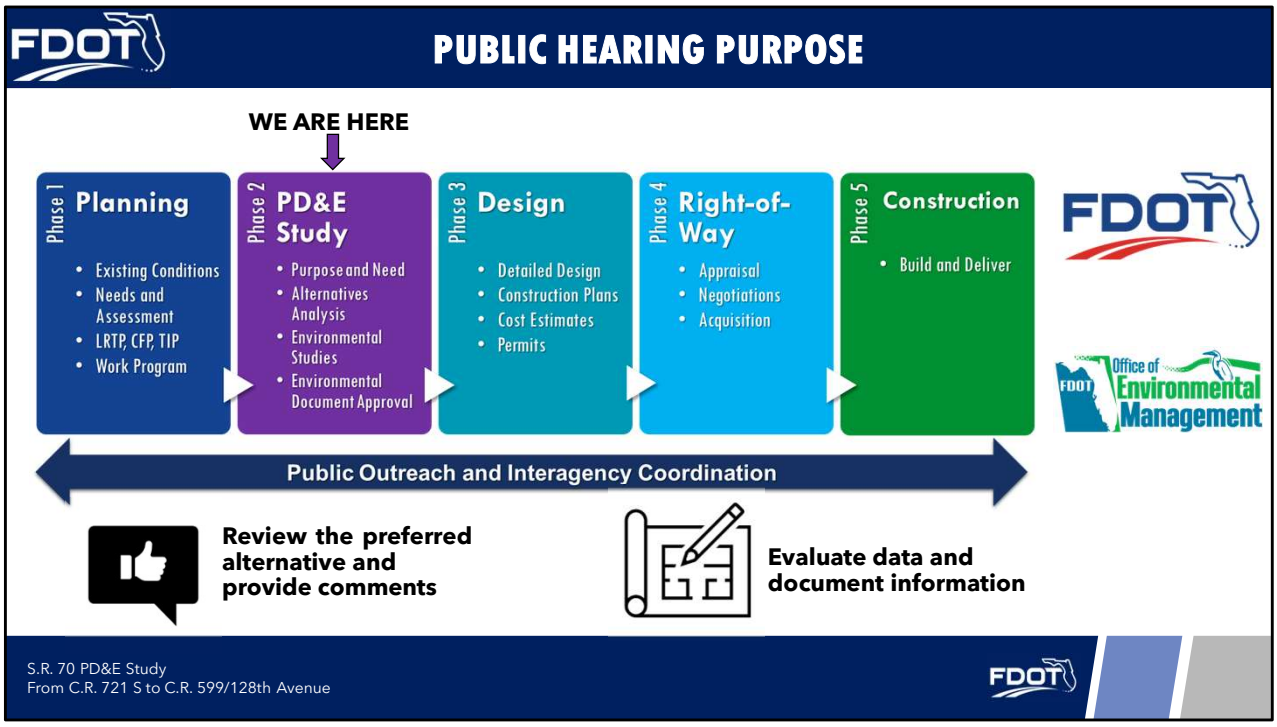
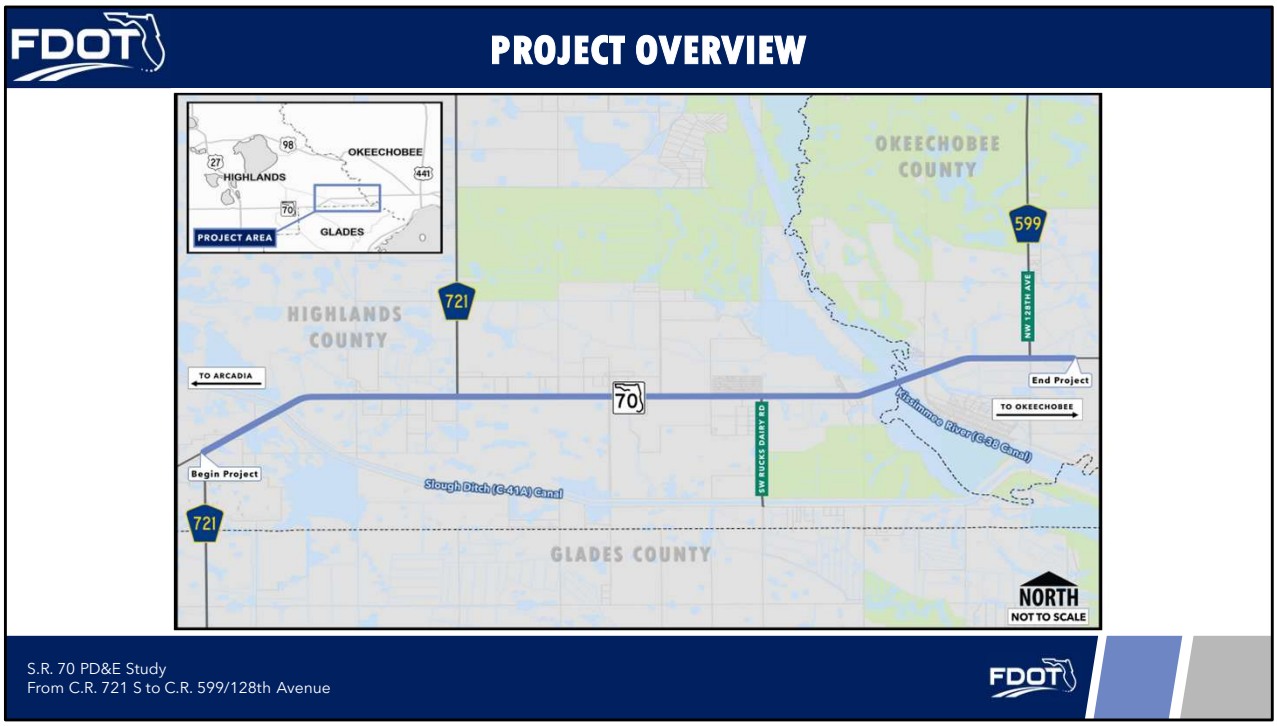



Welcome to the Florida Department of Transportation's public hearing for the State Road (S.R.) 70 Project Development and Environment, or PD&E, study. We appreciate your attendance and participation.




This public hearing is being conducted to give the public the opportunity to review and provide comments on the proposed preferred alternative and associated effects on the social, economic, cultural, natural, and physical environment. The purpose of this PD&E study is to evaluate engineering and environmental data and document information that will aid FDOT District One and the FDOT Office of Environmental Management in determining the type, preliminary design, and location of the proposed improvements.



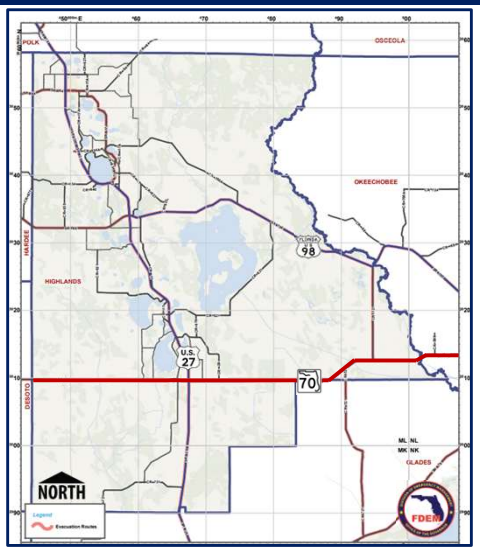

The study begins at County Road 721 South in Highlands County and extends approximately 8.6 miles to County Road 599 or 128th Avenue in Okeechobee County. The department proposes to widen State Road 70 to a four-lane divided roadway with the addition of paved shoulders, turn lanes and a shared use path.




The need for the proposed improvements to State Road 70 include improving traffic safety conditions, emergency evacuation and incident response times. The crash rate for this section of State Road 70 is 1.56, which is notably higher than the Highlands County crash rate of 0.898 and Okeechobee County crash rate of 0.717 for similar facilities.

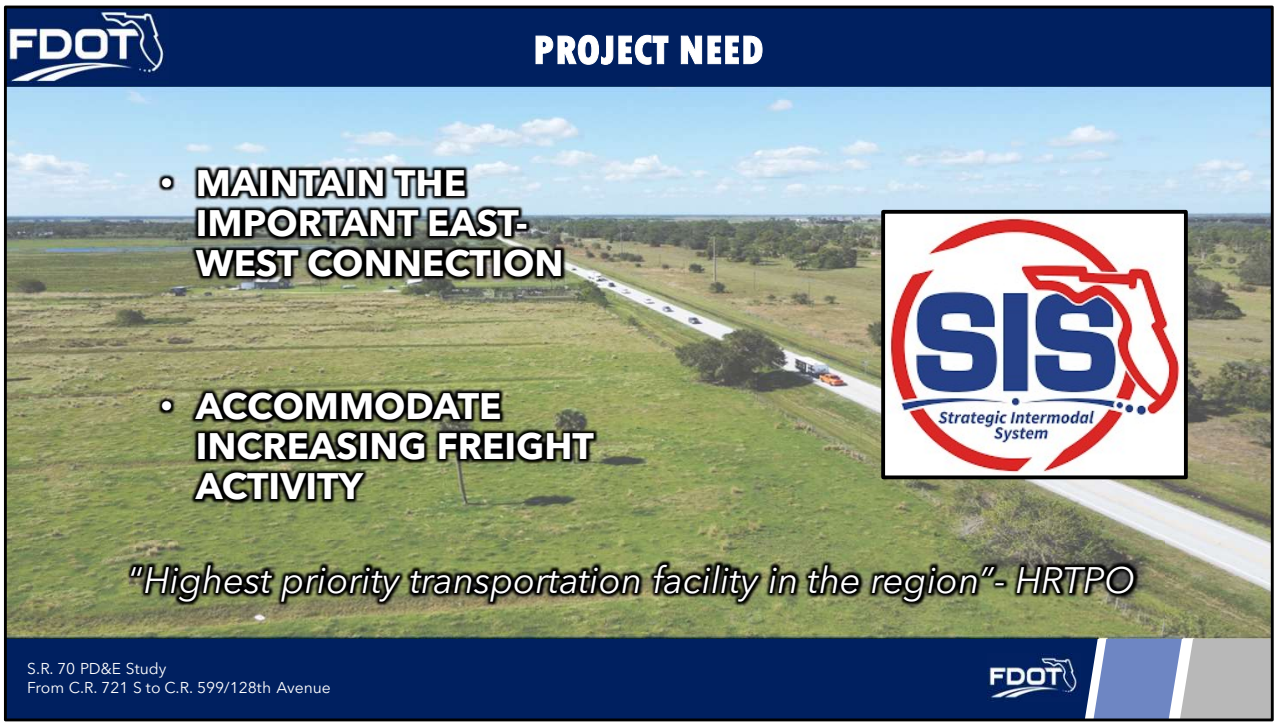
The substandard lane and shoulder widths and proximity of guardrails, roadside swales, and fence posts restrict the ability of drivers to avoid hazards. Due to the roadway's current configuration, there is limited space for an emergency service vehicle to pass to respond to a situation during periods of congestion or to accommodate a disabled vehicle to prevent it from obstructing traffic flow.

