

NOMINEES



# Planning Professional Of The Year



## Planning Professional of the Year

Nominators from organizations across the State submitted planning professionals for consideration to the TransPlex Award Committee.

Nominators described how the individual:

- Was a leader in transportation planning in Florida during 2020
- Made a significant contribution to Transportation Planning in Florida in 2020 or made a continuing commitment to, and significant achievements in, Transportation Planning in Florida over a period of years
- Helped achieve Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) and/or Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) goals and objectives

Additionally, the nominators were asked to share other considerations such as how the person:

- Demonstrated resourcefulness, collaboration and/or partnerships
- Employed cost effective strategies
- Increased safety
- Led to the enhancement of resilience and/or sustainability
- Overcame challenges and utilized opportunities presented by the project
- Reduced congestion
- Supported the integration of new technology



## Planning Professional of the Year Narratives

Narratives supporting these nominees follow in alphabetical order by first name. In the table below, the narratives are also linked to their names.

Nominee	Organization
Alex Henry	FDOT District 7
Alex Trauger	MetroPlan Orlando
Alissa Barber Torres	Orange County Planning Division
Autumn Calder	Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency
Bessie Reina	FDOT District 1
Colleen McGue	City of Sarasota
Conroy Jacobs	Osceola County, Transportation & Transit
Deborah Chesna	FDOT District 1
Eric Katz	Marlin Engineering, Inc.
Honorable Chairman Oliver G. Gilbert III	Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners (Vice Chairman) representing Southeast Florida Transportation Council (SEFTC) and Miami-Dade TPO
Huiwei Shen	FDOT Central Office
Ian Sikonia	City of Orlando
James Knight	FDOT District 2
Jeff Sheffield	North Florida TPO
Johnny Wong	Hillsborough MPO
Keith Robbins	FDOT District 1
L.K. Nandam	FDOT District 1
Larry Hymowitz & Trang Phan	FDOT District 4
Maryam Ghyabi-White	Ghyabi Consulting and Management
Shereen Yee Fong	FDOT District 6

In this document, the following key is used to identify primary points of the submissions:

- Underlined: Primary goal of the submission
- **Bolded**: Innovative aspect of the submission
- *Italicized*: Partner involvement/stakeholder engagement



## Alex Henry

### FDOT District 7

Alex Henry has made an immeasurable impact on transportation planning in Florida in 2020 and prior. His courage, intelligence, persistence and confidence embody excellence in transportation leadership. Alex joined FDOT in 2013 as the District 7 Bicycle & Pedestrian Safety Specialist in the Traffic Operations Office. In this role, he worked diligently to implement pushbutton safety projects to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists. He helped implement the first Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons in District 7, the first cycle track on the state highway system, and several other successful road diet safety projects on the state highway system. Alex was later promoted to the position of District 7 Bicycle & Pedestrian/Public Involvement/Complete Streets Coordinator, where he wears many different hats and balances competing priorities with expert skill. His work over the past several years has significantly advanced implementation of the FTP and SHSP in the Tampa Bay region. Some examples of Alex's work include planning and project coordination for bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements on Fowler Avenue (a major high-volume high-crash corridor in Tampa); leading and guiding implementation of safety and "complete street" improvements under the Heights Mobility Study initiative; and his ongoing work to incorporate safety improvements into resurfacing projects. Alex is always listening, learning and quietly working to break down silos and build partnerships across internal teams with differing goals, opinions and viewpoints. He is always focused on looking for the compromises in stalemate situations and finding ways to reduce crashes and fatalities and improve mobility for all users. His quiet and humble demeanor are welcomed in controversial or high-stakes situations and his continuous commitment to improving safety "one project at a time" demonstrates his commitment to transportation planning leadership. When there is an innovative or effective safety project being worked on at District 7, chances are Alex is involved. As a young professional, he also serves as an example and mentor to other young transportation leaders within FDOT and throughout Florida.



## Alex Trauger MetroPlan Orlando

Alex Trauger exemplifies a multifaceted blend of transportation planning expertise in both the private and public sectors.

Alex is currently MetroPlan Orlando's manager of transportation planning and works closely with his colleagues, creating an enthusiastic team dynamic. He oversaw the development of the 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), adopted in December 2020. The multimodal 2045 Plan is vastly different than the previous capacity-focused long-range plan, thanks to Alex's leadership. **Recognizing implications of the pandemic on the 2045 Plan, Trauger incorporated a new alternative future called "disruption dilemmas" to not only openly discuss the pandemic's challenges with local government partners, but also to develop a plan that recognized the future trends were not what we envisioned in 2019.**

Alex also understands the importance of collaboration and looking at a plan through multiple lenses. This was evident when *he established a cross-sector transportation working group to help shape the 2045 Plan*. Representation was key in creating the diverse working group. *Alex brought not only technical committee members from each of our three counties into the working group, but included members from our community advisory committee, the health community, nonprofit sector, transit agencies, freight and tourism industries to collaborate on the future transportation vision.*

This was not a simple endeavor to navigate, given the unprecedented circumstances 2020 threw at him with the pandemic interrupting the meeting timeline. The biggest challenge was keeping people engaged and committed to the 18-month planning effort without the ability to meet face to face. *Through Zoom, Alex kept the collaborative conversations going. With the plan being visual and geographic, he used different presentations and workshop techniques to keep the working group and community engaged.* Initially the pandemic created a challenge, but in the end, it turned into an opportunity to engage with the community that traditionally would not have participated in larger public workshop forums.

