

Request for Research Funding for FY 2022-2023

SPR Subpart B Project: PTO-23-03

Requesting Office	Public Transit	Priority	3 of 4
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Proposed Title Developing and Implementing a Multi-Stakeholder Action Plan for Countering Human Trafficking in Florida’s Multimodal Transportation System

Significance of Counter-Trafficking in Florida’s Transportation Systems

In the United States, human trafficking (or modern-day slavery) is a fast-growing crime in which victims are compelled to engage in commercial sex or to work in legal or illegal industries (such as agriculture, hospitality, and drug smuggling). The State of Florida ranks third in the U.S. for most reported human trafficking cases according to the National Human Trafficking Hotline statistics. Although human trafficking does not always require movement, both public transit and private commercial modes of transportation have played a role in many trafficking cases. Florida’s multimodal transportation system, which consists of 20 commercial airports, 15 public seaports, more than 2,700 miles of railroad, nearly 1,500 miles of interstate highway, and many large and medium public transit systems, can be a conduit for human trafficking. Those transportation modes can be used by traffickers to recruit, control, and transport potential victims; certain transportation professionals (such as rideshare drivers or truckers) may be complicit in human trafficking; and some victims may employ those transportation modes to escape from traffickers. While Florida law now mandates the posting of anti-trafficking signage at Florida transportation facilities, much remains to be done to confront the nexus between human trafficking and Florida’s transportation system.



Source: <https://polarisproject.org/>

Justification

Given the close interrelation of human trafficking and transportation, the Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) – Policy Element by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) offers an outline for preventing human trafficking in order to ensure the safety and security of all of Florida’s transportation system users. The 2020 FTP presents the number of human trafficking incidents that have involved the Florida transportation system as an indicator for tracking the system’s progress in providing safety and security. Therefore, fighting human trafficking in Florida’s transportation systems is urgent and essential to realizing the safety and security goals of the FDOT.

Research and Practice Gaps in FDOT’s Counter-Trafficking Program

Although there are many studies about human trafficking in general and there are even academic journals dedicated to the topic (such as the *Journal of Human Trafficking*), the existing scholarly research on the intersection of human trafficking and transportation is very limited. An initial survey of the counter-trafficking research in the transportation field yielded a very small number (fewer than 5) of research articles in peer-reviewed transportation journals, which implied that the scholarly literature on counter-trafficking in transportation is still in its infancy. Only four research projects sponsored by federal agencies through the Cooperative Research Programs (CRP) were found in the TRID (Transport Research International Documentation) database. No such projects

sponsored by State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) have been found. The record maintained by FDOT Research Center (<https://www.fdot.gov/research/documents.shtm>) also confirms that FDOT has not supported any human trafficking-related research efforts in the past. Thus, the research activities related to counter-trafficking in transportation at the state level are truly limited.

In addition to the lack of systematic research, there is a clear gap in the counter-trafficking practice of state DOTs, including FDOT. Although the U.S. DOT has multiple initiatives to fight human trafficking at the federal level (<https://www.transportation.gov/dot-effort-to-stop-human-trafficking>), FDOT does not seem to have any existing counter-trafficking programs or initiatives according to the FDOT website (fdot.gov). It is also unclear how well the FDOT personnel understand the issue of human trafficking and how effectively they can detect and respond to trafficking instances in Florida's transportation systems.

Therefore, there is a clear need for FDOT to assess the awareness of trafficking among its own employees as well as commercial transportation stakeholders and the general traveling public, to raise awareness and improve understanding of counter-trafficking through targeted training, education, and outreach, to compile a list of related tools and resources, and to formulate guiding policies.