## PROJECT NEED




S.R. 70 PD&E Study
From C.R. 721 S to C.R. 599/128th Avenue

State Road 70 is part of the emergency evacuation route network designated by the Florida Division of Emergency Management, or FDEM, as well as the network established by Highlands and Okeechobee Counties. This roadway is critical in facilitating traffic during emergency evacuation periods as it connects to other arterials and highways of the state evacuation route network. The FDEM notes that State Road 70 has some of the longest lasting vehicle queues in the Central Florida region, contributing to prolonged clearance times. The project is anticipated to address deficiencies of the roadway which may reduce crashes (including fatalities) and lead to enhanced emergency evacuation capabilities and incident response times.

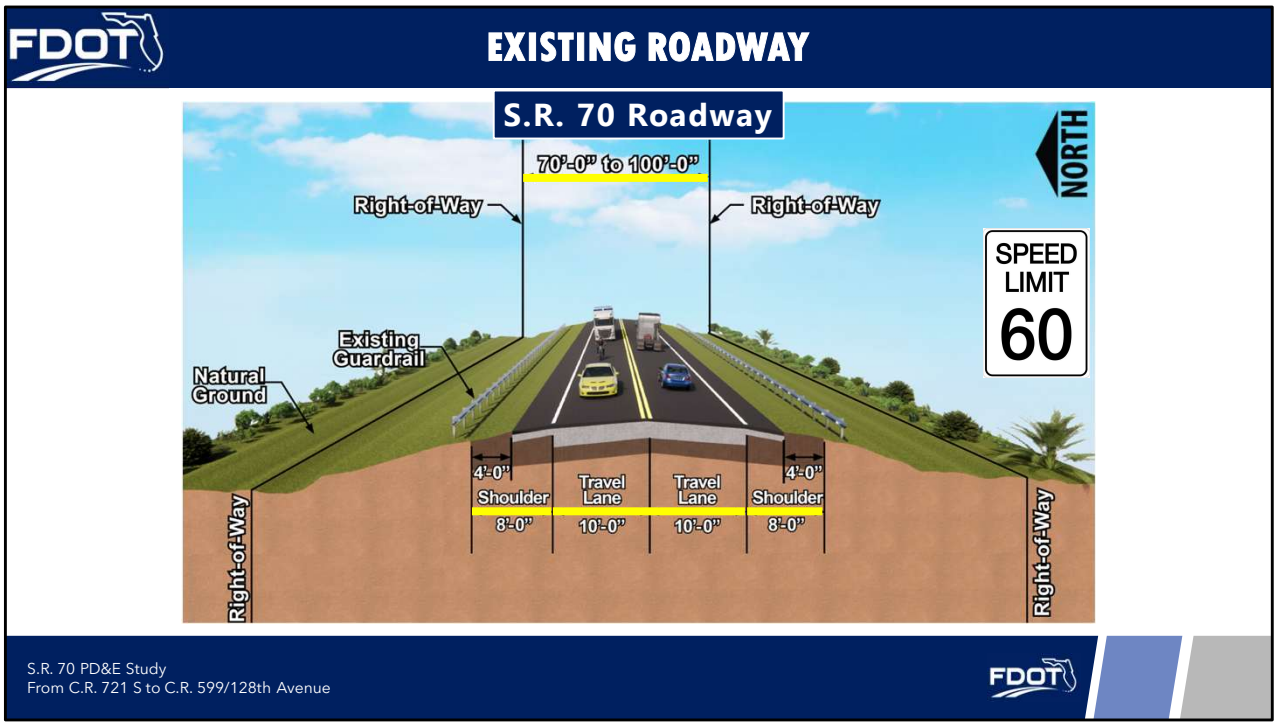



Additional needs for the proposed improvements include maintaining the important east-west connection and accommodating increasing freight activity along the project corridor. State Road 70 is part of Florida's Strategic Intermodal System, or SIS, highway network and part of the National Highway System. With the nearest available parallel east-west facilities being located nearly 10 miles or more to the north and south, State Road 70 is integral to facilitating east-west travel within the regional transportation network of Florida's heartland. Improvements to State Road 70 are long-term priorities in Highlands and Okeechobee Counties to facilitate the future growth of freight traffic in the region.

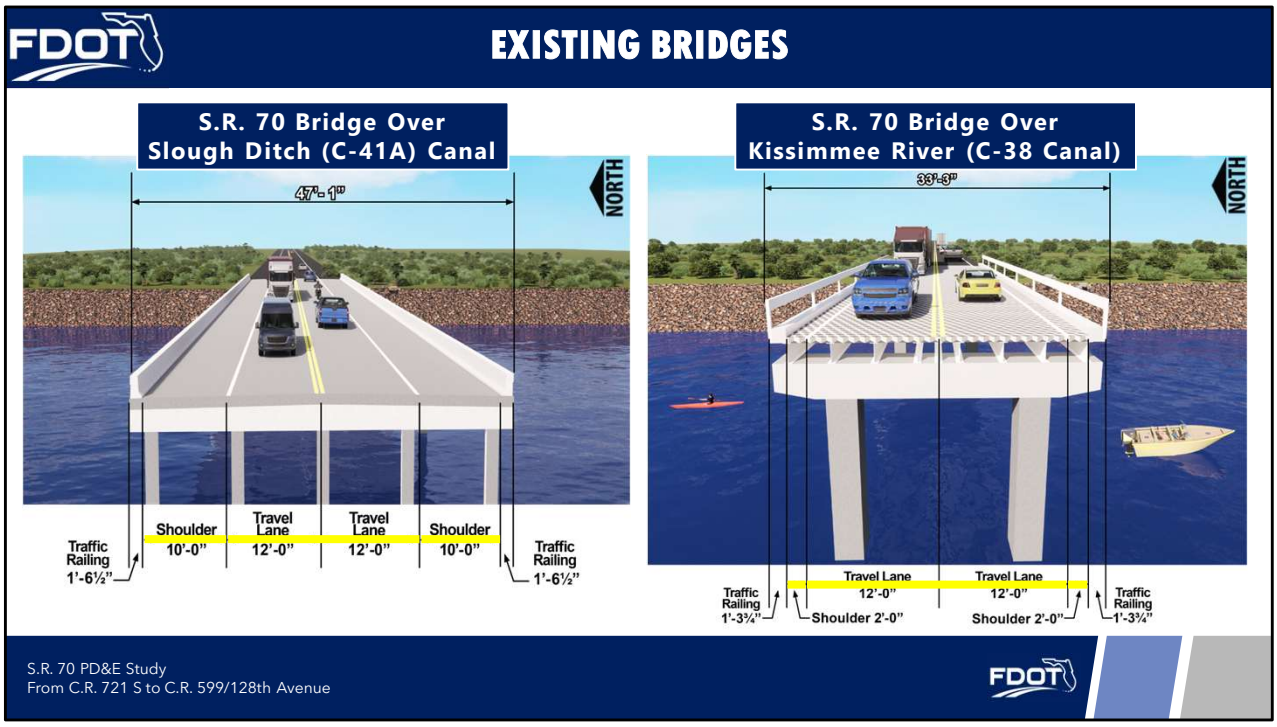
Additionally, the Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO), its committees, and community stakeholders have identified State Road 70 as the highest priority transportation facility in the region in need of improvements due to concerns pertaining to safety, freight mobility, and economic growth.