Alex also recognizes the importance of regional partnerships. He blended goals from both the Florida Transportation Plan and Strategic Highway Safety Plan into the MTP objectives to show direct linkage between our goals and the state's.

Trauger's transportation planning career began at MetroPlan Orlando after earning his master's degree in Public Policy and Regional Planning from the University of Central Florida and after graduating from the Crummer Graduate School of Business at Rollins College. During his experience in the private sector with HDR, Inc. as an Intermodal Planning Manager, he grew the regional planning practice throughout Florida providing consulting services to FDOT, MPOs, freight and transit operators.

With over 10 years of experience, his results-driven approaches have helped him become a transportation leader in strategic planning, project management, and stakeholder management. His experience as a planning professional bridged with his magnetic ability to communicate effectively with people from all sectors propel him into an impressive lane of his own and make him a deserving candidate for the Planning Professional of the Year award.



## **Alissa Barber Torres**

### **Orange County Planning Division**

Alissa Barber Torres, PhD, FAICP, CLTD was a leader in transportation planning in Florida during 2020 through management of several key projects and extensive service to the profession in Florida and nationally. Her work contributed to the Florida Transportation Plan's goals of safety and security, choices that improve accessibility and equity, and systems that enhance communities.

Alissa managed Orange County Code amendments to improve pedestrian safety and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, developing a 168-page ordinance to comprehensively update six chapters to require ADA retrofits, accessible on-street parking, pedestrian/bicycle connectivity, better maintenance of traffic and right-of-way utilization, enhanced pedestrian crossings, and other improvements reflecting best practices and current guidance.

*She led an interdisciplinary team through development and adoption by the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) in October 2020. She also led the public outreach process, including peer review by 15 associations, a Developer's Forum, and presentations to 4 advisory boards, the Orange County Community Traffic Safety Team, and the Greater Orlando Builders Association. Alissa also developed and presented staff training for effective implementation.*

**Alissa also co-authored, edited, and project managed the Orange County Transportation Technology white paper, published in January 2020 as part of a transportation funding initiative. She researched and wrote sections on mobility hubs, organizational changes needed to advance connected and automated vehicles, and innovations and best practices from seven jurisdictions across the U.S.** Alissa was invited to present this work at the FDOT District 5 TSM&O Consortium in May 2020, helping to promote regional collaboration and innovation.

Alissa also led an interdisciplinary team to craft the County's micromobility ordinance. She presented BCC work sessions and *led extensive public involvement with 10 advisory boards and at two forum events to obtain input from scooter companies. She researched and wrote a white paper on issues, regulations, and best practices from across the U.S. that she shared with Osceola County and the Cities of Apopka, Maitland, and Winter Park. Alissa also organized coordination meetings with these municipalities and with LYNX and the University of Central Florida to encourage collaboration.*

Selected examples of Alissa's service to the profession in Florida and the U.S. in 2020 included:

- Serving as a Technical Advisor for the Planning and Land Development chapters of the Florida Greenbook;
- Serving on APA Florida's "Transportation 101" subcommittee that developed elected official training for the Florida Association of Counties and authoring the section on state/regional agencies;
- Co-chairing APA Florida's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee, developing an EDI survey and strategy and presenting at EDI Forum events and a "Let's Talk About Privilege" conference session that reached over 320 attendees;
- Serving as a panelist for NCHRP 08-134;
- Serving as a member of the Transportation Research Board's Standing Committee on Economic Development and Land Use (AMS50); and
- Serving on the APA Transportation Planning Division's Student Paper Review Committee for the ninth year.

Alissa's extensive professional accomplishments, leadership, and service to the profession led to her induction into the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Certified Planners in 2020.



