

**Lee County MPO Rail Feasibility Study  
Contract 2012-001**



**Technical Report**

**Seminole Gulf / CSX Rail Corridor  
in Southwest Florida Land-Use Plans**

**August 15, 2013**

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## **1. Report Summary**

This report identifies local government comprehensive plans and land use policies that include language or maps referencing the Seminole Gulf rail corridor in southwest Florida.

The following plans contain such language or maps:

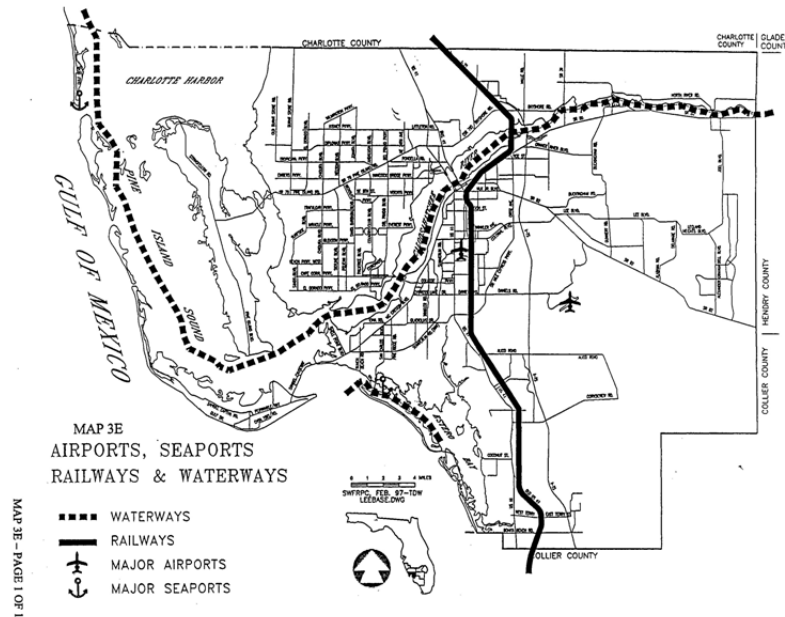
- Lee County Comprehensive Plan
- Lee County Greenways Master Plan
- Collier-Lee Bi-County Regional Transportation Network
- Fort Myers Comprehensive Plan
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. & Veronica Shoemaker Boulevards Revitalization Plan
- East Fort Myers Revitalization & Redevelopment Plan
- Fort Myers Parks & Open Space Master Plan
- Fort Myers Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
- Bonita Springs Comprehensive Plan
- Collier County Comprehensive Plan
- Charlotte County Comprehensive Plan
- Charlotte County US 17 Area Plan
- DeSoto County Comprehensive Plan
- Lee County MPO Long-Range Transportation Plan
- Lee County Freight and Goods Mobility Analysis
- Charlotte County – Punta Gorda MPO Long-Range Transportation Plan
- Florida Rail System Plan
- Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan

In the excerpts that follow, the most relevant provisions are highlighted with bold type.

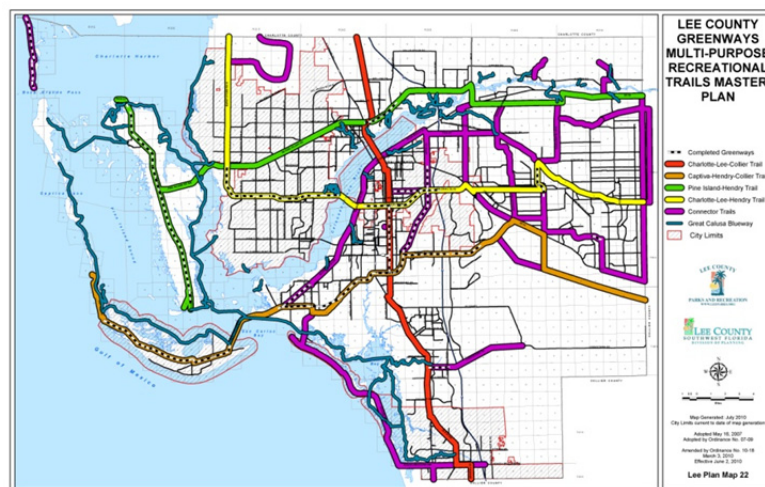
## 2. Lee County Comprehensive Plan

### 2.1 Maps

Lee Plan Map 3E identifies the entire length of the rail corridor on its map of "Airports, Seaports, Railways & Waterways."



Lee Plan Map 22 illustrates Lee County's Multi-Purpose Recreational Trails Master Plan. A north-south trail is shown that would connect to Charlotte and Collier Counties. Part of the route would follow the rail corridor, generally from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in Fort Myers to just south of Briarcliff Road where the rail corridor curves to the southeast. Segments that have been completed to date run from Crystal Drive south to Six Mile Cypress Parkway, parallel to and adjoining the Seminole Gulf rail corridor but built in the right-of-way of the Ten Mile Canal (formerly the Seaboard Air Line rail corridor).



## 2.2 Goals and Policies

Lee Plan policies refer to advantages of rail access to industrial uses (see also Policy 1.1.7 regarding the Industrial Development area).

**POLICY 7.1.1.5: Applications for industrial development will be reviewed and evaluated as to:**

j. **impacts on transportation facilities and access points** (rezoning and development orders);

k. **access to rail, major thoroughfares**, air, and, if applicable, water (rezoning and development orders);

**POLICY 7.1.3: Industrial land uses must be located in areas appropriate to their special needs and constraints, including**, but not limited to, considerations of: topography; choice and flexibility in site selection; **access by truck, air, deep water, and rail**; commuter access from home-to-work trips; and utilities; greenbelt and other amenities; air and water quality considerations; proximity to supportive and related land uses; and compatibility with neighboring uses

A Lee Plan policy for the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor anticipates a linear park along the rail corridor:

**POLICY 23.6.1: The Palm Beach Boulevard community will work with Lee County, the State of Florida and the Seminole Gulf Railroad to create a linear park along the railroad** in order to enhance community recreational opportunities.

Another Lee Plan policy anticipates high-capacity transit systems (without referring to specific corridors):

**POLICY 44.1.3: Develop transit system alternatives to fixed route bus service, such as High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes, Bus Rapid Transit and Light Rail.**

The Lee Plan proposes protection and linkage of railways, ports, and roads:

**GOAL 46: COORDINATED SYSTEM OF RAILWAYS, AVIATION, PORTS, AND ROADS.** Develop and maintain a **coordinated system of railways, aviation, ports, roads, and related facilities to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of commerce**, consistent with community values and economic objectives.

**POLICY 46.3.2: The county will encourage rail providers, as appropriate, to provide rail access to the ports and the Southwest Florida International Airport** where feasible.

**POLICY 46.3.3: The county will encourage private investors to develop and use rail freight facilities by encouraging construction of connecting rail tracks in a manner consistent with this plan, and seeking the necessary funding to maintain and improve Lee County's rail link.**

**POLICY 46.4.2: In order to protect ports and related facilities from the encroachment of incompatible land uses, development proposals (including but not limited to residential and commercial uses within the vicinity of existing or proposed ports and railways and related facilities) must demonstrate land use compatibility with these uses** and propose mitigation measures for any adverse impacts during the rezoning and development-of-regional-impact processes.

Policy 85.1.3 is related to Map 22:

**POLICY 85.1.3: The feasibility of converting canal, railroad, and power line easements and right-of-ways into linear parks, trails and greenways** in accordance with the Lee County Greenways Master Plan will be explored by county staff.