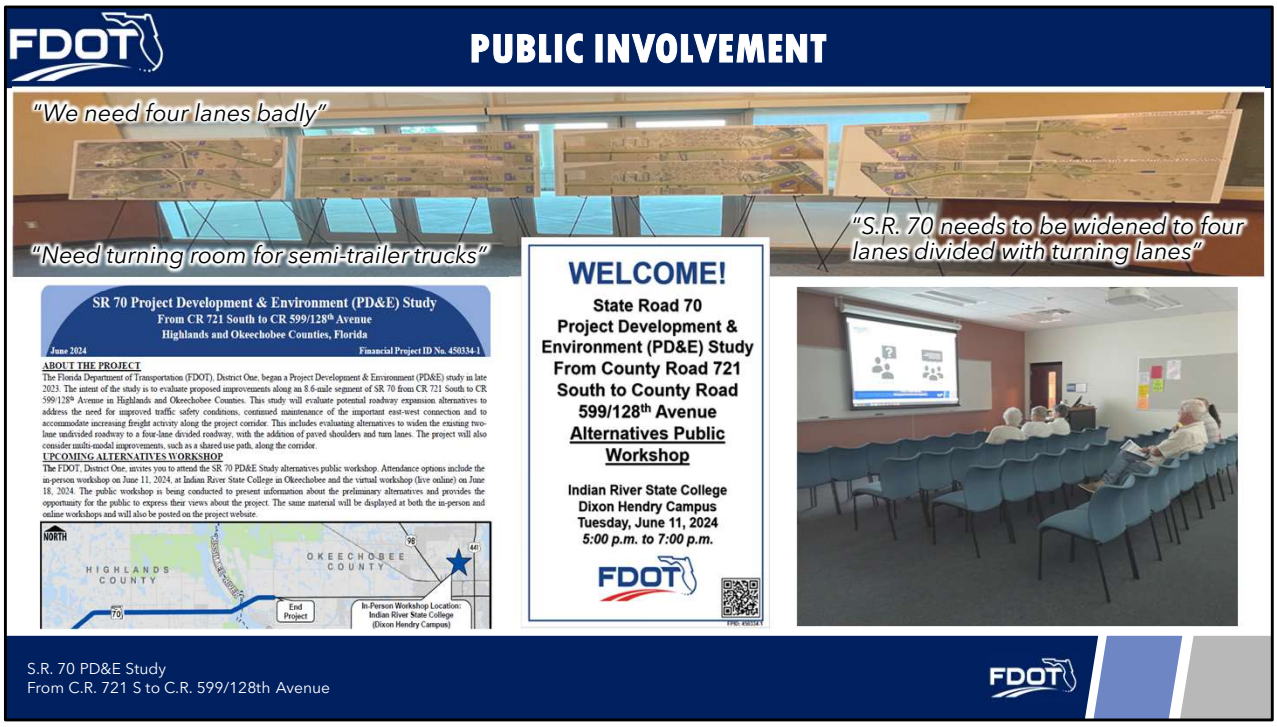

At this time, subsequent project phases, consisting of design, right-of-way, and construction, are unfunded and therefore not included in the FDOT Five-year Work Program in Fiscal Years 2026-2030. However, the project is listed in the FDOT SIS Cost Feasible Plan 2035-2050 as cost feasible. Additionally, the HRTPO Transportation Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2025/2026 – 2029/2030 identifies the project in the Fiscal Year 2029/2030 Transportation Project Priorities list.



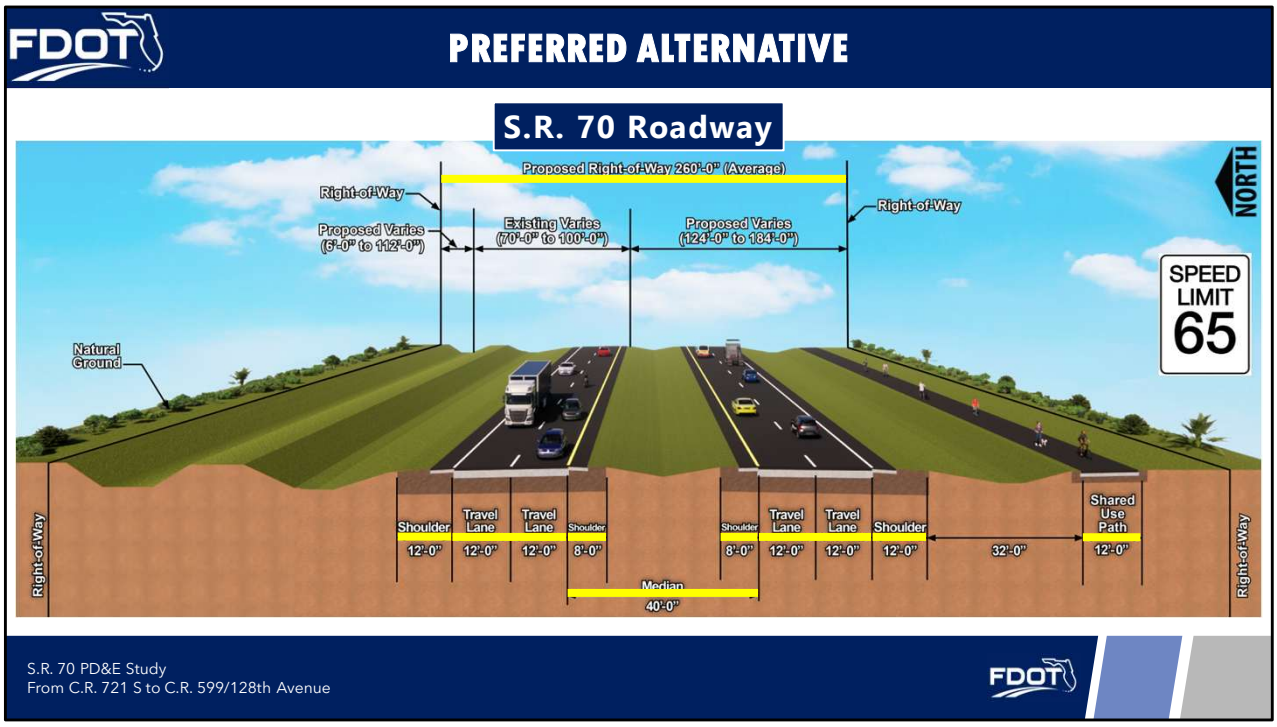

Within the project limits, State Road 70 is currently a two-lane undivided roadway with 10-foot travel lanes and eight-foot shoulders, four feet of which are paved. The roadway currently lies within 100 feet of existing right-of-way, and in some areas 70 feet of right-of-way, or property FDOT already owns. Guardrail is present on at least one side of the roadway for the majority of the corridor. Stormwater runoff is collected in roadside ditches. Additionally, there are no designated bicycle lanes or sidewalks present on either side of the roadway. The posted speed limit along the project corridor is 60 miles per hour.



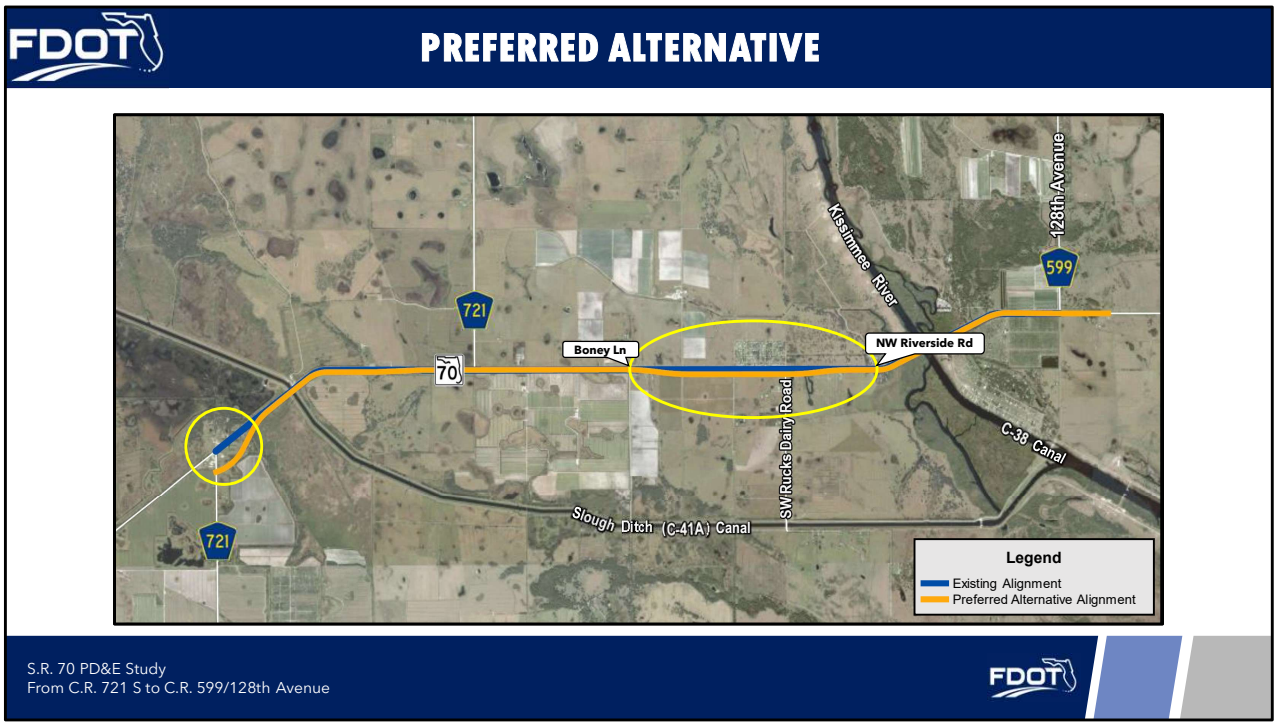

There are two bridges within the project limits, one over Slough Ditch or C-41A Canal and one over the Kissimmee River or C-38 Canal. The existing bridge over C-41A Canal has two 12-foot travel lanes and 10-foot paved shoulders. The existing bridge over the Kissimmee River has two 12-foot travel lanes and two-foot shoulders. Neither bridge has bicycle lanes or sidewalks present on either side.