## **Autumn Calder (Late Submission)**

### **Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency**

Autumn Calder, the Director of the Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency (IA), has excelled in her time as Director of the joint City of Tallahassee-Leon County Organization in charge of large-scale infrastructure planning in Florida's Capital, especially so in 2020. In a year in which the COVID-19 Pandemic has forced local governments to focus even more on cost-effective strategies, Blueprint IA, under leadership of the City of Tallahassee and Leon County Commissions and Autumn's guidance, has kept 31 active projects and subprojects in motion, in spite of an initially projected \$13.6 million shortfall, for fiscal years 2021 to 2025, due to decreased sales tax revenues from COVID-19. These projects range from the development of new roadways and roadway enhancements to reduce congestion, greenway trails to provide recreational opportunities and alternative transportation options, new parks that will increase quality of life, and new public spaces for the Capital Community to enjoy gathering and interacting in the public realm. When completed, these 31 projects and subprojects will provide over 22 miles of improved roadways; almost 79 miles of new bicycle and pedestrian facilities; over 400 tree plantings, and approximately 200 acres of new park and public spaces, which provide destinations for all transportation users. Under Autumn's direction, Blueprint IA has also embraced new technologies to increase the dissemination of public information and communicate with members of the public. In 2020 a new Blueprint website was created ([www.blueprintia.org](http://www.blueprintia.org)) with easy to find sources of information, including an interactive projects map, which allows members of the public to learn about all the projects that Blueprint IA will be completing over the next 20 years. *Autumn has also ensured that Blueprint's commitment to meaningful public engagement on projects has not waived, despite significant challenges presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Engagement has moved to the digital realm (with some socially distanced in-person events), and a combination of surveys, live Q&A sessions, digital whiteboards, and traditional presentations have been employed to ensure that the voice of the public is captured and incorporated. In total Blueprint held well-over 30 opportunities outside of regular meetings to engage members of the public. Blueprint has also worked closely in collaboration with many local, regional, and State partners; with Autumn serving as Blueprint's chief ambassador. Whether combining forces with the City of Tallahassee's Stormwater department to build new roadway improvements and a park around new stormwater ponds; or leveraging opportunities with the State of Florida Dept. of Transportation for streetscaping improvements, or local and regional partners on several greenway trail projects to ensure project completion and cost savings for all partnering organizations, Blueprint regularly works outside the confines of its own organization to develop amenities for community members.*





## Bessie Reina

### FDOT District 1

Bessie Reina was tasked with leading the newly created Planning Studio, a pilot unit in District One. *Ms. Reina and her team are responsible for significant outreach and local involvement to achieve community success while integrating transportation and land use, one of Secretary Nandam's primary goals for the District.* The definition of community success differs depending on who is asked, which is why building a solid relationship with partners and communicating with them early and often is crucial to the success of Ms. Reina's role. Working with locals to help them achieve their goals while still maintaining the Department's expectations is a near impossible task, but one that she does with panache.

Ms. Reina works on planning studies that help the locals define their visions. Notable studies include US 41 in Charlotte County and the Barrier Island Traffic Study. The US 41 Charlotte County Corridor Vision Plan is the first regional study performed, running 28 miles county line to county line. This study defines short term, mid-term and long-term goals across the county, city and four community redevelopment areas. It includes multi modal improvements, frontage roads, lane repurposing as well as intersection improvement opportunities. The foundation of the study are the multi-modal master plans already completed. *The Barrier Island Traffic Study was a partnership study with Traffic Operations and the Island communities along Sarasota and Manatee Counties.* This was a difficult study with creeping scope, political involvement, and extraordinarily high expectations. Although there were uncountable challenges, both technically and politically, that needed to be overcome, a resultant list of projects has now been accepted and prioritized.

A noteworthy practice that has helped ensure the results of these studies move forward is to *have* the local partners adopt a resolution at the end of the study. This resolution notes the agreement of the range of solutions mentioned in the study and ranks priorities on the recommendations. The County's LRTP then reflects the solutions in the cost feasible and needs plans. Short term solutions are placed in the project application list for funding consideration.

Ms. Reina diligently works to obtain an open flow of communication. *She meets one-on-one with elected officials to describe the studies, allowing an opportunity for early input. She has utilized the virtual meeting environment like it has always been an option and has conducted charettes, public workshops and training sessions in the virtual environment.* Ms. Reina was able to procure MetroQuest survey tool. This bilingual survey tool is unique in that it is fast and easy to use, can integrate maps, and is easy to disseminate - all you need to do is post a link and it provides analytics at the end.

The local communities now ask for assistance from Ms. Reina and her team. This level of accomplishment is not possible without strong leadership skills and initiative. She was not asked to ONLY complete difficult studies, or to do her job well, but to blaze trails where there was NOTHING.





**Colleen McGue**  
City of Sarasota

As Chief Transportation Planner for the City of Sarasota, Ms. McGue has transformed the City's transportation goals and objectives through its first Citywide Transportation Plan, Sarasota in Motion. The plan is bold in *focusing on the needs and desires of citizens, with giving additional emphasis on multimodal considerations.* Colleen has been a regional force in transportation for the last decade, serving as a planner for the Sarasota/ Manatee MPO before joining the City of Sarasota, and is truly dedicated to creating a safer, more equitable, transportation system.



## **Conroy Jacobs**

### **Osceola County, Transportation & Transit**

Conroy Jacobs AICP, MPA, is a Project Manager (PM), working in Osceola County's Transportation and Transit Department. Mr. Jacobs has been making significant contributions to transportation planning in Central Florida over the past 8 years. His major contributions to transportation planning include his work in comprehensive planning, site planning, project management, and service as a Technical Advisory Committee Member (SCTPO & MetroPlan Orlando). During the year 2020, Mr. Jacobs led several transportation planning initiatives, which satisfied Osceola County's goals and objectives, and likewise assist with achieving Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) and/or Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) goals and objectives.