### **3. Lee County Greenways Master Plan**

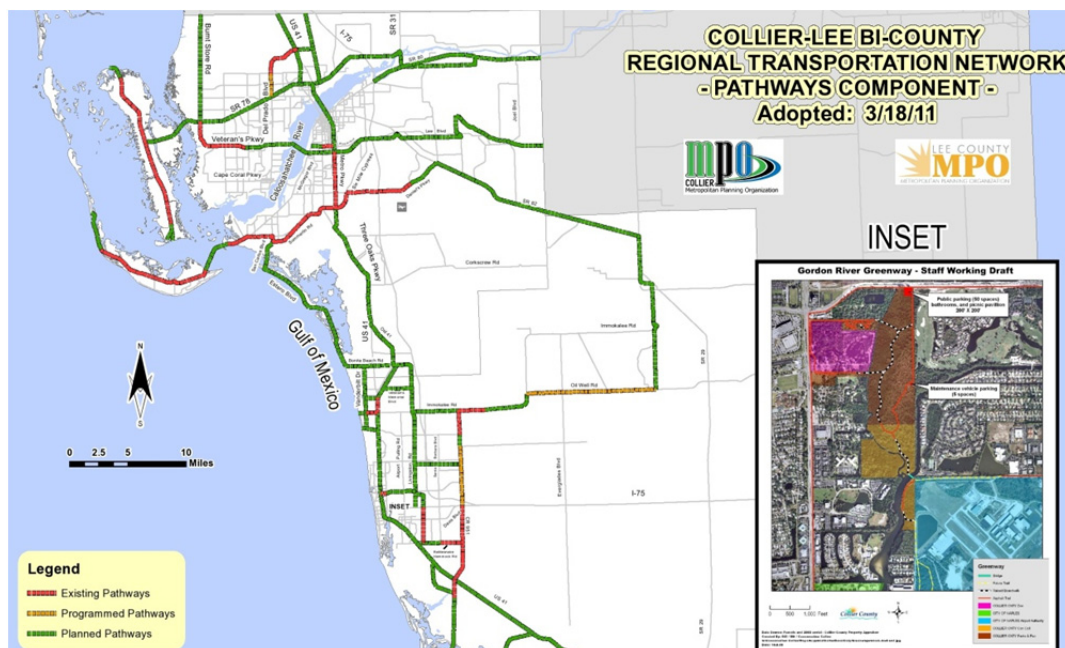
This plan was adopted in 2005 and updated in 2010. A master plan map on page 33 of the 2005 plan shows parts of the rail corridor as a north-south trail that connects to Charlotte County and to Collier County. This map, with some updating, has since become Map 22 of the Lee Plan, as presented earlier.

The Greenways Master Plan discusses rail/trail projects as a subset of Greenway Systems, as follows (from page 29):

A Greenway Multi-Use Trail (greenbelt) or linear park is a corridor of protected open space that is managed for conservation and/or recreation. A rail/trail project can be considered a greenway. **Rail corridors can be attractive sites for trails because they often provide a direct connection between popular community locations, such as downtown districts and residential areas.** At a time when demand for trails is increasing, finding land for them can be difficult. **Placing trails alongside active rail corridors (rails-with-trails) or along abandoned rail lines (rails-to-trails) can be an excellent method of securing land for safe, popular and effective trail development. Rail Trails can be successful under a variety of conditions as long as the trail is designed to the satisfaction of the railroad, the trail manager and existing design standards.** Please see Appendix E for general Trail Design Guidance.

### **4. Collier-Lee Bi-County Regional Transportation Network**

The most recent pathways map of this bi-county network was adopted by the Lee and Collier MPOs on March 18, 2011. As with the Greenways Master Plan, a major north-south spine of the path would follow the rail corridor, generally from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in Fort Myers to just south of Briarcliff Road and then be continued along the Ten Mile Canal and along US 41 beyond that point. South of Strike Lane in Bonita Springs, the path could follow US 41 or the rail corridor.



## **5. Fort Myers Comprehensive Plan**

The Transportation Element stresses multi-modalism:

**OBJECTIVE 1:** To meet the transportation needs of the incorporated area through a **safe, convenient, and energy efficient multi-modal system of roadway, rail, air, boating, public transportation, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.**

**ACTION 1.3.4: Identify corridors for off-road bicycle paths such as railroad and drainage canal Right of Ways.**

**POLICY 1.7:** The City will promote **intermodal terminals and access to aviation, rail and seaport facilities.**

**ACTION 1.7.1:** Provide appropriate assistance to **maintain railroad facilities that travel through and are in use within the City.**

**ACTION 1.7.2: Provide assistance to private railroad companies to provide for a rail/truck intermodal transfer terminal by:**

- (a) Making property available, for lease or purchase, in the City Industrial Park;
- (b) Encouraging local freight and trucking firms to develop a working relationship with the Seminole Gulf Railroad; and,
- (c) Assisting any potential developers of an intermodal freight terminal with permitting.

The Future Land Use Element identifies rail access as critical for strengthening the city's economic base and future growth:

**POLICY 1.8: Designate areas on the Future Land Use Map as Industrial (IND) that are areas integral to strengthening the City's economic base and future growth.**

These are the areas to which the City looks for expanded job opportunities, investments and production opportunities, and a balanced and sufficient tax base. **These areas have special location requirements, including transportation needs (e.g., air, rail, interstate access, and immediate access to arterial roadways); industrial levels of water, sewer, fire protection; and are centrally located to reduce employee commuting distances....**

**ACTION 1.8.1:** Designate well located areas on the Future Land Use Map and provide regulations within the Land Development Regulations for future industrial use.

**STANDARD 1.8.1.1: Industrial areas shall be designated after consideration of the following criteria:**

- a) Located in close proximity (ideally 2½ miles or less) to Interstate interchanges;
- b) Rail frontage;**
- c) Immediate access to or frontage on an arterial roadway;
- d) Useable lot sizes-typically 200 feet or d
- e) Distance from residences, schools, and historic districts or sites;
- f) Easy access for employees;
- g) Optimum minimum size of 10 acres; and,
- h) Located so as to avoid routing industrial traffic through residential areas.



## **6. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. & Veronica Shoemaker Boulevards Revitalization Plan**

This 2006 redevelopment plan discussed the then-imminent opening of the new three-lane northbound Evans Avenue corridor and the adjoining rail corridor:

In the distant future, **the rail line** that runs between the original Evans Avenue and the three new northbound lanes **could become a commuter rail line** that would have the opposite effect — reconnecting downtown with Dunbar, with pedestrians flowing to and from a Downtown station at MLK.

**Florida DOT is evaluating the purchase of the rail right-of-way so that in the future it would be available for bus rapid transit or a commuter rail line that could run from Collier County through Bonita Springs and Fort Myers to Punta Gorda.** (from page 5.1)

This redevelopment plan also discussed the possibility of Bus Rapid Transit service to the rail corridor:

**Lee Tran will also be studying the possibility of implementing Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) both north-south and east-west in the study area. The north-south routes to be considered are the Seminole Gulf Railway/US 41 corridors** and the east-west routes include MLK/Lee/Colonial Boulevards & Veterans Parkway. The east-west corridor is intended to serve from downtown Fort Myers to Lehigh Acres. They plan to phase in the system with a goal to have a full-scale BRT system operation in place. (from page C.8)

## **7. East Fort Myers Revitalization & Redevelopment Plan**

The rail corridor runs parallel to Palm Beach Boulevard through East Fort Myers. Potential additional uses of this corridor are discussed throughout this 2010 plan; a sample follows:

Figure 1.7 is a photo of the poorly maintained rail line through East Fort Myers. (page 1.4)  
Pages 1.6, 1.9 and 1.14 provide a historical narrative and illustrations about the settlement of East Fort Myers and the **important role of the two rail lines that had been built there. The Seaboard Air Line was built in 1926 and removed in 1952. The Atlantic Coast Line, now owned by CSX and leased to Seminole Gulf Railway, opened in 1904.**

Chapter 4 proposes construction of a new park along Seminole Avenue west of Van Buren Street:

**Also, when passenger rail returns, a rail station should be built at the park so that the new development will be supported by the rail. In turn, the development will support the rail by providing housing sites and business within walking distance of the station. The rail station and its accompanying transit-oriented development will reinforce the connection between Palm Beach Boulevard and the railroad, and increase natural surveillance along the railroad right of way.** (pages 4.20 and 4.21) *NOTE: The site of this park was recently acquired by the City of Fort Myers.*

Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the potential that the remaining rail corridor has for public transportation; pages 5.10, 5.11, and 5.13 are reproduced on the following pages.