Throughout this PD&E study process, FDOT has looked at many different concepts to widen the existing two lanes of State Road 70 to four lanes through Highlands and Okeechobee Counties. After environmental and engineering analyses and public and agency comments, many of these alternatives were eliminated. The last public meeting was an Alternatives Public Information Meeting held on June 11, 2024. At that meeting, we asked for your input on proposed improvements. Some of the feedback received included: need for turn lanes, adequate widths for truck turning radii, access management, evaluation of noise walls and guardrail, proposed roadway elevation at the Kissimmee River Fishing Resort, and overall support for the four-lane widening to address safety and traffic capacity. Based on your comments and additional environmental and engineering analyses, a preferred alternative was selected for State Road 70.



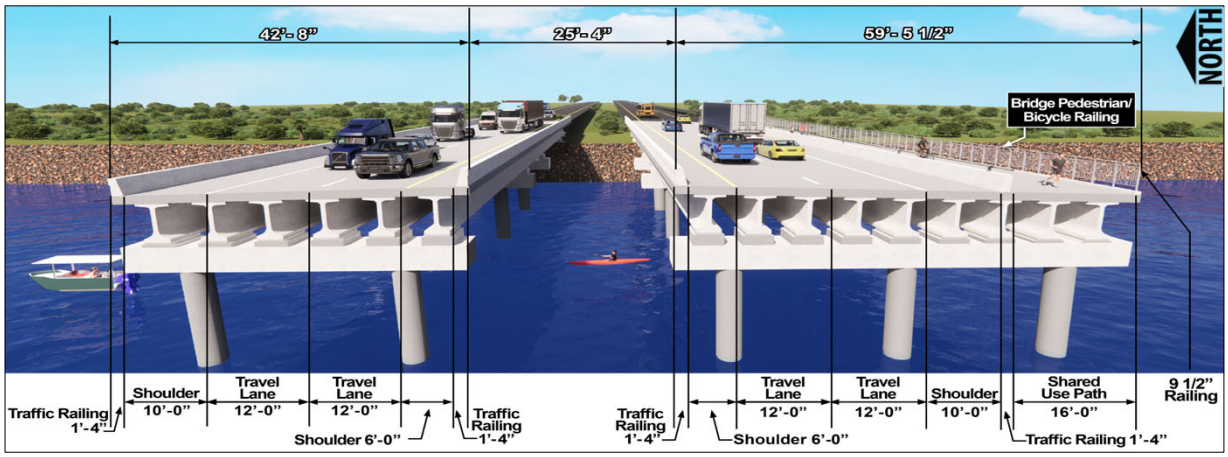

The preferred alternative for State Road 70 results in a rural typical section with an open roadway drainage system, meaning the use of ditches, for the four-lane construction. The typical section includes: two 12-foot travel lanes in each direction; a 40-foot median with eight-foot inside shoulders of which four feet are paved; 12-foot outside shoulders of which five feet are paved; and a 12-foot shared use path on the south side of State Road 70 adjacent to the eastbound travel lanes. The average width needed for the right-of-way is 260 feet but varies throughout the alignment from 210 feet to 290 feet. The proposed right-of-way need is primarily on the south side of State Road 70. The target, design and posted speed are 65 mph.




The alignment for the preferred alternative closely follows the existing roadway alignment and widens to the south. There are two locations where the proposed facility shifts away from the existing alignment. This includes the beginning of the project at County Road 721 South where the alignment is on the south side of the existing State Road 70 to avoid impacts to the businesses, utilities, and church in this area, and between Boney Lane and NW Riverside Road where the alignment is also on the south side to avoid impacts to Kissimmee River Estates.

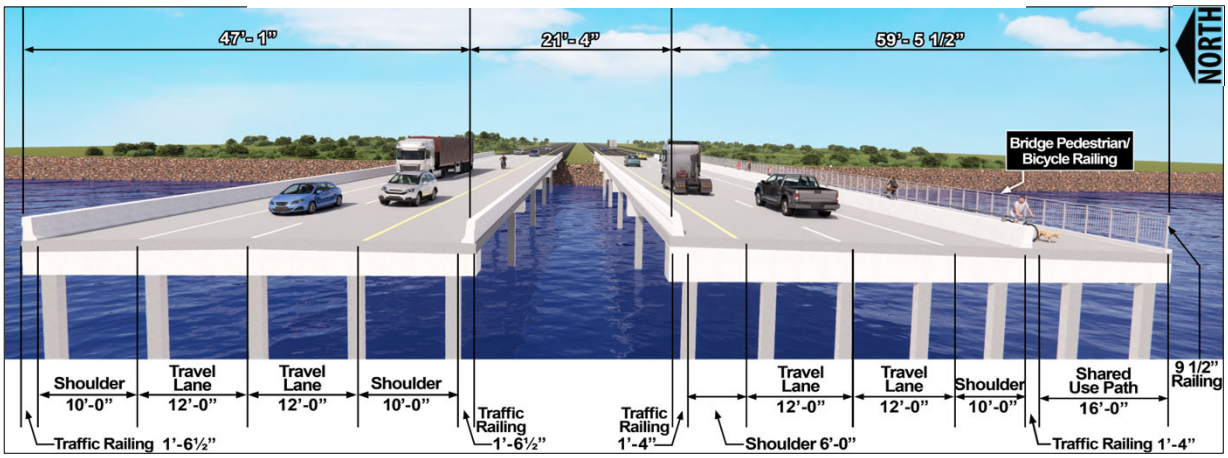
## PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