Conroy was responsible for managing the priority project programming process application process during the 2020 call for projects cycle. He was instrumental in ensuring that the applications and supporting materials were submitted on-time, credible and thorough. With the help of staff from the County's Transportation and Transit Department, a total 18 applications were submitted, which included complete street, safety, transit, trails, sidewalks, ITS/ATMS, and intersection projects. The total estimated cost for these improvements is approximately \$127M over a 10 year period. Mr. Jacobs collaborated early and often with internal departments, FDOT and MetroPlan Orlando staff for the purpose gaining their respective input and involvement in the planning process. These critical infrastructure projects will contribute significantly to a more sustainable future, more specifically, the safety and security of all roadway users by lowering design/posted speed, enhance mobility with the application of ITS/ATMS technology, expand accessibility and equity by providing alternative modes of transportation that are ADA compliant, and minimize impacts of transportation on the environment by potentially reducing VMT and carbon emissions.

During the year 2020, Mr. Jacobs led several major transportation projects in Osceola County, during the planning and design phase. Most notably, Conroy was the PM for the Diverging Diamond Interchange located at CR532 @ I-4, Fortune-Lakeshore Multi-use Trail (Florida Greenways and Trails System Priority Network), Boggy Creek Alternatives Study, Partin Settlement Alternatives Study, and Poinciana Boulevard Alternatives Study. The goals and objectives of these projects were to improve traffic operations and safety, provide multimodal features, enhance access management, reduce congestion, and minimize environmental impacts. Also, these projects will ultimately serve as a catalyst for economic growth, by connecting people to jobs, adding capacity to accommodate future demand as a result of rapid urbanization, and job creation. The total estimated cost for these improvements is in excess of \$200M.

The covid-19 pandemic proved to be a major challenge in carrying out the work effort associated with the aforementioned projects. However, Mr. Jacobs reacted quickly to the challenge and adapt in such a manner which kept each project on track and within budget. Conroy, in collaboration with the various project teams and County's IT Department, led the County's public involvement effort. He played an integral role in shifting the planned in-person public meetings to virtual/hybrid. Mr. Jacobs led six successful public meetings, most of which were held during "lockdown". These public meetings ensured that impacted residents and other stakeholders were able to participate in the planning process.



**Deborah Chesna**  
FDOT District 1

Deborah has been instrumental in planning for improved multimodal transportation and safety within District 1. In her role as Pedestrian Bicycle Planning Coordinator she has worked closely with us at the City of Sarasota to implement our vision for multimodal transportation and safety on the state facilities within our boundaries such as US 41, US 301, SR 780 and SR 789. She always asks if there is an existing plan for the facility and facilitates coordination with the appropriate departments within the District, and really just helps make projects better!



## **Eric Katz**

Marlin Engineering, Inc.

Eric has been working tirelessly to setup the nonmotorized count program for the State of Florida since 2018. His dedication and commitment to safety, multimodal accessibility, and connectivity are evident in the work he does. Eric has collaborated with professionals across the state and nation to address the data collection needs to establish continuous counters for non-motorized travel. Eric and the MARLIN team have integrated new and different technology throughout different programs to measure and compare the different counting technologies for future incorporation. This work that he does will not only increase safety and savings in the long-term, it will establish the much-needed data the state needs to fund critical facilities for non-motorized travel.



## Honorable Chairman Oliver G. Gilbert III

Miami-Dade County BOCC representing Southeast Florida Transportation Council (SEFTC) and Miami-Dade TPO

Oliver G. Gilbert III is serving his second term as the Chairman of the Southeast Florida Transportation Council (SEFTC) which is comprised of the Miami-Dade TPO, Broward MPO and Palm Beach TPA. Southeast Florida is home to over 6 million residents and is a top destination for travelers from across the globe. Our region is expected to grow by 1,000 residents each week over the next 25 years. As it is today, our transportation system is imbalanced and bursting at the seams. The Chairman understands the regional transportation issues which impacts residents' access to jobs and visitors' access to local attractions, and ultimately deters businesses from coming to South Florida. **Chairman Gilbert has made it his mission to implement a SMART REGION in South Florida to ensure a coordinated strategy on mass transit. He champions the ideology that transportation is fundamental for us not only to be able to sustain growth and address issues of sea-level rise and housing, but also for long-term sustainability in the South Florida region** which is a key component to position the state as a major global competitor. Chairman Gilbert has diligently advanced regional long-range planning efforts by identifying policies and transportation facilities and services that strengthened the region through the adoption of the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). **The RTP created one voice by coalescing the three counties' projects into a regional plan that will provide resilient and equitable transport for our residents, businesses, visitors, and the national economy.** Chairman Gilbert convened the SEFTC in the height of the pandemic to ensure the Regional Plan was adopted by on August 7th, 2020.