Page 5.23 identifies this Action Step: **"Fort Myers should encourage the MPO and Florida DOT to make long-term arrangements to allow the existing rail line to also be used for passenger service."**

Page 5.23 contains this vision of life for residents near Palm Beach Boulevard:

In this future, they will be able to live a high-quality lifestyle without having to own an automobile. Because walking is "built in" to the fabric of the neighborhoods and the corridor, physical fitness is encouraged rather than hindered by the built environment. Such a multi-modal, mixed-use, and attractive environment will enable those residents who do not have access to a car to engage fully with their city and neighborhood and will facilitate the exchange of goods and services within the study area and beyond.... Next-generation recommendations include:

- **Activation of passenger rail service on the Seaboard Air Line** and introduction of transit (technology to be determined in the future) on Palm Beach Boulevard will help to reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), allowing for Palm Beach Boulevard's design to undergo further transformations.
- Reduction of the overall corridor speed to 30 mph for pedestrian safety, with specific changes at the mid-block crossings to reinforce the lower speed.
- Changes over time to match the design of Palm Beach Boulevard to the changing form of the adjacent land uses, allowing the corridor in some locations to transform from a four-lane divided arterial to a town center street with on-street parking.
- Addition of traffic signals as new town centers develop.

Page 7.12 identifies three major and two minor nodes of future urban intensity, which are based, in part, on locations **"along existing railways and major roads and thus have the potential to be transit-served when passenger rail service is revived** and when bus service with short headways (less than ten minutes between buses) or street car service is inaugurated."



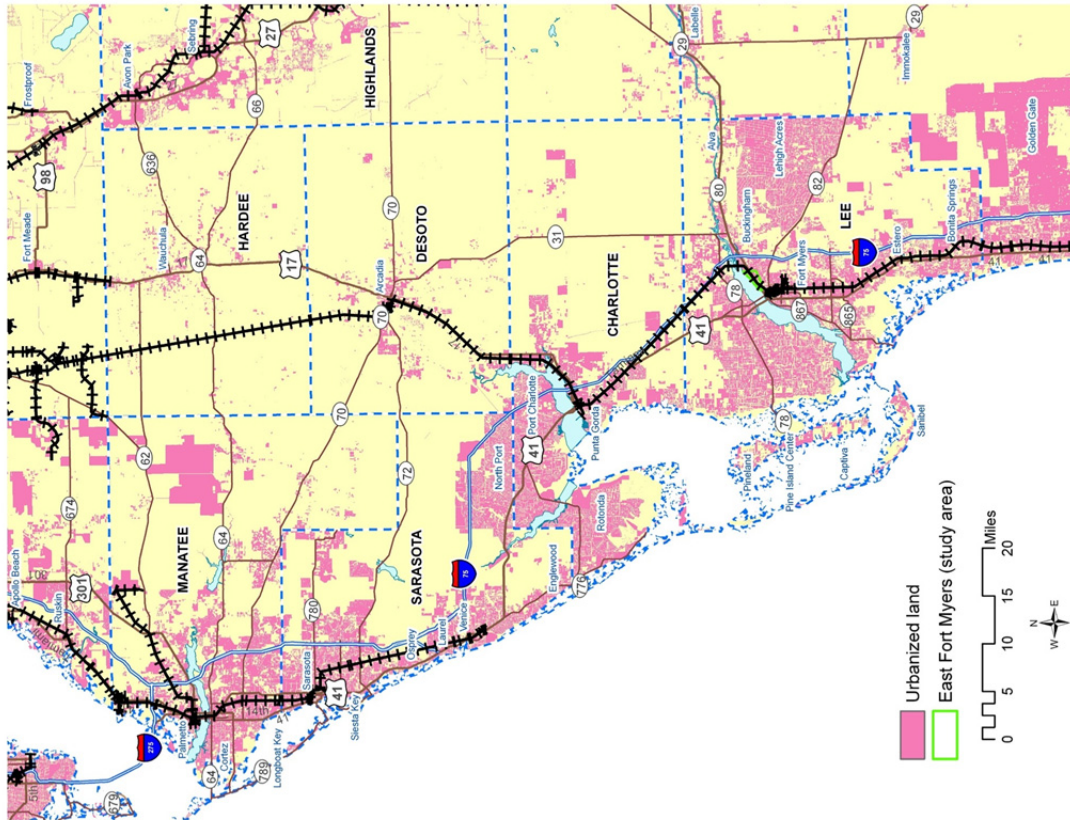


Figure 5.12: Railroad tracks in southwest Florida.

### 3. TRANSIT ACCESS

Recognizing that automobiles powered by fossil fuels are likely to have a diminished presence in our lives, the plan for East Fort Myers must make convenient public transit one of its priorities. This includes the resurrection of passenger railway service through the study area. In the meantime, transit-ready development will create an environment that is conducive to transit usage. Walkability is a key element in creating a high level of transit ridership. Unless the origins and destinations of the trip are walkable, transit will have little chance to encourage shifts from automobile to transit usage. As the new town centers along the corridor are developed, transit shelters should be included in the streetscape design. Transit provisions should be coordinated with Lee Tran to ensure compatibility with local transit planning and operations.

Starting in 1926, East Fort Myers was nearly the center of rail transportation in Lee County. Although the Seaboard Air Line tracks were removed in the early 1950s, the Atlantic Coast Line tracks that run parallel to Palm Beach Boulevard have been in continuous service for freight and are now also used for excursion trains.

During the past several decades, cities across the country have begun new passenger rail service. Most new systems are in cities much larger than Fort Myers but often smaller than Lee County as a whole. Development patterns in many parts of Lee County are spread too thin to ever support passenger rail service, but the existing rail corridor runs through populated mixed-use areas that could benefit from fast efficient public transportation: Naples-Bonita Springs-Estero-Fort Myers-East Fort Myers-Punta Gorda. If tracks were added to a missing link north of Punta Gorda, rail service could be provided from Naples through Fort Myers to Sarasota, Bradenton, and Tampa.

The map on this page, Figure 5.12, shows the existing Seminole Gulf rail line in southwest Florida. The pink areas on this map indicate urbanized land (and other disturbed land such as phosphate mines). Florida DOT recognizes the potential for restoration of passenger rail service in southwest Florida. It has been investigating the purchase of the entire rail right-of-way for its continued use for freight trains or for adding passenger rail or even Bus Rapid Transit BRT service.

There is an interesting parallel in southeast Florida for reintroducing passenger rail to urban areas. When Florida DOT realized that it would take five years to widen I-95, it began offering offered rail service in 1989 on a parallel route crossing three counties. "Tri-Rail" was so successful that it continues to grow today, linking West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami.