### S.R. 70 Bridge Over Kissimmee River (C-38 Canal)



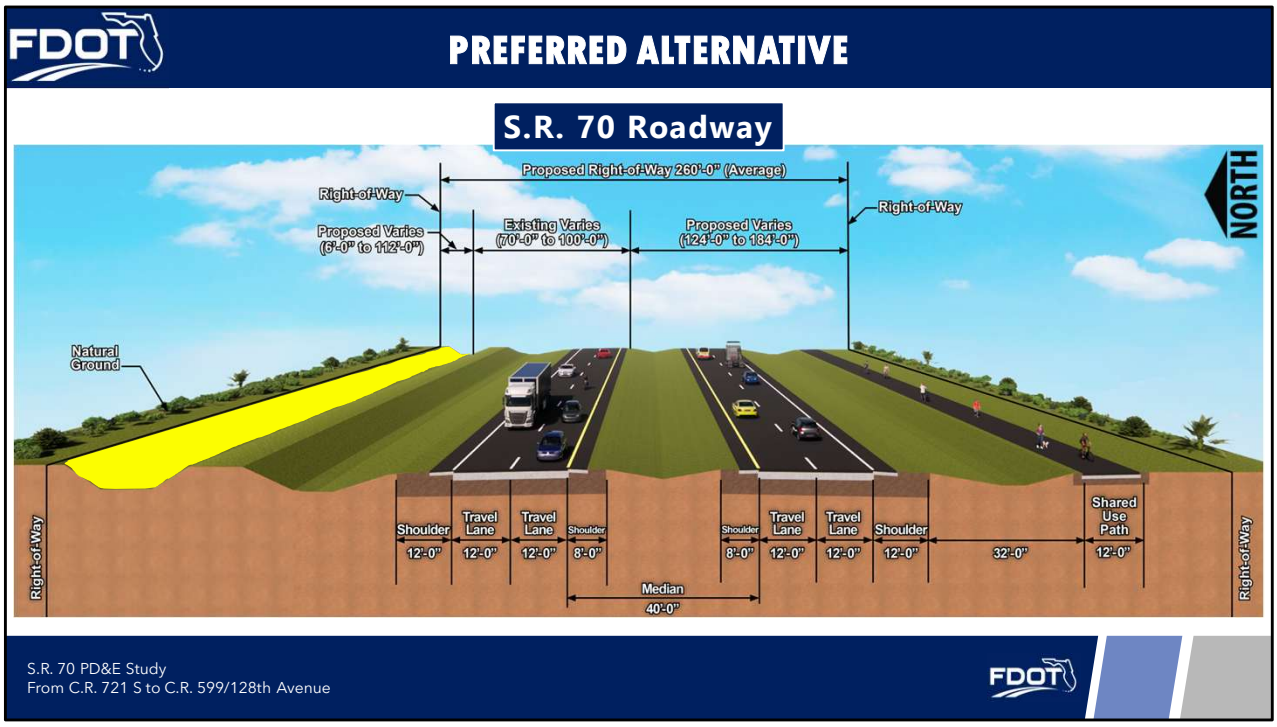

## PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

### S.R. 70 Bridge Over Slough Ditch (C-41A) Canal

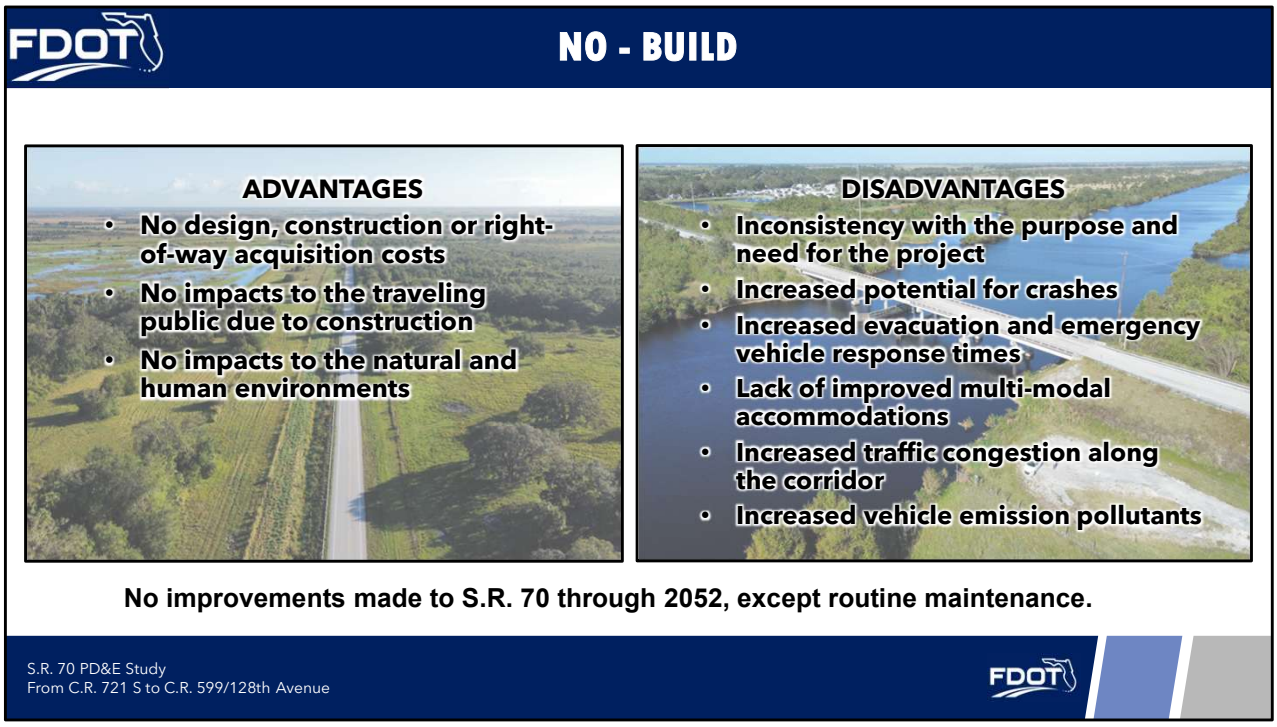



S.R. 70 PD&E Study
From C.R. 721 S to C.R. 599/128th Avenue

The existing two-lane Kissimmee River bridge is functionally obsolete and will be demolished and two new bridge structures, one in each direction, will be constructed. The existing bridge over the C-41A Canal that currently carries two lanes of traffic will be maintained and will carry westbound traffic in the future condition. A new two-lane bridge will be constructed on the south side of the existing bridge and will carry the eastbound traffic.




Additionally, a new stormwater management system will be constructed. The roadway stormwater runoff will be collected and conveyed in roadside ditches on the outside of the travel lanes to stormwater management facilities that will be constructed along the corridor. Offsite and onsite stormwater runoff will be handled separately. Therefore, the typical section includes a second ditch on the north (westbound) side of the roadway to collect and convey offsite stormwater flow.




Throughout this study, a “no-build” alternative is also considered. The “no-build” alternative assumes that no improvements are made to State Road 70 through the year 2052, except for routine maintenance. There are advantages and disadvantages to the “no-build” alternative.

Advantages of the no-build alternative include:

No associated design, construction, or right-of-way acquisition costs;

No impacts to the traveling public due to construction; and

No impacts to the natural and human environments.

Disadvantages include:

Inconsistency with the purpose and need for the project or with local transportation plans;

Increased potential for crashes due to congestion and intersections;

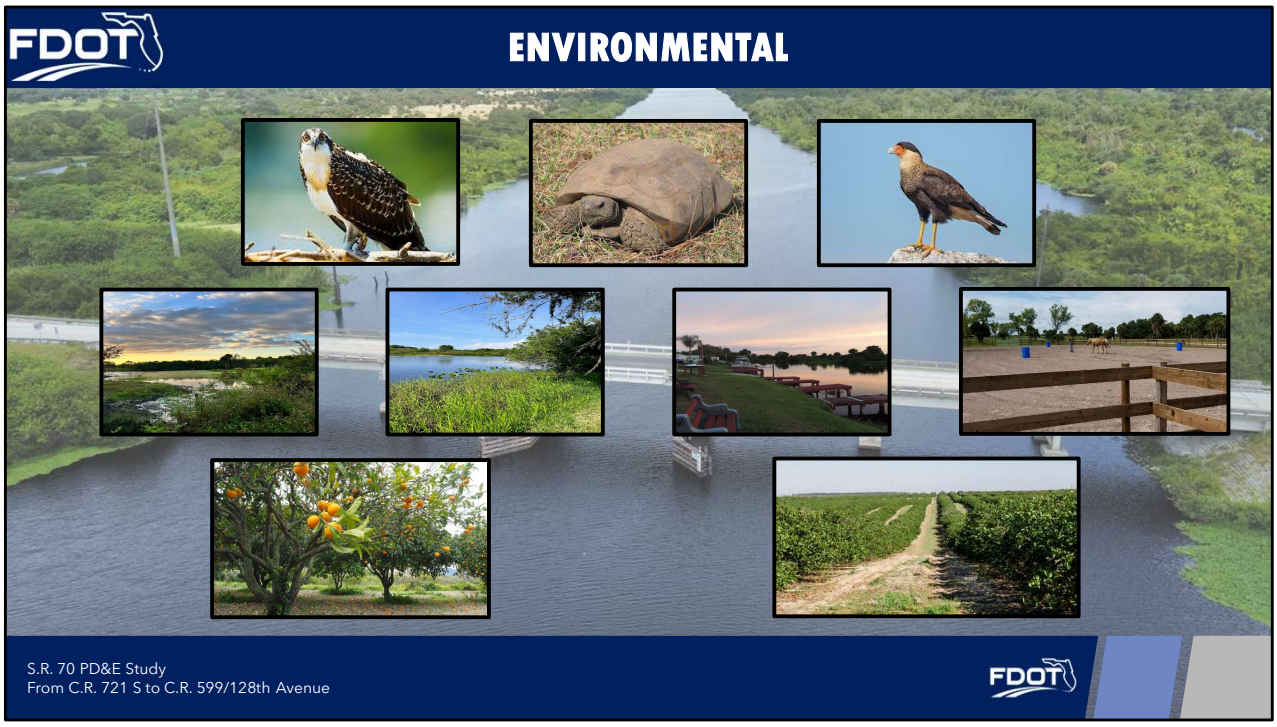
Increased evacuation and emergency vehicle response times;

Lack of improved multi-modal accommodations for bicycles and pedestrians;

Increased traffic congestion along the corridor; and

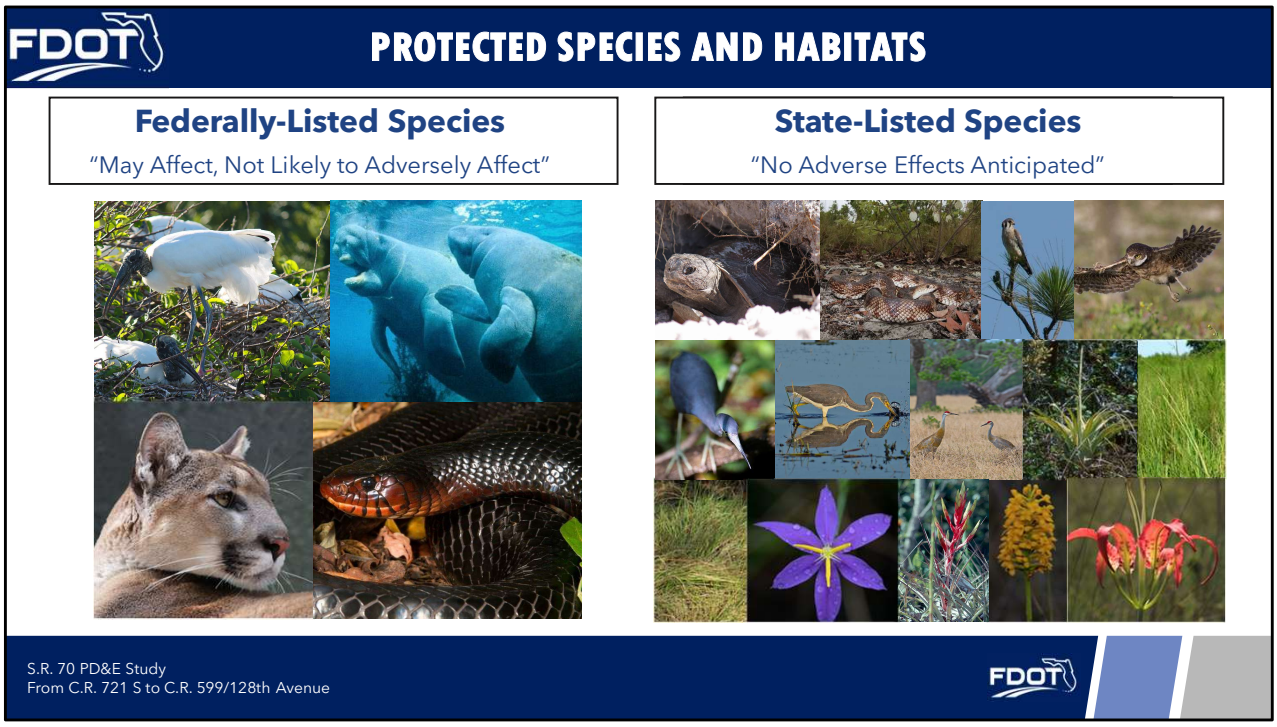
Increased vehicle emission pollutants due to higher levels of traffic congestion

The no-build alternative remains a valid option and will continue to be evaluated until the completion of this study.