In these unparalleled times of pandemics and climate-fueled disasters, **Chairman Gilbert recognizes a sense of urgency to transition our future to be more economically and environmentally resilient.** He works tirelessly on legislation at the regional scale and in leading peer exchanges at the regional and national level to propose multimodal solutions.

As the Chairman of the Miami-Dade County TPO he has overseen the passage of fifty TPO Governing Board transportation planning related resolutions during 2020. As the Chairman of the TPO he has led major milestone resolutions that advance critical transportation initiatives in the Miami Urbanized region. He is working with partners in the region to continue advancing the SMART Region. Under his leadership he advanced the SMART Plan through the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the Beach and East-West Corridors, North Corridor proposals to consider all modes of transportation, and station area development along the Northeast Corridor.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the TPO approved a study focusing on telecommuting as part of an overall strategy to reduce congestion and improve mobility in Miami-Dade County. *The Miami-Dade TPO in partnership with FDOT and Florida International University administered a survey focused on telecommuting, with the desired outcomes to understand the trends in telecommuting and its potential usefulness to "Flatten the Congestion Curve".* **The significant outcomes of the study are the advancement of a pilot program to maximize telecommuting opportunities and recommended policies for implementation.**

For all these reasons, Chairman Gilbert has demonstrated that he is the perfect candidate for the Planning Professional of the Year Award and looks forward to continuing forging partnerships throughout the State to advance multimodal transportation for our residents and visitors.



**Huiwei Shen**  
FDOT Central Office

Ms. Shen was an excellent transportation planning professional in leading the M-CORES efforts. *Her professionalism and responsiveness to all participants was timely, professional and outstanding. She employed unique resources to present to the public, as I watched a number of the meetings on public television.* Her extensive experience in transportation planning helped FDOT overcome many of the challenges presented in the M-CORES planning studies. *Her calm and patient approach to all challenges added stability to the program when other participants were at times unruly.* The M-CORES planning efforts are some of the largest undertaken in the state of Florida for decades. Ms. Shen's leadership, guidance and experience made for a productive basis for these efforts to move forward in the future for Florida.





**Ian Sikonia**  
City of Orlando

As the Senior Planner/Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator for the City of Orlando, Ian was instrumental in creating a number of notable programs which advanced safety and mobility during his career with the city, including:

- Bicycle and Pedestrian Count Program
- Bicycle Beltway Project: 8.5-mile loop trail that will serve the ever-increasing population of Downtown Orlando and provide an alternative transportation network to accommodate cyclists of all ages. Winding through the Central Business District, the beltway will connect the existing Bumby Path, Cady Way Trail, Gertrude's Walk, Orlando Urban Trail and Lake Underhill Path
- Bicycle Rack Request Program-Program to install bike racks within the public right-of-way for the purpose of increasing the amount of available bike parking
- Bike Share Program
- Scooter Share Program
- Sharrows: Implementation of Sharrow routes based on Bike Share program heat mapping:

For all his efforts to increase safety and mobility in the core of Central Florida, which supports the FDOT Vital Few Initiative, Ian deserves to be recognized as the Planner of the Year.



**James Knight**  
FDOT District 2

Jim has played a crucial role in advancing a one-mile section of the East Coast Greenway through the City of Atlantic Beach that will be a transformational project for the community. Originally, the project was designed as a road diet from six lane to four that included two at grade bike lanes. *Jim coordinated a meeting with the Jacksonville, FDOT, Atlantic Beach and the East Coast Greenway.* It was determined that a separated path would be required in order to meet ECG's design standards. Jim did not hesitate to redesign the project to include a separated path to meet these standards. *Then he worked with Atlantic Beach staff and the regional planning agency to get the project on the List of Priority Projects.* Once complete, this project will greatly improve the safety and livability of the Mayport Road Corridor.



## Jeff Sheffield North Florida TPO

2020 was a year that most of us would prefer to forget. A year of trial and loss. Homelessness, hunger and health care challenges brought food and health deserts to the forefront. In-home learning and remote work highlighted the growing digital divide, especially for the underserved. Adversity opens the door to opportunity and that is a door that Jeff Sheffield never hesitates to walk through. Who would imagine a TPO would have a role in bringing off-hour and weekend 211 services for United Way of Northeast Florida to the Regional Transportation Management Center? Jeff Sheffield of course. It's all about having the right people in the right place at the right time.