The map below, Figure 5.13, was created in 1939 and shows the greatest extent of railroad tracks in southwest Florida. Comparing this map to Figure 5.12 on the previous page, it is clear that about half of the original rail network was later removed. An era of seemingly inexhaustible and cheap gasoline made rail transport seem obsolete. However, the remaining rail rights-of-way provide an opportunity for southwest Florida to begin diversifying its transportation network.



Figure 5.13: Map reproduced from "Florida: The American Guide Series", (courtesy of the Southwest Florida Historical Society)



The red line shows the route of the proposed passenger railway service. Red circles indicate the possible locations of rail stations. The blue line, which runs along Palm Beach Boulevards, shows the proposed bus or streetcar route. Blue circles indicate the locations of bus or streetcar stops. The bus or streetcar can occupy one of Palm Beach Boulevard's car lanes. At certain key stops and stations, the bus or streetcar stops should be coordinated with the nearby Passenger Rail stations in order to facilitate transfers between the two transit modes. Such transfer areas should have a great variety of convenience retail and services. Transit stations and stops can give rise to an diverse and vital economy of small businesses which are not currently possible in this automobile-oriented corridor.

**ACTION STEP # 5  
 CITY LEADERS SHOULD ENCOURAGE LEE COUNTY IN SUPPORTING  
 BETTER PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION.**

Fort Myers should vigorously support a Lee County Transit Authority to provide better public transportation through the county and particularly in more urban areas.

- Fort Myers should push for the authority to levy a gasoline tax in order to fund transit improvements.
- Fort Myers should encourage the MPO and Florida DOT to make long-term arrangements to allow the existing rail line to also be used for passenger service.

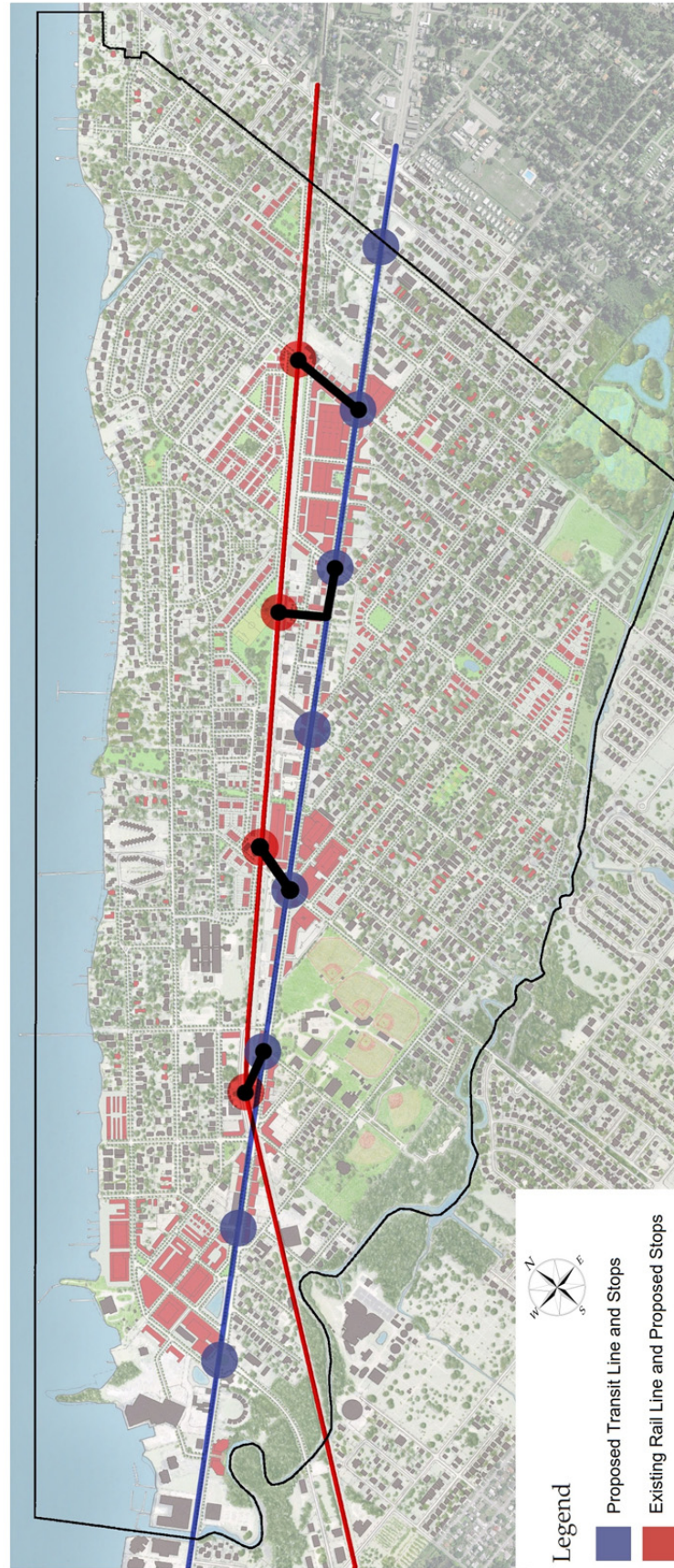
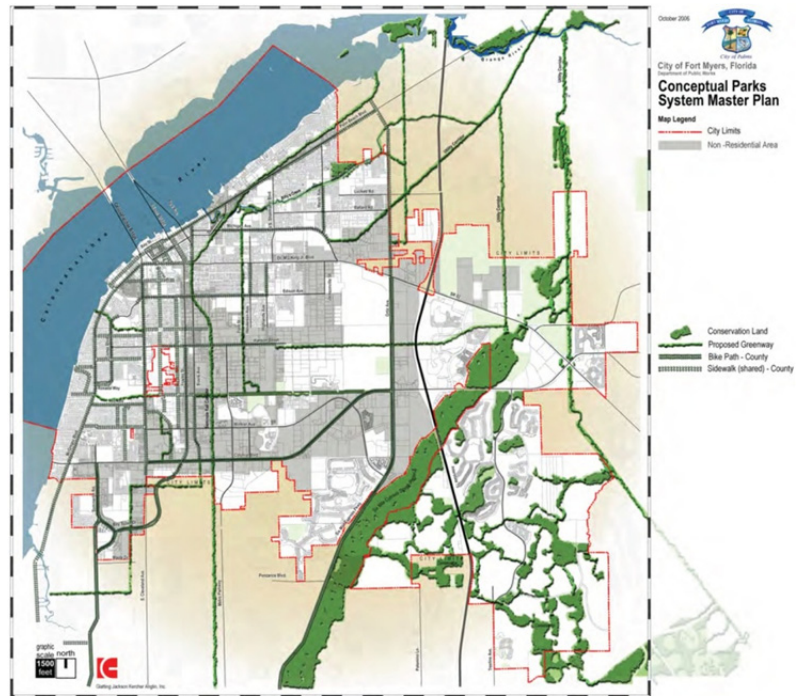


Figure 5.15: Proposed Transit Connections



## 8. Fort Myers Parks & Open Space Master Plan

This Parks and Open Space plan designates the rail corridor through the City of Fort Myers as a "Proposed Greenway." The map to the right is on page 55 of this plan. The proposed greenway is also incorporated in the "Conceptual Parks System Master Plan" on the last page of the published report, which was issued in November 2006.