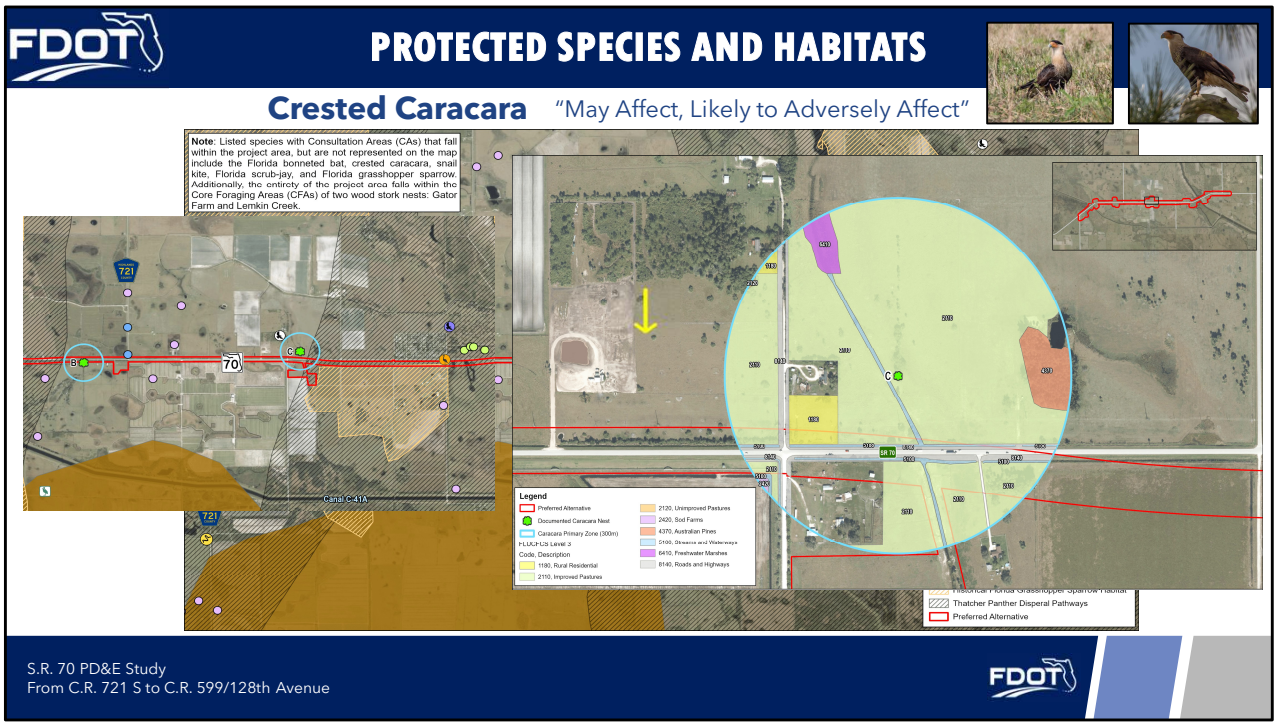

FDOT evaluated environmental and socioeconomic factors relating to proposed widening improvements in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, and other federal requirements. The evaluation considered the effects of widening State Road 70 on:

- Protected species and habitat
- Wetlands and floodplains
- Water quality
- Stormwater management and permitting
- Air quality
- Social, cultural, and economic effects
- Contamination
- Archaeological and Historical Resources
- Recreational sites
- Noise
- Land use
- Construction effects and
- Farmlands




Protected species and habitats are allowed special protection under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, and Florida statutes. FDOT assessed species within the project limits, and through ongoing coordination with U S Fish and Wildlife Service, has determined that the proposed project "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" the existence of certain federally listed threatened or endangered species. The animal species include the Eastern indigo snake, wood stork, West Indian manatee, and Florida panther.

In addition, the project will have "no adverse effect anticipated" on the following state listed threatened or endangered species: gopher tortoise, Florida pine snake, Florida sandhill crane, Florida burrowing owl, little blue heron, tricolored heron, Southeastern American kestrel, giant wild-pine, cardinal wild-pine, pine lily, yellow fringeless orchid, celestial lily, cutthroat grass, and Piedmont jointgrass.




The project lies within the Consultation Area of Audubon's crested caracara. The preferred alternative proposes direct impacts to one nest and direct impacts to suitable habitat within the primary protection zone of a second nest. With these proposed impacts, FDOT made a determination of "may affect, likely to adversely affect" for this species. Project commitments, consisting of species conservation measures and a financial contribution to the Crested Caracara Conservation Fund for these impacts are proposed.

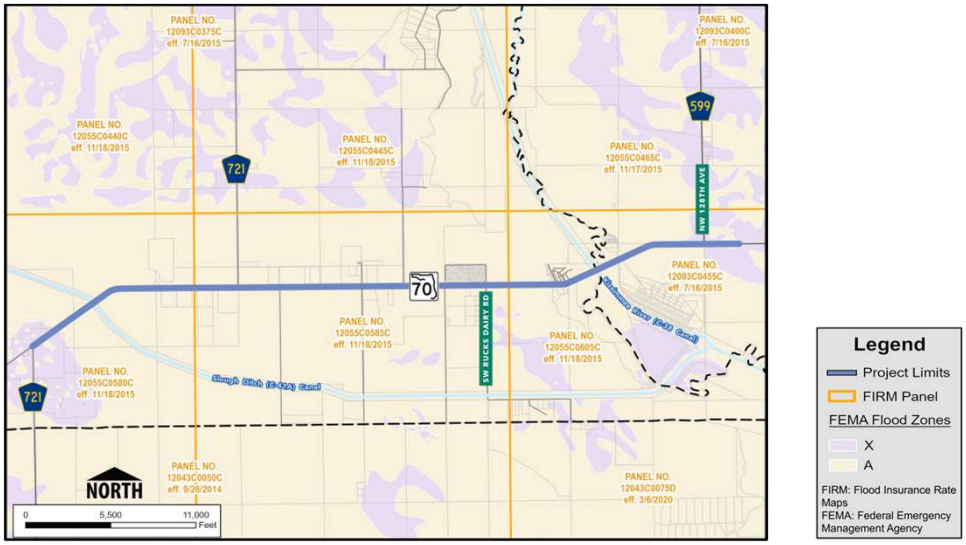
Consultation with U S Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the final status of these species is ongoing. If the preferred alternative is approved by the Office of Environmental Management, FDOT District One will continue to work closely with environmental agencies in future phases, such as design and construction, to meet all environmental permitting requirements.




FDOT evaluated wetlands within the project limits in accordance with Executive Order 11990, “Protection of Wetlands.” The proposed improvements will directly affect approximately 13.88 acres of wetlands, 2.60 acres of surface waters and 25.22 acres of other surface waters. Approximately 4.47 acres of secondary impacts are anticipated to wetlands. The Department will take all practical measures to minimize harm to these areas. The Department will mitigate wetland impacts resulting from this project’s construction to meet requirements of Florida statutes and the United States code.

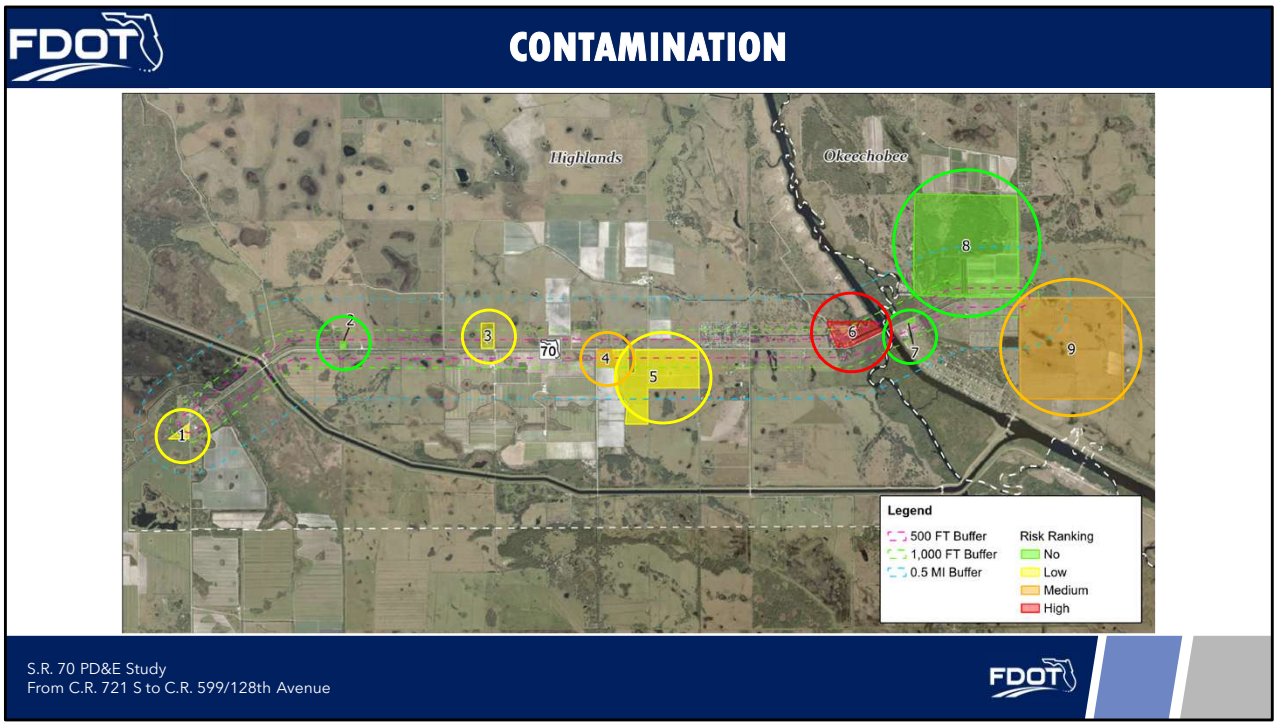
## FLOODPLAINS AND WATER QUALITY

- No significant change in flood risk
- Minimal impacts expected to the 100-year floodplain




S.R. 70 PD&E Study
From C.R. 721 S to C.R. 599/128th Avenue

The project has been evaluated for potential floodplain involvement in accordance with Executive Order 11988 Floodplain Management. There is no significant change in flood risk as a result of the proposed widening and minimal impacts are expected to the 100-year floodplain. Additionally, there is no significant change in the potential for interruption or termination of emergency services or emergency evacuation routes due to flooding. A water quality impact evaluation was performed. The proposed stormwater management facilities will be designed in accordance with the current requirements of the South Florida Water Management District.