Out of the box thinking, unique partners, working in fun environments contemplating exceptional challenges are hardly new to Jeff. Tech and beer events to bring tech professionals, entrepreneurs and investors together and hackathons to develop apps to make our roads safer are a snippet of his creative ideas. To further accelerate solutions, Smart North Florida was incorporated as a 501C3, non-profit corporation. Jeff, JEA Director of Information Technology Solutions Development Steve Selders and University of North Florida Vice President of Jobs Karen Bowling are the nonprofits' initial board members. *Founding partners include the following: JEA, the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, JAXUSA, the regional development arm of the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce, the Cities of Jacksonville and St. Augustine, and Duval County Public Schools.* **The 501C3 nonprofit organization recently submitted a Smart and Connected Communities grant from the National Science Foundation to provide a proof of concept private LTE network for broadband service for Jacksonville's Eastside neighborhood, an underserved community east of TIAA Bank Field in downtown Jacksonville.** Few residents of this underserved community can afford private internet service. The digital divide limits access to learning, employment, health care, on-line shopping and transportation. The Duval County School Board is currently providing computers and hotspots to students in the neighborhood for on-line learning. To test the proof of concept, the school board will remove the hotspots and assess student on-line activity via each delivery media. Grant applications close February 24. If SMART North Florida receives an award, improved connectivity could spur development in the Eastside neighborhood where property values and educational attainment are low, and unemployment is high.

This grant is a distinct opportunity and hopefully the application will be successful. But successful or not, the relationships established are invaluable. Building relationships and bringing unlikely partners together are a skill that Jeff Sheffield uses masterfully. He also has the foresight to recognize that the solutions to many of challenges in our region, though mobility related, will not be solved by the North Florida TPO. The TPO does not have the expertise, authority and financial resources to address these issues alone. Solutions will come from working with others, finding creative financial resources and implementing technical innovation.



## Johnny Wong Hillsborough MPO

Johnny Wong is a principal planner with Hillsborough Metropolitan Planning Organizations and manages the Performance Measures program; staff to the Surtax Independent Oversight Committee (IOC) and the MPO's Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Committee and is responsible for Smart Cities and TSMO-oriented planning. Johnny's passion for excellence in transportation is demonstrated with the following projects:

### Safety Targets

- **Through early and frequent coordination, Johnny developed a more efficient method for preparing the MPO's safety targets.** This coordination has not only led to more precise safety targets but also to the funding of more complete streets and intersection improvement projects through FDOT's resurfacing and safety programs. His commitment to a data driven approach to safety has led to more efficient decision making and better definition of the challenges ahead in the County.

### Regional Data Sharing

- **Johnny and Hillsborough MPO have taken the lead to determine the best approach and garner support for a regional data platform that would allow Hillsborough, Pinellas, Pasco, Hernando-Citrus, Sarasota-Manatee, and Polk MPOs to have access to current transportation and related data that would be used for better travel projections.**
- Johnny has researched and interviewed various data sharing companies to find the best product that met the needs of all stakeholders while maintaining an affordable budget.
- To help reduce costs Johnny identified an innovative method to acquire access to the UrbanSDK platform through a government rate. *In an effort to capitalize on the low cost of entry he coordinated with the District to execute a task work order to acquire the initial access needed to the data sharing platform.* This has enabled the MPO team to evaluate the platform for compatibility with the various needs of the regional data sharing groups.
- He is working with all his partners to not only develop an agreement for all parties that maintains neutrality and balance, but also developing a plan for how to build on the foundation of the platform to maximize the return on investment for all stakeholders.
- Once implemented this will be the first regional data sharing platform in the Tampa Bay Region helping to enhance the planning and construction of projects within the entire region.

### Commitment to Excellence

- *Johnny has built strong relationships with other MPOs in the region and throughout the state and his knowledge and commitment to excellence is valued by the District.*



## Keith Robbins

### FDOT District 1

Mr. Robbins is a leader in transportation planning within the State of Florida. He has engaged in projects that help the Department to understand existing conditions at major freight-generating facilities throughout District 1 and forecast demand to effectively plan for future roadway network needs. His continuing commitment to ensure planning and readiness for on-going and future development is of great service to both businesses and residents of the state. During the previous year, Mr. Robbins has undertaken the Piney Point Road Needs Assessment, which proactively evaluated this piece of SIS infrastructure at Port Manatee, another SIS facility. Under his guidance, the District also completed an analysis of current and future throughput volumes at Port Manatee to gauge impact and capacity of local roadway infrastructure. Mr. Robbins has also completed the ARTIDA study, which consisted of an evaluation of five District 1 airports and their surrounding roadway networks. Currently, Mr. Robbins is conducting a study of up-to 15 intersections in developing areas to evaluate the potential need for concrete construction/reconstruction. This study incorporates future land development and roadway improvement plans to rank candidate intersections per their viability for concrete.

Mr. Robbins is a true professional. The relationships he has built with the freight community in District 1 during his time with the District are invaluable to understanding local needs and selecting timely and valuable projects for FDOT. These studies have and will lead to outcomes that support economic development, increase safety, and maximize SIS infrastructure.

It is my absolute pleasure to nominate Mr. Keith Robbins for Planning Professional of the Year.



## L.K. Nandam FDOT District 1

In recent decades, the Florida Department of Transportation's District One Work Program has included significant investment in transportation infrastructure to respond to the mobility demands from unprecedented population growth organizing in its coastal communities and the I-4 corridor serving central Florida. This investment has resulted in improved mobility for people and freight throughout the District. While solving an important mobility function, these improvements often did not respond to broader community objectives such as economic development, quality of life, multimodal safety and connectivity, and environmental preservation.