Proposed Research Activities

To address the above-identified research and practice gaps, the following research tasks can be conducted:

- 1) Perform a thorough review of the existing scholarly research addressing the intersection of human trafficking and transportation.
- 2) Conduct a comprehensive survey of other state DOTs' counter-trafficking practices through questionnaires and structured interviews.
- 3) Evaluate the adequacy of FDOT counter-trafficking policies, programs, and initiatives in relation to other state DOTs' practices, and identify key areas for improvement.
- 4) Develop and implement a systematic plan for raising awareness and promoting action among multiple stakeholders (including FDOT employees, commercial drivers, private taxi and ridesharing companies, the general public, and other related public agencies).
- 5) Assess data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline reports on human trafficking incidents in Florida to identify how the state's transportation systems are currently exploited in human trafficking schemes (for both sex trafficking and labor trafficking).
- 6) Design strategies and outline policy recommendations (related to inter-agency collaboration, data collection, and sharing, etc.) to be considered for future implementation by FDOT.
- 7) Complete a technical report on fighting human trafficking in Florida's transportation systems based on results from previous research tasks.
- 8) Conduct an assessment of the nexus between human trafficking and the Florida transportation system to be presented to the Florida Statewide Council on Human Trafficking.
- 9) Deliver a free webinar to disseminate the project findings.

Importantly, Task #4 is the heart of the proposed project and the most vital. Implementing the task generate immediate improvements for counter-trafficking efforts.

	<p>For Task #4, a minimum of 100 FDOT employees from various offices (such as aviation, public transit, freight and multimodal operations) in the state headquarter and other district offices will be recruited to receive extensive training on human trafficking prevention and intervention, to be offered remotely by a state university in Florida. For instance, Florida State University has such a professional certificate program designed for the public (https://learningforlife.fsu.edu/professional-certification-human-trafficking-prevention-and-intervention/). Additionally, the Florida State University Center for the Advancement of Human Rights has 20 years of experience in both the anti-trafficking policy realm and the design and delivery of anti-trafficking trainings for state agencies in Florida.</p> <p>In addition, in Task #4, pilot studies will be conducted on three to five representative transportation agencies or companies (such as airlines, urban transit operators, taxi and rideshare companies, trucking companies, and passenger rail operators) suggested by the project team and approved by the project manager. Customized counter-trafficking training and education materials based on the best practices compiled under this project will be used to engage selected transportation stakeholders in counter-trafficking. Ideally, those selected transportation stakeholders should span multiple modes and cover various geographic regions in Florida.</p> <p>In the final part of Task #4, online counter-trafficking outreach materials (including communication templates and graphics) will be created for the general public and distributed widely.</p>
Impact	<p>This proposed project, once completed, can directly advance the current anti-trafficking practice in Florida’s transportation systems. First, this project will provide a systemic review of the existing anti-trafficking programs and policies in FDOT and identify areas for improvement in consideration of the practices adopted by other state DOTs and advised by the U.S. DOT. Second, this project will design and implement a counter-trafficking plan with the aim of raising awareness and promoting action among multiple stakeholders (including FDOT staff, commercial service providers, and the public). Through customized training and targeted outreach, those involved stakeholders are expected to significantly enhance their abilities to detect and disrupt human trafficking in Florida’s transportation systems. Third, this project will yield a toolkit consisting of best practices, successful stories, training lectures, education and outreach materials, which can be broadly disseminated in Florida to maximize the impact of this project.</p> <p>Since prior counter-trafficking research projects have seemingly only taken place at the federal level, FDOT is well-positioned to establish itself as a pioneer among peer state DOTs in fighting human trafficking by completing the much-needed research. Supporting this research funding request can fill a clear research gap in the research portfolio of FDOT.</p> <p>If counter-trafficking continues to be advocated and emphasized only at the strategic level, without the adoption of concrete initiatives or other actions at planning and operational levels, it is unlikely that FDOT can achieve its overall safety and security goals due to the lack of progress in fighting human trafficking in Florida’s transportation systems.</p>
Affected Offices	<p>Although the Public Transit office is requesting this project, all divisions in the Office of Modal Development including Aviation, Freight and Multimodal Operations, Seaports, and Public Transit are expected to be affected. This is because human trafficking occurs across the multimodal transportation system, including on the rails, highways, and waterways.</p>