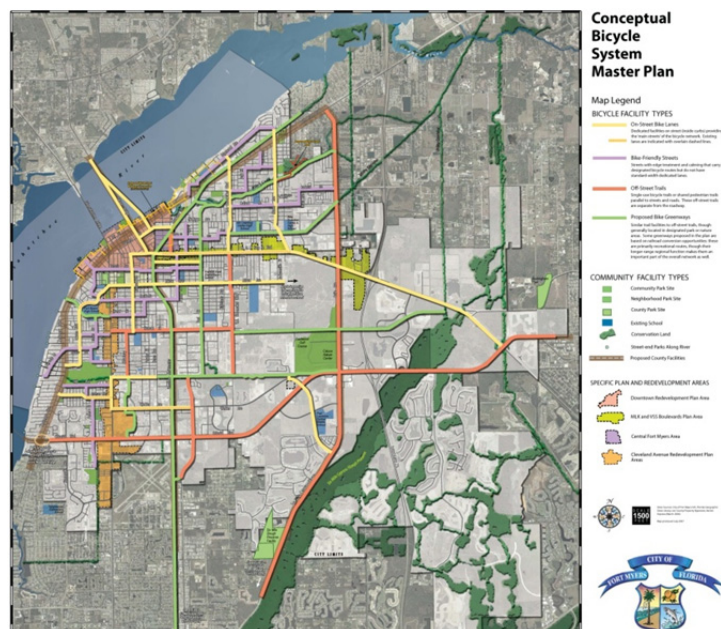


Proposed Greenways and Trails

## 9. Fort Myers Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

This Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan also shows a "proposed bike greenway," a 14-foot paved path within the rail corridor through the City of Fort Myers, as shown below. The plan states:

At their heart greenways are trail facilities, although in the nomenclature of this plan they have been designated as greenways to emphasize that they are routes either independent of a public street or intended to emphasize or celebrate features of the landscape. **The Seminole Rail Corridor that traverses Fort Myers north to south is the most direct and long-reaching opportunity for a greenway facility in a rail corridor and offers an off-road transportation 'spine' to the city.**

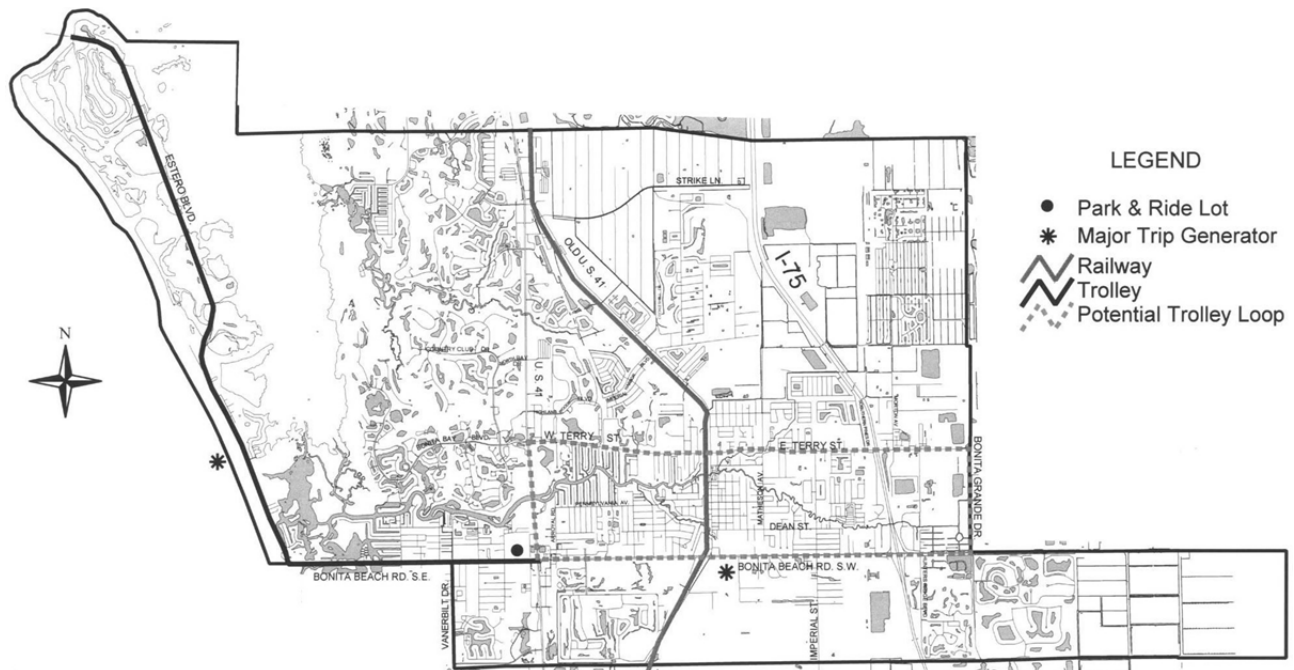


## **10. Bonita Springs Comprehensive Plan**

The Bonita Springs Comprehensive Plan has one policy that addresses the rail corridor:

**POLICY 1.2.15: The City shall investigate railroad and electric power rights-of-way for their potential inclusion in the system of public bike paths and other ancillary recreational uses.**

Figure 3 of the Transportation Element designates the rail corridor on this map of "Future Transit Routes and Other Transportation Facilities." That map is reproduced below.



## **11. Other City Comprehensive Plans**

The rail corridor does not run through the other three cities in Lee County: Cape Coral, Sanibel, and Fort Myers Beach. Consequently none of their comprehensive plans contain any references to the rail corridor. The only references to rail transit are in the Fort Myers Beach plan where various innovative transit technologies are described as potentially better suited to Fort Myers Beach than light rail transit.

## **12. Collier County Comprehensive Plan**

Collier County’s Transportation Element contains two maps that show the rail corridor, which at this time extends less than two miles into northern Collier County.

Map TR-8 is a reproduction of Florida DOT’s SIS and emerging SIS hubs, corridors, and connectors map, dated January 20, 2005. **This map identifies the entire Seminole Gulf rail corridor from Arcadia to northern Collier County as an emerging rail corridor.**

Map TR-9 shows the Collier-Lee Bi-County Regional Transportation Network, dated January 25, 2007. **This map identifies the entire rail corridor from the Lee-Charlotte line into northern Collier County as a “First Order Railroad Line.”** This map was a combined effort of the Collier and Lee MPOs to identify a network of roadways, navigable waterways, and rail corridors that were regional priorities for Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) and Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) funding. (The Collier and Lee MPOs updated this map in October 21, 2011, on the basis of new criteria that eliminated the “first order” designation, however the new map retains the entire Seminole Gulf rail corridor on the regional transportation network.)

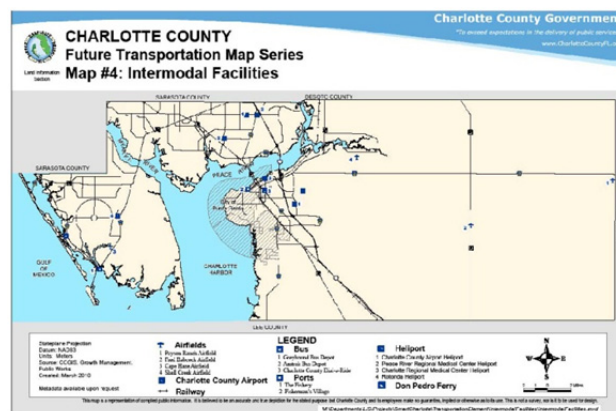
## **13. Charlotte County Comprehensive Plan**

The Future Land Use Element contains this policy:

Policy 6.3.2: Provision for Infrastructure and Services. The County shall review the possibility of creating a frontage road or a reverse frontage road system along the corridor, shall create and adopt regulations to promote healthy neighborhoods, and shall **explore alternative transportation possibilities such as rail linkages to create railroad passenger service or auto train stations.**

The data and analysis supporting Charlotte County’s transportation element contained this summary:

**The remaining functional rail line is owned by CSX, as shown in FTRAM Series Map #4, Intermodal Facilities [see map below]. However, Seminole Gulf Railways entered into a 60-year lease of the underlying real estate in 1987. In addition, Seminole Gulf owns the track, road bed, bridges, and platform at the Punta Gorda Depot. This 90-mile line extends from Naples to Arcadia and ties into the CSX system. The line currently supports rail freight and rail excursions. Currently, Seminole Gulf operates six trains per week through the County.**



The Transportation Element contains these objectives and policies:

Policy 1.2.7: Opportunities for Multi-use Trails. The County shall continue to seek opportunities to **construct multi-use facilities adjacent or parallel to limited-access highways, along drainage channels, shorelines and various utility and railroad rights-of-way.**

**Objective 1.4: Rail Facilities.** To participate in the planning efforts to improve rail freight service and make the rail mode an integral part of a true multimodal transportation system in the County.