As District One Secretary, LK Nandam recognized that the Department's transportation investments needed to be developed through early collaboration with community stakeholders to ensure these investments are supportive of community and economic development goals. In recognition of this, LK created a new Planning Studio Department to lead this charge. The Planning Studio anticipates when projects are scheduled for implementation on state roadways, and it engages community stakeholders in advance of these projects to clarify the community context and vision as the foundation for identifying opportunities to integrate supportive transportation strategies, designs, and policies.

The Planning Studio achieves the vision and interrelated goals of the Florida Transportation Plan that aim to strengthen Florida's communities, economy, and natural environment through safe, resilient, and quality transportation infrastructure for people and freight. Planning Studio's primary goal is ensuring that transportation projects and strategies align closely with community' visions and values. In doing so, Planning Studio builds broad acceptance of transportation strategies through collaborative and informed decision making.

Planning Studio strongly links planning and early project development, building efficiencies into project schedules and implementation, and providing the technical evidence needed for integrated transportation and land use strategies. It is a catalyst for interagency coordination, context supportive strategies that provide modal choices, multimodal safety, economic development, and community revitalization. The Planning Studio approach also generates foundational and contextual information needed to identify and implement mutually supportive transportation and land use strategies, moving communities toward their desired future. Complementing his Planning Studio initiative, Secretary Nandam is engaging the intermodal unit at the District to move the needle on mobility through innovation and collaboration with local partners. His work with partner agencies to identify opportunities to implement transit as a relevant mobility strategy and community asset is gaining traction through projects such as a pilot for the proposed trolley service from downtown Sarasota to St. Armond's Circle.

*LK Nandam's leadership to systematically engage communities and interested stakeholders early in the planning process ensures that transportation strategies align with broader community objectives and has resulted in lasting partnerships and broad acceptance for corridor strategies. He has championed efforts to enhance and foster innovation in the planning department at FDOT District One, and his initiatives have positively impacted communities in central Florida. Under his direction, the District is better positioned to meet the FTP goals of reflecting community visions and values in decision-making, accelerating new technologies and options to increase reliability and service, and enhancing access for all Floridians to jobs and services.*





## Larry Hymowitz & Trang Phan FDOT District 4

Larry Hymowitz and Trang Phan are Planning Specialists for the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) in District Four. They recognized a lack of consistency associated with local government future land use changes and adopted Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs). **Using the power of Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, map layers of Traffic Analysis Zones (TAZs), and socioeconomic data (population and employment) from the adopted MPO LRTP travel demand models, they were able to create a visualization tool to compare proposed land use changes against existing and proposed socioeconomic data.**

The tool uses conversion ratios to convert employment projections from the counties into square feet of land use that are then compared to existing land uses. This allows for a quick identification of those TAZs where proposed land-use changes are consistent with the planned growth as reflected in the adopted LRTP, or if the existing land use may already exceed the future projected land use. Using GIS, a map depicting the growth potential of each TAZ can easily be identified. The GIS interface also allows the user to select various TAZs and assess the associated data results.

The benefits of the improved process utilizing GIS include:

- Employment data contained within each TAZ in the transportation model automatically converted to square feet to enhance compatibility with land use analysis and associated decisions.
- Growth assumptions in Metropolitan Transportation Plans (MTPs)/Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs) can be easily reviewed against local government land use decision making.
- Compatible data enables an opportunity to increase coordination and consistency between local government and MPO planning processes.
- Better aligned land use and transportation planning processes can reduce risk and uncertainty that may exist between MPO projected needs and subsequent project priorities and local government land-use decisions.
- This process allows for a more routine check of proposed land-use changes in real time. This provides an opportunity for the MTP/LRTP to be proactively monitored so that inconsistencies can be identified and addressed.

This planning analysis approach is being used by FDOT District Four to provide oversight of local government land use changes. It could also benefit the County, municipalities, MPOs to better understand how land use and development approval decisions impact MPO long range transportation planning and project prioritization. It is anticipated this understanding will lead to more effective planning and coordination with MPO transportation plans and local land-use decisions and could lead to a more dynamic planning process that helps keep the projects being programmed in MPO Transportation Improvement Programs and the FDOT Work Program to stay synchronized with the more fluid decision making that is occurring at the local comprehensive planning level.

**This is an excellent example of a successful FDOT cross-office collaboration that led to an innovative approach to help address the complex dynamic relationship between land-use planning and transportation planning.**



## Maryam Ghyabi-White

Ghyabi Consulting and Management

Mrs. Maryam Ghyabi-White is the CEO/President of Ghyabi Consulting and Management (GCM) and serves as an adjunct professor of civil engineering at Embry Riddle University. She is an advocate for the Central Florida Transportation Industry and works every day on advancing transportation initiatives in Flagler and Volusia Counties.

Mrs. Ghyabi-White understands the mobility and safety concerns of the area and brings innovative solutions to the table so that collaboratively, communities, local and state agencies, and transportation professionals can improve our region's transportation systems.

