

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pasco County and the Turnpike Authority have submitted a Permit Application SAJ-2011-00551 (IP-TEH) to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) requesting a permit to construct an extension of existing Ridge Road in central and western Pasco County. This document provides an alternatives analysis (Analysis) for the proposed project related to compliance with the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines (Guidelines) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Analysis is based on the Corps defined overall project purpose as stated in Section 1, which addresses Pasco County's need for enhanced mobility in the study area and improved evacuation capacity from the designated coastal evacuation zone in accordance with the County's current Comprehensive Plan and the Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

A total of 17 alternatives, including the Applicant's Proposed Project and the No Action alternatives were evaluated. Evaluation criteria were established including specific practicability criteria under the Guidelines pursuant to Corps Jacksonville District guidance dated June 2014. The practicability evaluation criteria included:

- Availability (Available for Acquisition? Likely to Receive FDOT Permit?)
- Cost (Total Project Costs Reasonable? Costs Reasonable for Improvement in mobility? Costs reasonable for improvement in evacuation from coastal area?)
- Logistics (Consistent with LRTP? Are safety concerns acceptably low to the County? Are impacts to residences and businesses acceptably low to the County? Available as an additional evacuation route?)
- Other Summary Factors for Alternatives (Does alternative substantially meet overall Project Purpose?)

The evaluation of the 17 alternatives based on the Guidelines evaluation criteria resulted in a subset of alternatives that the County believes are practicable. Those practicable alternatives were then evaluated based on their environmental impacts and an apparent Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA) was recommended for the USACE's consideration in accordance with the Jacksonville District Guidance.

The methods used to develop information for the underlying evaluation criteria are described in general in Section 2 of this Analysis with more detailed descriptions in the technical Attachments. Section 3 evaluates each of the 17 alternatives based on the evaluation criteria providing factual results of that analysis. Finally, Section 4 draws on the information developed and presented earlier in the Analysis evaluating the alternatives for practicability based on the Guidelines criteria listed above.

As provided for in the County's Comprehensive Plan and the MPO's LRTP there is a critical need for improved evacuation of the central western evacuation zone to safer areas outside of the evacuation zone and enhanced mobility within Pasco County. Meeting these important transportation needs are the subject of the County's permit application and this Alternatives Analysis. Availability of each alternative was determined by two factors: 1) Whether the ROW was available to the County for purchase and 2) Whether each alternative was likely to receive

a permit from FDOT for the SR 52 and SR 54 routes, since the State owns those ROWs. FDOT has stated that it does not support alternatives that are inconsistent with the LRTP or include more than 6 general use lanes because they increase operational and safety problems and are therefore not acceptable.

Cost is a critical element of any Guidelines evaluation of alternatives. Under the Guidelines in order to be “practicable” the cost of an alternative must be practicable to the applicant and therefore not unreasonably expensive for the applicant. Cost was evaluated in three important ways: 1) Is the alternative’s cost within the County’s ability to fund, 2) Are the costs reasonable in terms of the improvement in mobility, and 3) Are the costs reasonable in terms of improvement in evacuation of the coastal area. Sources of revenue available to the County to fund this project and the limitations on those revenue sources are detailed in Section 4 of this Analysis. Making maximum use of all available sources of revenue and reprioritizing transportation projects by deferring one or more approved projects will be required to fund some of the alternatives that are identified as “practicable to the applicant”. Alternatives that are beyond that level of funding are not practicable because they would be “unreasonably expensive to the applicant” as provided for in the Guidelines. Although the Corps does not conduct a cost benefit analysis, as a publicly funded agency the County would not expend funds for alternatives that would provide only minimal improvement in mobility and/or evacuation because they do not substantially meet the overall project purpose.