Policy 1.4.1: Evaluate and Plan Modifications. The County shall continue to participate in studies designed to evaluate and plan modifications to rail freight service along with the possibility to connect to AMTRAK to provide passenger service in the County.

Policy 1.4.2: Abandoned Railroads. The County shall continue to consider non-automobile uses of abandoned railroad rights-of-way, such as light rail, dedicated transit corridors, trails or street modifications in congestion management plans, to have a better integrated multimodal transportation system.

Policy 1.4.3: Railroad Crossings. The County shall continue to promote safety at railroad crossings and shall implement a policy to eliminate two existing crossings for each new crossing.

Policy 1.4.4: Seminole Gulf Railroad. The County shall continue to coordinate with the Seminole Gulf Railroad in encouraging maintenance of its facilities in a safe and satisfactory manner, particularly the existing at-grade railroad crossings.

GOAL 4: GOODS MOVEMENT AND SERVICES. Ensure efficient and **effective goods movement within the County using all modes** by developing a well-connected intermodal transportation system.

Objective 4.1: Goods Movement. To enhance the movement of goods and people by **identifying important truck routes along with rail and waterway facilities** and by identifying available funding sources during the transportation planning and capital improvement programming process.

Policy 4.1.3: Coordination with Public and Private Agencies. The County shall continue to coordinate with the Airport Authority, FDOT, MPO, and other public and private parties to plan, fund, and implement transportation modifications that will **enhance access to air and rail facilities.**

## **14. Charlotte County US 17 Area Plan**

In this plan, the rail corridor was identified as "Community Catalyst No. 8":

**The existing CSX railroad corridor provides an opportunity to develop industrial uses that are served by the railroad for transportation of products and supplies. Certain industries rely on rail facilities. Some areas of the railroad corridor are located in residential and natural areas. In those areas, it may be appropriate to buffer the railroad from adjacent development. Within the buffer areas, there is an opportunity to encourage development of bicycle and pedestrian trails that could parallel a portion of the rail corridor and provide a recreational use for residents and ecotourists.**



This plan also stated, as an economic challenge:

**The CSX rail road corridor is an active corridor; the Florida Department of Transportation's ultimate goal to purchase the railroad line for future multi-modal use will require extensive funding.**

Suggestions for a third phase of implementation included the following:

**The rail line has historically been an economic driver for the area. The rail was the original impetus for the development of several communities along US 17. It has since diminished dramatically in use and function. Although it is still active, there is little nexus between the uses along the corridor and the rail line that runs the length of the corridor.**

**Over the long term, the County should look into either expanding use of the rail line or encouraging its reuse. Either way, Charlotte County should work with the local community to reestablish the nexus with the rail. The current line is a real opportunity for locating industrial uses that need rail service. Where rail spurs can be established to open up additional industrial properties in the area, they should be considered.**

**If the rail fails to increase in usefulness, the county should look for opportunities to convert the rail line into a public trail system. Any conversion of the rail line is assumed to be a long term goal as the county does not own or operate the rail line and it is currently in active use. However, in its current state, the rail line is simply disconnected with the community. The opportunity of the rail line is either to expand or change its use.**

This plan contained this recommendation for the rail corridor:

**The FDOT 2007 Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) Data and Designation Update identifies the Seminole Gulf Railway Line from North Naples to Arcadia as an Emerging SIS Freight Rail Corridor. Charlotte County and the State should continue to explore opportunities for shared use of this right-of-way for rail, transit and/or bicycle/pedestrian facilities.**

## **15. DeSoto County Comprehensive Plan**

DeSoto County's Traffic Circulation Element does not provide any mapping or policy language relating to rail service.

This element's inventory contains the following comments:

**Rail Facilities:** Currently, there is no passenger rail service available in DeSoto County. There is railroad freight service in the County provided by CSX and Florida Gulf Coast Railway.

**Intermodal Facilities & Transfer Centers:** There are no multi-modal facilities or transfer centers in DeSoto County at present.

**Freight, Goods and Service Mobility:** Identifying freight movement in the County is important to determine which routes/facilities will need to be designed for high truck traffic, and to determine the best location of high intensity industrial uses that are heavily dependent on access to freight routes. The following are the existing modes of freight transportation.

- There are two major truck routes in the County, SR 70 running east-west and US 17 and SR 31 running north-south, all intersecting in the City of Arcadia.

- **There is one freight rail line in the County**, as previously mentioned.

This element’s analysis contains the following comment:

**Future Rail Facilities Analysis: As stated in the inventory, DeSoto County has no passenger rail service available and does not anticipate the need in the future.**

DeSoto County’s Recreation and Open Space Element describes the desirability of trails along rail corridors. This element refers to both rail corridors that run just west of US 17, the existing rail corridor leased by Seminole Gulf and an abandoned rail corridor closer to the Peace River. The following narrative appears in this element (along with the map shown below):

**The County should continue to explore the shared use of easements such as electrical utility lines, gas lines, abandoned rail corridors, and water management canals for trail purposes.** The abandoned CSX railroad tracks create a tremendous opportunity for a new north/south bike trail and greenway. **The existing railroad right-of-way, which is still owned by CSX, could connect Arcadia to Charlotte County roughly following the Peace River. This could become an ideal greenway between Arcadia and the explosive growth expected in the southwest corner of the County.** The abandoned railroad right-of-way, which has already had miles of tracks removed, also continues north of Arcadia into Hardee County roughly along CR 661. A greenway could potentially connect one side of the County to the other along scenic farmland and the banks of the Peace River. Thus a safe and effective system of connecting people with Arcadia’s business core, community focal points, parks and distant neighborhoods could be realized. Arcadia schools and neighborhoods around Arcadia could be connected to this proposed Peace River Trail by a pedestrian/bicycle network of sidewalks, bike lanes and or trails. DeSoto County residents are very supportive of walks and trails as indicated in the DeSoto County Long-Term Recovery Plan.

In funding new trails, the County should investigate the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) as well as the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse (NTEC). RTC will support the county’s local efforts to transform the dream of a trail into a tangible community asset. NTEC will help the County learn how to use Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds for trail design and installation. TE activities are federally funded, community-based projects “that expand travel choices and enhance the transportation experience by improving the cultural, historic, aesthetic and environmental aspects of our transportation infrastructure.” The federal government provides funding for TE projects through our nation’s surface transportation legislation.