Results of the contamination screening showed that there are nine potential contamination sites with potential for hazardous material or petroleum impacts. Of these nine sites, three were ranked “no risk”, three were ranked “low risk”, two were ranked “medium risk” and one was ranked “high risk.” For the sites that are ranked “low” for contamination, no further action is required at this time. For the sites with a risk ranking of “high” or “medium”, the FDOT Project Manager and the District Contamination Impact Coordinator will coordinate on further actions during the design phase that must be taken to address contamination issues. Before construction, specially trained crews will address contamination in these areas, as required. Locations of these sites are shown in the concept plans on display tonight.

## AIR QUALITY



EPA History: The Clean Air Act of 1970

by Paul G. Rogers
[EPA Journal - January/February 1990]

Historians of the environmental movement are likely to peg Earth Day 1970 as a key turning point in the American public's consciousness about environmental problems. I believe that Congress' enactment of the 1970 amendments to the Clean Air Act a few months later was an equally significant landmark. For the 1970 amendments moved environmental protection concerns to a prominent position on Capitol Hill, where they by and large have remained ever since.

It seems appropriate, as Congress is considering new amendments to the Clean Air Act, to assess what lessons might be learned from the events of two decades ago.

The juxtaposition of Earth Day and the 1970 amendments was no accident. As a representative body, Congress was responding to the ened public concern about the environmental pollution that was symbolized by the Earth Day demonstrations. Some have said that Congress reacted to public pressure too quickly and rushed through clean-air legislation that was not up to the task of responding to real air-pollution concerns. I disagree.

While the 1970 amendments may have been the first time that pollution-control efforts obtained such a high profile in Congress, they were not Congress' first effort to address air pollution problems. On the contrary, we drafted those amendments to correct previous pollution control strategies that had failed. With the passage of the 1970 amendments, Congress adopted new approaches to regulation such as national air quality standards and statutory deadlines for compliance that are commonplace today, but represented a significant turning point in 1970.

To put the 1970 amendments in proper context, one needs to look back at Congress' prior efforts to control air pollution, particularly the Air Quality Act of 1967. That statute authorized the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (who then had chief responsibility for federal environmental protection programs) to designate so-called air quality regions throughout the country; the states were given primary responsibility for adopting and enforcing pollution control standards within those regions.

Some of us involved in the enactment of the 1967 statute had significant doubts as to the viability of the regional approach to air pollution control; after all, air contamination does not stop at neatly defined regional boundaries. Nevertheless, Congress as a whole and American industry were not yet convinced of the need for a national strategy for pollution control; therefore, as a first step, the 1967 statute's regional approach became the law of the land.

The approach was a notable failure. By 1970, fewer than three dozen air quality regions had been designated, as compared to an anticipated number in excess of 100. Moreover, not a single state had developed a full pollution control program.

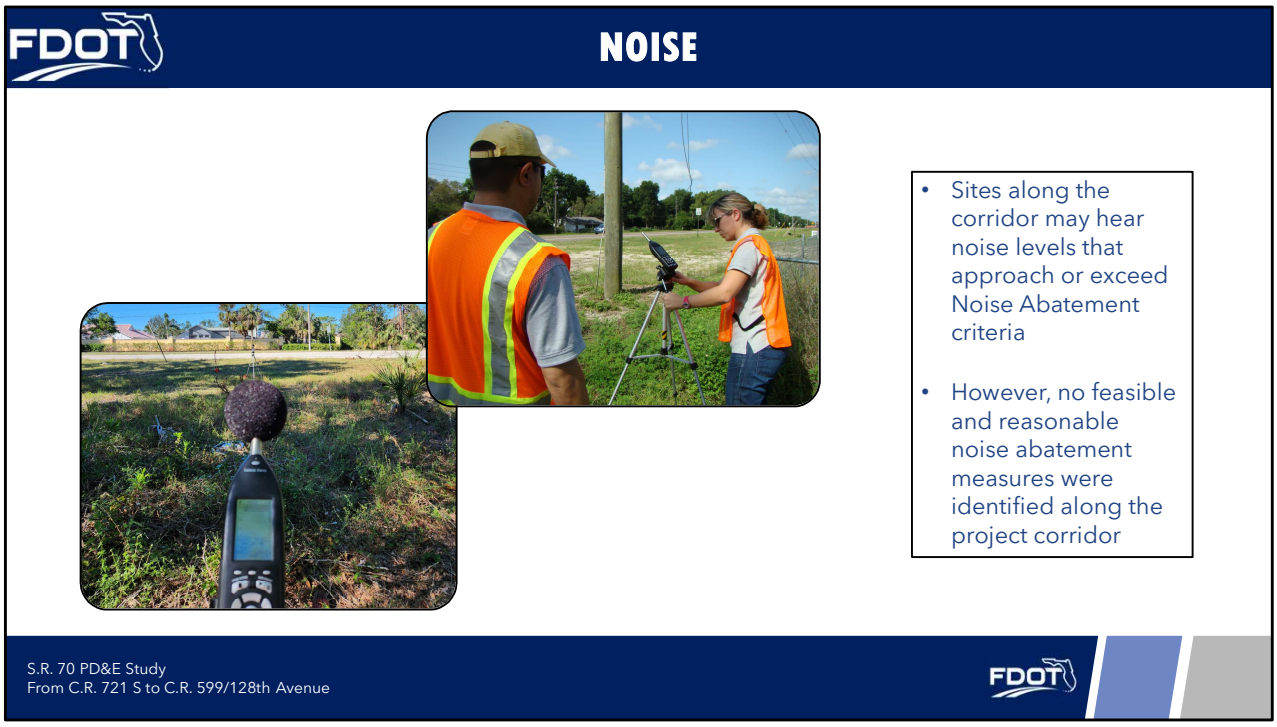
This unsatisfactory record, coupled with the public pressures created by the Earth Day movement, provided the necessary impetus to convince Congress that national air quality standards were the only practical way to rectify the United States' air pollution problems. Similarly, the record of inaction under the 1967 law led Congress to impose statutory deadlines for compliance with the emissions standards authorized under the 1970 statute, in the hope that those deadlines would spur action.

### Clean Air Act

- Designated attainment for all National Ambient Air Quality Standards under the Clean Air Act
- No significant impact expected on air quality
- Improved traffic flow and congestion relief should reduce operational greenhouse gas emissions

S.R. 70 PD&E Study
From C.R. 721 S to C.R. 599/128th Avenue

The project is located in an area which is designated attainment for all of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards under the criteria provided in the Clean Air Act. Therefore, the Clean Air Act conformity requirements do not apply to this project and no significant impact is expected on air quality. This project is expected to improve traffic flow by adding capacity to relieve congestion, which should reduce operational greenhouse gas emissions. Minimal short-term air quality effects may be caused from construction of the proposed improvements, such as dust from earthwork or unpaved roads and smoke from open burning. The FDOT will adhere to all state and local regulations and to the Standard Specifications for Road and Bridge Construction.




The study team evaluated effects of traffic noise associated with the proposed improvements consistent with requirements outlined in Title 23, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 772, Procedures for Abatement of Highway Traffic Noise and Construction Noise and with the FDOT PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 18. Noise-sensitive sites along the project corridor may hear traffic noise levels that approach or exceed Noise Abatement criteria established by the Federal Highway Administration. The team has considered noise abatement measures including traffic system management, alignment modifications, property acquisition, land use controls, and noise barriers at four locations. While traffic noise abatement was considered as part of the project, no feasible and reasonable measures were identified that can be implemented to abate traffic noise at the four locations along the project corridor. If you'd like more information regarding traffic noise, please speak with one of our noise specialists here tonight.