Logistics is another principle consideration related to practicability. Logistical considerations include whether an alternative is consistent with the LRTP, whether safety concerns and impacts to residences and businesses were acceptably low to the County and whether the alternative provided an additional effective evacuation route from the coastal evacuation zone. Impacts to residences and businesses includes both the number of residences or businesses taken or partially taken and impacts to community cohesion. Some alternatives result in substantial impacts to the community including access to the community. The factor of providing an additional evacuation route is not simply a yes/no answer, the additional evacuation route must be effective. The access to the potential additional evacuation route determines whether it will be effective at moving residents out of the evacuation zone in a timely manner.

The final summary Guidelines practicability factor was whether an alternative substantially meets the overall project purpose. In particular does the alternative result in a project that substantially improves mobility and evacuation from the coastal area.

Three of the 17 alternatives analyzed were determined to be practicable based on the practicability factors discussed above - Alternatives 3, 4, and 5. The criteria which were the most important in making the determination of practicability included: Availability; Likelihood of receiving an FDOT permit; Consistency with the LRTP; Total project cost; Cost related to improvement in mobility; Cost related to improvement of evacuation from the coastal area; and, Safety. These three alternatives are practicable to the County based on the County’s ability to fund using all reasonable revenue sources.

Four other alternatives that are not practicable to the County are discussed in detail in Section 4 of this Analysis, Alternatives 2, 7, 10 and 15. Alternative 2 has lower overall impacts to wetlands, but the same level of impact to wetlands within the Serenova Preserve as the alternatives identified as practicable. In addition, Alternative 2 has substantial impacts to residences and community cohesion in a residential community just west of US 41. Alternative 7, which bridges approximately half of the area within the Serenova Preserve is unreasonably expensive to the applicant since the County does not have the ability to fund the Alternative. Alternative 10, Tower Road would provide only minimal improvement in both mobility and evacuation because it is difficult to reach Tower Road from population centers with evacuees having to travel on SR 54 which is known to flood during major storm events resulting in evacuees having to detour onto local roadways. In addition Alternative 10 would have severe impacts to community cohesion. Alternative 15, a combination of 2 lane Ridge Road Extension and 2 lane Tower Road, is unreasonably expensive to the County and would result in severe impacts to community cohesion on the Tower Road portion of the alternative.

The County recognizes that impacts to the Serenova Preserve, including impacts to wetlands within the Serenova Preserve, are viewed as particularly important and require avoidance of wetlands to the maximum extent practicable. All of the central alternatives (2-7) involve impacts to the Serenova Preserve, including approximately 1.0 acre of impact to wetlands to support an interchange with the Suncoast Parkway. Alternatives 6 and 7 would bridge all wetlands within the Serenova Preserve, except the 1.0 acre of wetland impact required to construct the intersection with the Suncoast Parkway. However, both Alternatives 6 and 7 are unreasonably expensive to the County because they are beyond the County's ability to fund them.

Recognizing the importance of avoiding Serenova Preserve wetlands the County developed Modified Alternative 7 by bridging all of the Serenova Wetlands practicable other than the 1.8 acres of wetland impacts; 1.0 acres at the intersection with the Suncoast Parkway and 0.8 acres distributed over the length of the bridging through the Serenova Preserve. The result is that Modified Alternative 7 would have 0.8 acres more wetland impact than original Alternative 7 in the Serenova Preserve but 5.3 fewer acres of wetland impact within the Serenova Preserve than the other practicable alternatives. Avoiding the remaining 0.8 acres of wetlands within the Serenova Preserve would be unreasonably expensive. The 0.8 acres of impact in the Serenova Preserve are to herbaceous wetlands along the edges of forested wetlands and no wetlands are bisected in the Serenova Preserve by Modified Alternative 7.

The County believes Modified Alternative 7 is the apparent LEDPA because compared to the other practicable alternatives, Modified Alternative 7 results in less direct wetland impacts, particularly within the Serenova Preserve, less direct impact to Natural Upland Habitat, less impact to listed species, the greatest wildlife corridors preserved by bridging and the least direct impact to archaeological sites.