## **16. Lee County MPO Long-Range Transportation Plan**

The Lee County MPO's current long-range transportation plan (LRTP), which has a target year of 2035, was adopted on December 8, 2010, and was updated most recently on February 17, 2012. The LRTP consists of thirteen chapters plus six appendices:

- Chapter 1 – Introduction and Overview (14-17)
- Chapter 2 – Plan Development Process (18-21)
- Chapter 3 – Public Involvement/Participation (22-28)
- Chapter 4 – Mission, Goals and Objectives (29-39)
- Chapter 5 – Model Validation (40-42)
- Chapter 6 – Land Use Forecast and E+C Network (43-52)
- Chapter 7 – Congestion Management Systems Strategies
- Chapter 8 – Transit Needs Assessment (54-83)
- Chapter 9 – Freight and Goods (84-128)
- Chapter 10 – Needs Plan (129-177)
- Chapter 11 – Financial Plan (178-187)
- Chapter 12 – Cost Feasible Plan (188-218)
- Chapter 13 – Transit Cost Feasible (219-236)
  - Appendix A – Public Participation Plan (237-318)
  - Appendix B – Travel Demand Model Validation (319-454)
  - Appendix C – Socio-Economic Data (455-642)
  - Appendix D – Congestion Management Process (643-700)
  - Appendix E – Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan (701-819)
  - Appendix F – 2035 Revenue Forecast (910-922)

Chapter 4 provides goals and objectives that guided the long-term vision for this plan. Several addressed rail issues:

Goal 1: A multi-modal transportation system that is balanced and **integrated with all transportation modes** to ensure safe and efficient movement of people and goods.

Objectives 1.5 and 5.3: **Improve intermodal connectivity and access to intermodal facilities (e.g. airports, transit centers, Interstate bus system, rail, passenger ferries, etc.) and activity centers.**

Objective 1.10: Maximize transportation network continuity and **promote alternative modes of transport (e.g., rail, pipeline and waterways).**

Chapter 8 describes a potential corridor for bus rapid transit (BRT) that would use part of the rail corridor (from San Carlos Park to North Naples). The north-south BRT corridor previously evaluated by Lee Tran would run along US 41 and end at Sanibel Boulevard in San Carlos Park; the new corridor would continue this service 26 miles to Naples County using 11.4 miles of the rail corridor, then returning to US 41 where the rail corridor ends:

**An additional BRT corridor extends into Collier County along the Seminole Gulf Line Rail (SGLR) corridor as a dedicated facility. This corridor currently terminates in the vicinity of Old 41 and North Tamiami Trail in Collier County; in this alternative it would be extended south to serve Naples, operating in mixed traffic on US 41.**

Chapter 9 examines the status of the rail corridor, the potential for a rail-to-truck intermodal transfer facility, and the potential for shipping gasoline and aviation fuel by rail and pipeline.

Chapter 9 also considers a new rail connection between Lee County and the South Central Florida Express in Moore Haven, which would provide rail access to Central Florida and also a

connection to several Florida ports and to the north-south railroads that run along the east coast of Florida, the FEC (Florida East Coast) and CSX.

Chapter 9 also examines freight and goods movement according to travel mode, considering truck, rail and air. Nine existing and emerging freight activity centers are evaluated, six of which have rail access, as shown in the following table.

Map ID	Freight Activity Center	Approximate Size (Acres)	Intermodal Facility	Available Transport Mode(s)			Access <sup>a</sup>	Character			Lee County Industrial Parks <sup>b</sup> Included within the FAC
				Truck	Rail	Air		Expanding	Redeveloping	Constrained	
F1	Central Fort Myers Industrial	954	● <sup>c</sup>	●	●		F		●		19, 25, 26, 27, 31, 36
F2	South Fort Myers Industrial	996		●	●		F		●		7, 15, 28, 33, 34, 35
F3	Alico Rd. Industrial	2,082		●	●		G	●			4, 5, 6, 37, 39
F4	Airport/I-75 Industrial	16,364	● <sup>c</sup>	●		●	G	●			1, 2, 3, 16, 18, 24, 38, 42, 43
F5	Lockett Road/I-75 Industrial	1,272		●			G	●			8, 10, 12, 23, 40
F6	North Fort Myers Industrial	227		●	●		G			●	17, 21, 22
F7	Central Cape Coral Industrial	152		●			F			●	14
F8	Bayshore Industrial	205	● <sup>c</sup>	●	●		G			●	9
F9	Bonita Industrial	978		●	●		G	●			13, 20

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> G = Good, F = Fair, P = Poor

<sup>b</sup> Source Map: Lee County Southwest Florida Economic Development Office, April 2007.

<sup>c</sup> Potential site of rail intermodal facility (*Lee County Goods Mobility Analysis*).

Appendix E presents the Lee County MPO Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan, which was adopted in May 2011. **The entire rail corridor is shown as an off-road trail on the primary bicycle and pedestrian network. This trail is anticipated as a “Rails with Trails” project that would utilize the rail corridor without impeding the potential for future light rail or bus rapid transit service.**

The primary network will be the backbone of a county-wide system of continuous corridors that connects local communities and provide access to transit and employment centers. The secondary network consists of other collectors and arterials that feed into the primary network.

North-south alternatives to the rail corridor are presented from Alico Road to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard; one would use Plantation Road Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard while another would use a portion of Metro Parkway.

## **17. Lee County Freight and Goods Mobility Analysis**

The Lee County MPO commissioned Cambridge Systematics Inc. to conduct this analysis in 2009. Although the focus was on transport by truck, the analysis also considered transport by air, rail, and sea. The condition and current activities on the rail corridor were examined and the eligibility for state funding of access and track improvements was noted.

Recommendations were provided on potential rail improvements such as:

- Installation of heavier track between Colonial and Hanson and north of Cranford St.
- Rehabilitation of the bridges over the Caloosahatchee
- Reconstruction of the tracks and ballast from Alico to Colonial
- Local improvements such as double tracking and passing sidings to respond to increased demand from CSX's intermodal terminal which is now under construction in Winter Haven
- Construction of a rail/truck transfer terminal and a fuel terminal that could accept delivery of bulk fuels by rail
- Consider rail connectivity to proposed inland ports in central Florida

## **18. Charlotte County -- Punta Gorda MPO Long-Range Transportation Plan**

The Charlotte County – Punta Gorda MPO's current long-range transportation plan (LRTP), which has a target year of 2035, was adopted on December 13, 2010. The LRTP consists of fourteen chapters plus three appendices:

- Chapter 1 – Introduction
- Chapter 2 – Goals & Objectives
- Chapter 3 – Plan Development Process
- Chapter 4 – Forecasting Growth and Land Use
- Chapter 5 – Cost and Revenue Assumptions
- Chapter 6 – Needs Plan
- Chapter 7 – Cost Feasible Plan
- Chapter 8 – Performance Evaluation
- Chapter 9 – Congestion Management Process
- Chapter 10 – Public Participation
- Chapter 11 – Socio-Cultural Effects & Environmental Justice
- Chapter 12 – Transportation Safety & Security
- Chapter 13 – Hazard Mitigation
- Chapter 14 – Plan Implementation
  - Appendix A – Glossary of Terms and Acronyms
  - Appendix B – Detailed Highway Costs, Unfunded Needs
  - Appendix C – Detailed Transit Costs

Chapter 2 provides goals and objectives that guided the long-term vision for this plan. Two objectives and seven policies address rail issues:

**Objective 1.5: Support the planning effort to improve rail facilities and service.**

**Policy 1.5.1: Continue to coordinate with Amtrak in planning efforts providing access to the national passenger rail service.**

Policy 1.5.2: Coordinate with the Lee County MPO, the Collier County MPO and with other agencies to **secure funding (grants and other sources) for rail improvements that will provide continuous rail from Southwest Florida to the national rail network.**

**These rail projects should always include either double tracking or bypass rail so that more than one train can be running at a time.**

Policy 1.5.3: When considering rail improvements, examine the hazard vulnerability of the rail and facilities location and **determine if relocating sections of the right of way to avoid hazardous locations is feasible.**

**Policy 1.5.4: Support the development of intermodal transfer facilities to encourage the movement of freight by rail.**

Policy 1.5.5: Consider alternatives that **promote use of abandoned railroad right-of-way for other modes of transportation.**

**Policy 1.5.6: Support the preservation of rail as a viable transportation mode in the region.**

Policy 2.4.2: Coordinate with other regional partners to evaluate existing evacuation routes on an ongoing basis and propose improvements as necessary including the consideration **of alternative modes of evacuation such as rail.**

Objective 3.1: Support economic development through consideration of improved access for all users and **connections to regional port, rail and airport facilities**, as well as all regional activity centers.