	Gabrielle Matthews and David Sherman of the Public Transit office will be involved in the scoping of this proposed project.		
Existing Work	<p>After searching in TRID and RIP databases, fewer than five peer-reviewed research articles, and a dozen popular press articles have been found, revealing how undeveloped the literature on counter-trafficking in the transportation sector remains. While four related research projects funded by federal agencies through Cooperative Research Programs are found, those projects either focus on programs, policies, and initiatives at the federal level or a specific transportation mode. None of the projects are sponsored by state DOTs, nor do those projects emphasize state-level counter-trafficking strategies.</p> <p>Although disrupting human trafficking in Florida’s transportation system has been clearly identified as a priority in the 2020 Florida Transportation Plan, no sponsored research activities are available. Therefore, the status quo of counter-trafficking in the transportation sector in Florida is unclear; systematic strategies and policies for fighting human trafficking are lacking.</p>		
Keywords Used in Existing Work Search (Cannot leave blank)	Trafficking + transportation, human trafficking + transportation, trafficking in human beings + transportation		
Related Contracts (Give contract numbers)	The record of completed research projects (https://www.fdot.gov/research/documents.shtm) maintained by the FDOT Research Center confirms that FDOT has not funded any human trafficking related project, although FDOT recognizes the foremost importance of fighting trafficking in transportation in the Florida Transportation Plan – Policy Element.		
Funding Request	\$200K	Anticipated Duration	18 months
Project Manager	Gabrielle Matthews	Contracting Method	Direct contract with university (FSU)
Equipment	Estimated equipment cost (or N/A)	No equipment is requested for the proposed project.	
Urgency	1 (highest, most immediate need)	Human trafficking is a fast-growing crime in the United States and the State of Florida. Given that Florida has the third most reported number of human trafficking cases in the United States and that FDOT recognizes counter-trafficking as key to achieving its overall safety and security goal, FDOT should act immediately to develop and implement a systematic plan for countering trafficking in Florida’s multimodal transportation system. As only the U.S. DOT has sponsored trafficking-related research plans, FDOT is well positioned to become a leader in fighting human trafficking among its peer agencies.	
Implementability	1 (greatest likelihood of and proximity to implementing results)	The proposed project will raise awareness and promote action among multiple involved transportation stakeholders in Florida. For instance, at least 100 FDOT employees from various offices will receive extensive training on human trafficking prevention and intervention, through a collaboration with a state university in Florida. This proposed project will also yield a toolkit including promising practices, success stories, a	

		<p>training curriculum, and outreach materials, which can be broadly disseminated in Florida to maximize the impact of this project.</p> <p>Therefore, most of the research to be conducted under this project will be directly implemented in Florida and FDOT’s counter-trafficking practice will likely see swift improvements.</p>
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Project Benefits (Succinct, complete explanation)

This requested project aligns closely with the FDOT Vital Few visions of improving safety and inspiring innovation. Countering human trafficking through multi-stakeholder collaborations is critical to reaching FDOT’s overall transportation safety and security goal. This project will present a systematic and comprehensive review of FDOT’s current counter-trafficking policies and programs, design and carry out an action plan for raising awareness and promoting action, and outline related policy recommendations. Therefore, this project can directly advance FDOT’s mission by elevating transportation safety and enhancing the counter-trafficking practice in transportation. In addition, this project seeks to identify innovative technologies and effective policies for countering human trafficking in transportation, based on the review of research and practice. Therefore, this project can also inspire the discovery and adoption of innovative technology solutions and policies for countering trafficking.

Project Benefits (Select all that apply and explain)	Quantifiable Benefits (units, dollars, etc...if applicable)	Methodology or Data Sources Used to Determine Quantifiable Benefits. If not applicable, please give justification of project benefits
<input type="radio"/> Materials Enhancement		Not applicable.
<input type="radio"/> Materials Savings		Not applicable.
<input type="radio"/> Time Savings	Reduced labor costs	This project will yield promising practices, success stories, a training curriculum, and outreach materials, all readily available for broad dissemination in Florida. Thus, no additional efforts from local agencies are needed, leading to savings in staff hours.
<input type="radio"/> Lives Saved/Injuries Prevented	Reduced human trafficking cases	By raising awareness and providing targeted counter-trafficking training for multiple transportation stakeholders in Florida, it is expected that counter-trafficking practice in Florida will be enhanced, and human trafficking will be curbed.
<input type="radio"/> Other (Explain)	Establishing FDOT as a forerunner in counter-trafficking research, education, and outreach	As no state DOTs in the U.S. have sponsored a research project on human trafficking in transportation, FDOT could become the leader in countering human trafficking among its peer agencies.

*Comments should explain and support urgency, financial benefit, and implementability scores