

TRENDS AND CONDITIONS RESEARCH

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Florida Statutes (F.S.) mandate that state agencies conduct Trends and Conditions analysis in their annual Long Range Program Plan (LRPP): “By analyzing the trends and conditions, goals and objectives, and current facilities inventory, each agency and the judicial branch shall determine its unmet and forecasted future needs” (216.0158 (1), F.S.). As a support to the 2020 Florida Transportation Plan (FTP), the Short Range Component (SRC) and the LRPP, the FDOT Trends and Conditions process is a continuing effort that assesses the needs of stakeholders and monitors the external and internal environment. Knowledge of key trends and conditions assists policy makers by identifying trends that should be acknowledged as entities prepare their long range transportation plans. With this information, policy makers and transportation professionals will be better equipped to make wise and informed decisions.

OBJECTIVES

The goal of this project is to provide planners and policy makers with supportive information and analysis. In 2004, the work program included five major tasks:

Task 1 - Trends and Conditions Research Report This initiative is a major element in the ongoing work program. Three major reports, *Transportation and the Economy*, *Transportation and Land Use*, and *Transportation System Performance*, were completed and are now available online (<http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/policy/trends/tc-report/table-of-contents.htm>). The final major report, *Transportation Policy*, is under review and will be completed as part of the ongoing work program.

Task 2 – FDOT Transportation Indicators Web Site This reference website is regularly updated on a monthly or more frequent basis (<http://www.indicators.cutr.usf.edu>).

Task 3 – Florida Transportation Trends and Conditions Pocket Guide – 2004 This widely distributed and read document was completed in late summer 2004 and is currently being distributed. It is also available online (<http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/policy/trends/pocket-guide-2004.pdf>).

Task 4 - Policy Research on Florida Transportation Policy Issues CUTR monitors transportation policy issues, including new data releases and national and state information products, relevant to trends and conditions research. This task includes support for FDOT presentations and planning, which, in 2004, included a lecture at FDOT on VMT trends in the nation and in Florida.

Task 5 - Florida Commuting Worker Flow Web Site This website will present information on commuting flows in Florida. It will be completed and maintained in 2005 as part of the ongoing Trends and Conditions work program.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The principal objective of this project is the production of information; however, that information is synthesized into findings and conclusions. The 2004 work program continued the focus on assembling and formatting information. The final paragraphs of the forthcoming *Policy Report* of the *Trends and Conditions* series characterize those findings:

When reviewing the lists of critical transportation policy issues confronting decision makers and transportation professionals it is easy to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the challenges and the complexity and level of effort that will be required to craft solutions. Yet, stepping back reveals a history of success. The degree of mobility that Floridians and Americans have today is unprecedented. Transportation is safer, more available, and more affordable than ever. Auto availability has increased dramatically and technology improvements have enabled vehicle safety and emissions to improve dramatically. The transportation planning/decision-making process has evolved to include widespread opportunity for public participation. The methods for planning, engineering and implementing improvements are superior to those used a decade or two ago. Planners have embraced a complex set of planning goals and have been able to produce transportation solutions that are less intrusive, more attractive, safer and more robust. We are making progress in leveraging technologies to enhance the productivity of existing infrastructure. Travel options are greater and increasing. We are learning more about how transportation and land use can be more complementary and are showing a greater sensitivity regarding the impact of transportation on all aspects of our lives from our ability to participate in the workforce to our health and physical fitness.

But continued progress is not assured. Florida's ability to provide transportation capacity is not keeping up. We have shifted our travel to the off-peak times where we could and we have shifted to less congested roads or modes where possible. But we are running out of places to shift to. There are risks of increased delays and unacceptable travel safety. The capacity reserves in our system are running on low. Continued progress will take concerted efforts on numerous fronts: leveraging technologies, focusing on near term and long term improvements, working to increase the supply of transportation but also to moderate demand, and carefully exploring a host of transportation policy considerations. The future performance of the transportation systems will be impacted by myriad of policy decisions that will be made by individuals, businesses, and various levels of government. Complex, contentious, dynamic and diverse policy considerations will play significantly in those decisions. Hard work and difficult policy decisions will be required to sustain progress.

BENEFITS

This project provides a review of the key trends and conditions related to transportation in Florida, their importance to the State, and potential policy considerations and issues identified by considering the trends. This project is part of an ongoing *Trends and Conditions* research effort intended to support the needs of decision makers, transportation professionals, and the interested public. Work in this area is intended to support state and local planning efforts by providing data and interpretation of important trends and conditions. As such, the documents provide information that enables informed decisions to be made. The ultimate value to citizens is that better informed decisions can result in transportation policies and investments that are more effective and efficient in addressing the travel needs of citizens and businesses. The feedback being received on the various initiatives indicates that the materials are being read and are influencing policy discussions and decision making for transportation.

This project was conducted by Steven Polzin, Ph.D., of the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida. For more information, contact Monica Zhong, Project Manager, (850) 414-4808, monica.zhong@dot.state.fl.us.