Chapter 7 contains the only other reference to the rail corridor (beyond brief historical references and a discussion of transportation security issues in Chapter 12):

#### **Rail Lines and Terminals**

**The Florida Southern Railroad began service from Arcadia to Punta Gorda in the late 1890's. Since that time, many railroad tracks have been abandoned and converted to other uses. Currently, CSX Transportation owns the remaining active rail line and Seminole Gulf Railways has entered into a long-term lease with CSX to use and control these tracks. Seminole Gulf Railway has provided freight transportation and logistics to southwest Florida since 1987, operating 115 miles of track in Manatee, Sarasota, Desoto, Charlotte, Lee and Collier counties. The Seminole Gulf Railway also operates various passenger excursion trains.**

## **19. Florida Rail System Plan**

Every two years the Florida Rail System Plan examines passenger and freight rail issues. The 2010 update contained a Policy Element which provided a broad framework for investing state resources into rail systems. It also contained an Investment Element that identified specific needs of Florida's rail system, established investment priorities for state funds, and described future actions to implement the rail system plan.

Chapter 2 of the Investment Element described each freight rail operation in the state, including its ownership, history, routes, major markets, and intermodal connections. It also identified all approved and potential abandonments of rail corridors. Chapter 3 described all existing and proposed passenger rail operations in the state.

Chapters 4 and 5 identified and evaluated a variety of rail projects desired by various parties throughout the state. Six southwest Florida projects were included and are described below, followed by the Investment Element's priority ranking for each project:

- **284: Lee Collier Intercity and Freight Rail Feasibility Study.** *The project would consist of studies to evaluate the feasibility of investing in new passenger rail service in SW Florida, with significant reliance upon connection to Amtrak services from either Tampa (as envisioned in the Florida Inter-City Passenger Rail Vision Plan) or Lakeland, or both, connecting key urban centers*



in SW Florida including Sarasota, Venice, Punta Gorda, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs and Naples, using the CSX/SGLR and I-75 right-of-way. The project would include evaluating the SGLR right-of-way from Arcadia to Naples and its possible purchase from CSX. **PRIORITY: HIGH. TIMEFRAME: 1-5 YEARS.**

- **287: Seminole Gulf Infrastructure Improvements – Phase I.** The Phase 1 project would renew sections of the SGLR railroad Bridge that spans the Caloosahatchee River. The project would replace fully depreciated sections and make structural improvements; replace fully depreciated pilings and other structural members, and paint the main drawbridge span. The project would also upgrade SGLR track structure between Colonial Boulevard and Hanson Street and between Cranford Street and Lee County line, a total distance of 14 miles. Improvements to this section include installing new 115-pound continuous welded rail, long-life crossties and related tie plates, track fastening systems and installing new ballast. The project also includes rehabilitating SGLR track structure between Alico Road and Colonial Boulevard, a distance of 8 miles. Improvements to this section includes installing 100-pound rail that will be removed to install 115-pound mentioned previously, installing long-life crossties and related tie plates, associated materials and ballast. Also in coordination with Charlotte and DeSoto County, expand the improvements to include replacement of Shell Bridge in Charlotte County and installation of 42 more miles of 115-pound rail in these two counties. **PRIORITY: MEDIUM-HIGH. TIMEFRAME: 6-10 YEARS.**
- **288: Lee County Intermodal Transfer Terminal.** Design and construct an intermodal transfer terminal that will facilitate centralized rail car-truck transloading, including both trailer on flat car/container on flat car (TOFC/COFC) and non-containerized "team track" operations. The site is located close to the intersection of Hanson Street and Veronica Shoemaker Parkway. Alternative locations are also available which would require site acquisition and development costs and may require environmental assessments. **PRIORITY: MEDIUM-HIGH. TIMEFRAME: 1-5 YEARS.**
- **289: Rail Intermodal Yard.** A rail intermodal yard in the vicinity of SW Florida International Airport and off Alico Road for transloading and storing petroleum products such as gasoline, diesel fuel, and aviation kerosene type jet fuel (Jet A Fuel) transported by rail. The project would also include the delivery of jet fuel. **PRIORITY: MEDIUM-HIGH. TIMEFRAME: 1-5 YEARS.**
- **291: Seminole Gulf Infrastructure Improvements – Phase 2.** Phase 2 is a project to continue upgrading and expanding the rail infrastructure in Lee County by appropriate investments in track maintenance and capacity upgrades, track and crossing signals and railroad crossings, in addition to building additional tracks to connect the railroad to key markets in Manatee, Glades, Hendry, Charlotte, Collier and Lee. Furthermore this project would look into investing in new rail technology such as double-stacking, rail cars, etc., and expanding rail capacity through double tracking, passing sidings etc., which could be needed in response to the proposed Winter Haven Intermodal Logistics Center. Proposed Phase 1 and 2 improvements would facilitate in the future investment of a permanent Amtrak services connecting Lakeland, Arcadia, Punta Gorda, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs and Naples. It may also result in the investment of intercity rail services connecting Tampa and Bradenton to all the urban centers in SW Florida including Sarasota, Venice, Punta Gorda, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs and Naples as described in the Florida Inter City Passenger Rail "Vision Plan." **PRIORITY: MEDIUM-HIGH. TIMEFRAME: 11-21 YEARS.**
- **307: Passenger Railway in Southwest FL.** Rehabilitate passenger rail for 95 miles along the CSX line from Old 41 on the Collier-Lee Co. border to Ona, Hardee Co. connecting with CSX line, currently used for freight to Lakeland. This CSX line, proposed for rehab/upgrade to passenger service, passes through Bonita Springs, Fort Myers, Punta Gorda, Arcadia, to Lakeland. This line should act as a connector with another proposed project reconnecting passenger service between Collier County and Tampa, connecting in Punta Gorda with new 8-mile track from Fort Ogden to North Port to Sarasota, picking up TBARTA rail in Sarasota to Tampa. All land is rail-banked except for 30-foot ROW of three-quarter-mile for purchase somewhere near mile markers 200-203 on I-75. **PRIORITY: MEDIUM. TIMEFRAME: 1-5 YEARS.**



## **20. Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan**

The 2012 update of this statewide plan is the first since it was adopted by the Florida Legislature in 1999. An integral part of this plan is a "Land Trails Opportunity Map," a synthesis of trail planning efforts by cities, counties, MPOs, and non-profits across the state. This map focuses on linear trails of regional significance that can form an interconnected system.

This map includes a proposed Tamiami Trail Corridor, part of which matches the Greenways Master Plan and the bi-county pathways map by following the rail corridor from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in Fort Myers to just south of Briarcliff Road. A major difference is that north of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, it stays on the rail corridor through East Fort Myers and across the Caloosahatchee and past Slater Road, where it turns to the west, crossing the Prairie Pines Preserve and rejoining the Tamiami Trail in northern Lee County.