There are several examples that I would like to share to exhibit Mrs. Ghyabi-White's dedication to developing every aspect of transportation projects, beginning with planning to ensure the right projects are being built for future generations.

The East ISB project is an important project in Daytona Beach that will revitalize and improve safety and mobility along the International Speedway Corridor as it connects to A1A. While the planning for this project began many years ago, 2020 was a pivotal time as it became evident that the proposed solution for the ISB and A1A intersection may not be the best fit for the community. *Mrs. Ghyabi-White reconvened the ISB Coalition, which brought stakeholders, FDOT, and the public together to ensure the right solution for the community could be implemented, the collaboration culminated with a design change, keeping the construction plan on schedule while meeting the community's needs.*

Another example of Mrs. Ghyabi-White bringing leading people to work collaboratively for community oriented transportation is Clyde Morris Blvd. Clyde Morris is an important corridor in Volusia County, interacting with Embry Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach International Airport, Daytona International Speedway, Mainland Highschool, and Daytona State College, among other important stakeholders. This project was originally imagined several years ago with the traditional approach of adding vehicular capacity through asphalt and concrete and remained unfunded. *Knowing that there were immediate safety and mobility concerns along the corridor and a need for a more community oriented approach to mobility, Mrs. Ghyabi-White brought together stakeholders including FDOT and challenged everyone to reimagine this corridor and to take a Complete Streets Approach to the corridor to best blend the bicycle and pedestrian needs with vehicular needs, within the existing rights of way. This effort kicked off in early 2020 including a stakeholder workshop and is making progress towards design now.*

Development activity is inducing tremendous pressure on transportation facilities in Volusia County, as we are also seeing elsewhere across the state. Balancing the additional mobility and safety demands that comes with rapid growth is a challenge that transportation and community leaders must work to overcome. Mrs. Ghyabi-White is the type of engineer, planner and community leader that develops visions for the future, brings the right stakeholders together and builds consensus for the future.

Mrs. Ghyabi-White has dedicated her life and career to improving communities through transportation. She has the vision, desire and leadership to continue advancing community-oriented transportation. Thank you for your consideration of Mrs. Ghyabi-White as 2020 Planning Professional of the Year.



## Shereen Yee Fong FDOT District 6

Project Champion for Bus-On-Shoulder, I-195/SR 112/Julia Tuttle Causeway. Champions are needed to actualize the goals and objectives of the Florida Transportation Plan, bringing them to fruition. Ms. Shereen Yee Fong, a Senior Transportation Planner with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 6 has been that champion, shepherding the district's involvement in the successful planning and programming for the design and construction of a Bus-On-Shoulder (BOS) project along the I-195/SR 112/Julia Tuttle Causeway, the first of its kind on an Interstate in Miami-Dade County.

The Miami-Dade Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) developed the Strategic Miami Area Rapid Transit (SMART) Plan to implement transit solutions for congested roadways in Miami-Dade County. The SMART Plan has identified several Bus Express Rapid Transit (BERT) Network new express bus routes including the Julia Tuttle Causeway. To improve travel time reliability, two of the BERT routes, the Beach Express North and Central, are proposed to run along the shoulders of the Julia Tuttle Causeway to and from US 1 and Alton Road; allowing busses to bypass congestion if their travel speed falls below 35 mph. The repurposing of the existing shoulder is an innovative approach to addressing congestion in an urban area. Shereen led the FDOT team that carried out a range of activities to expedite the planning of the project positioning it for a two phased implementation. Phase 1 (\$500,000) a temporary use, set to begin construction in April 2021 using the outside shoulder as an interim project; followed by the permanent Phase 2 project (\$5,000,000) utilizing the inside shoulder. Both projects require approval of Central Office and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Ms. Yee Fong's tireless efforts included:

1. Adding the BOS planning to the ongoing I-195 planning study.
2. Evaluating initial project feasibility for periods of likely use, developing preliminary cross sections, cost benefit analysis.
3. *Facilitating timely coordination between multiple stakeholders including the City of Miami Beach, Miami-Dade County Department of Transportation and Public Works (DTPW), Central Office, FHWA, Florida Highway Patrol and district offices.*
4. Managing the review and approval of the concept of operations memorandum of understanding.
5. *Ensuring DTPW performed the required public outreach.*
6. Working diligently with the District work program and construction offices to identify an expedited funding mechanism to allow the interim project to move forward in a timely manner.

The BOS project is a top priority for the community underscored by the multiple resolutions passed by the City of Miami Beach and the Miami-Dade TPO supporting its expedited implementation. Shereen's involvement as the District's champion for this project, *ensured the Department's proactive and responsive approach in meeting the needs of this wider community.* Shereen is noteworthy to be the Planning Professional of the Year as demonstrated by her tireless effort to advancement of regional multi-modal planning, collaboration, and partnerships with internal and external stakeholders, encouraging innovative public engagement through virtual public meetings, and leadership in planning as the District's champion on this multi-modal planning effort.