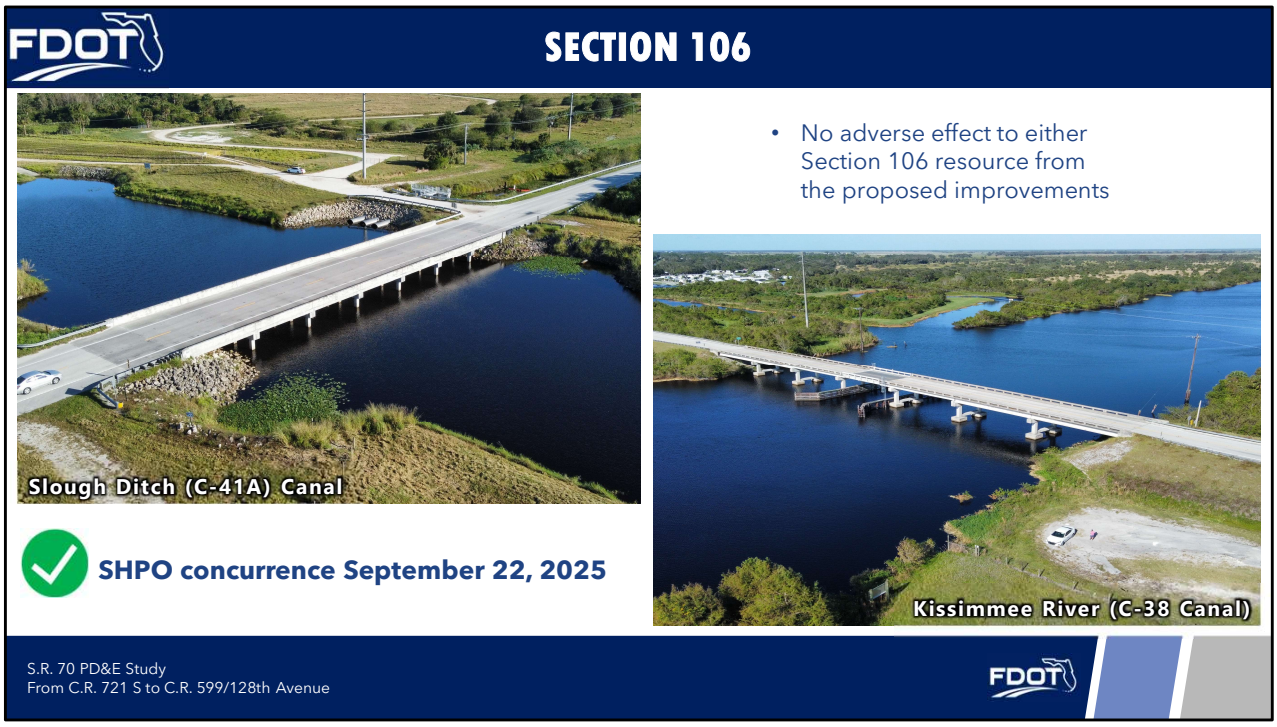



The project team examined the project area for publicly owned properties that may be affected under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966. Potentially protected recreational Section 4(f) resources along the project corridor include the boat ramp located at the C41-A Canal, the Okeechobee North Trail Connector, and the Kissimmee River Public Use Area. The boat ramp and Okeechobee North Trail Connector meet the conditions of a "No Section 4(f) Use" since the project has no permanent acquisition of land from these Section 4(f) properties, no temporary occupancies of land that are adverse in terms of the statute's preservation purpose, and no proximity impacts which significantly impair the protected functions of the properties.

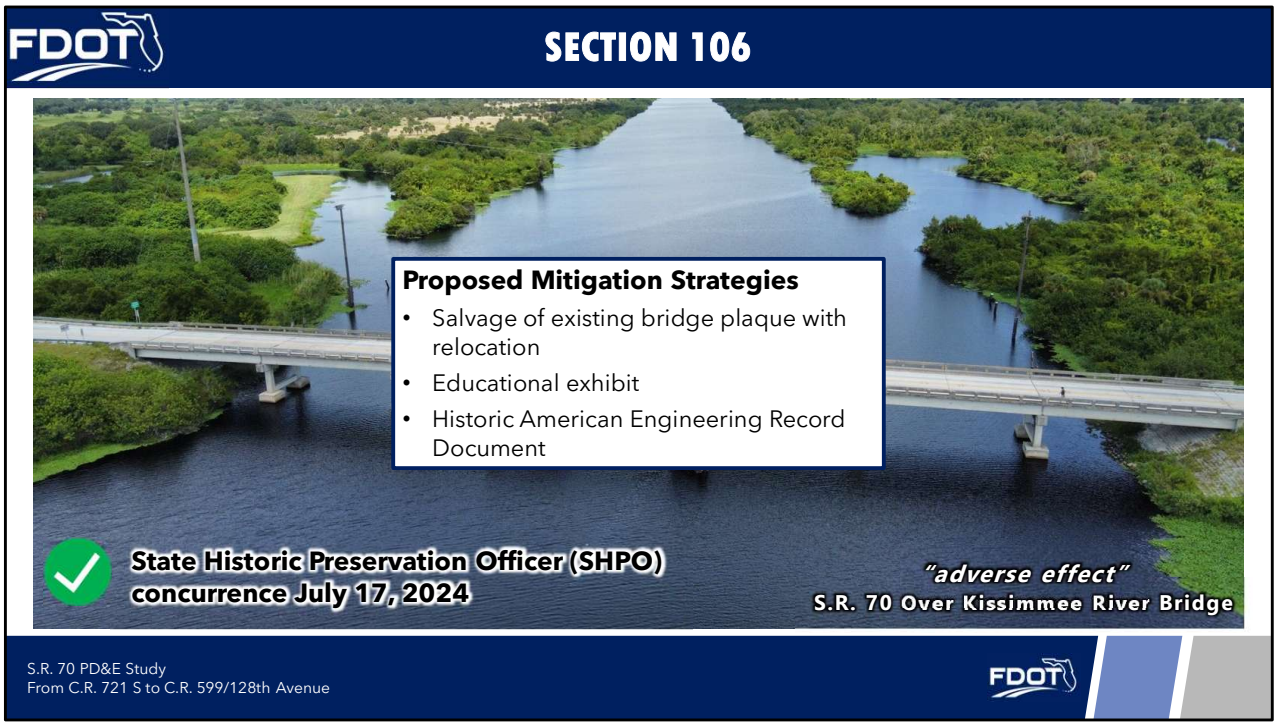



The Preferred Alternative will require permanent use of approximately 2.48 acres from the boundary of the Kissimmee River Public Use Area. Other properties protected under Section 4(f) include the C-41A Canal and the channelized feature of the Kissimmee River. These are historic sites eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The proposed project bridges will be constructed over these canals.

Based upon the overall minor level of impact and implementation of proposed mitigative actions to address potential impacts, the project will not adversely affect the activities, features, and attributes of the Kissimmee River Public Use Area, the Slough Ditch, or C-41A Canal, and the Kissimmee River, or C-38 Canal, in meeting its intended Section 4(f) purpose. As such, FDOT is pursuing a Section 4(f) *de minimis* finding for the potential impacts to these resources. This information is available for review tonight. The hearing provides the opportunity for public comment on the project's use of these resources.

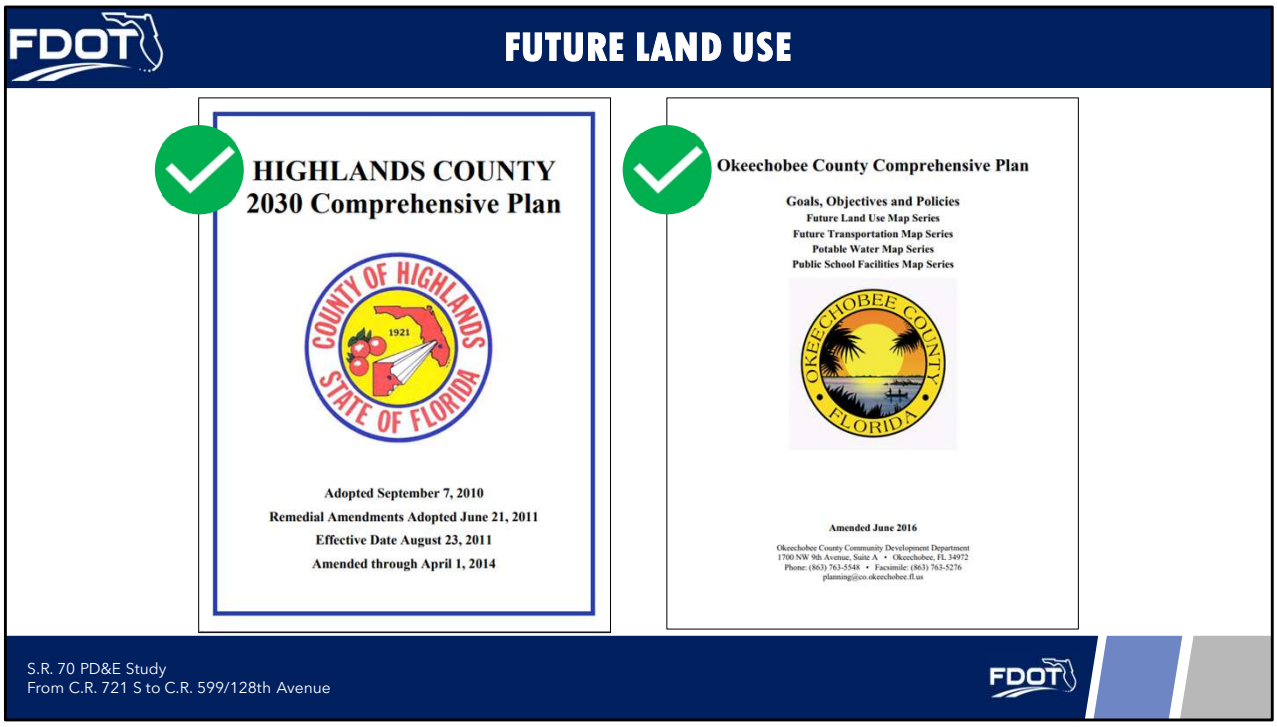



A cultural resource assessment survey was conducted in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and Florida Statutes. Archaeologists and historians identified one archaeological site and 46 historic resources in the project area. Two resources are individually eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the Slough Ditch (C-41A) Canal and Kissimmee River (C-38 Canal). FDOT determined that the proposed improvements will have no adverse effect to these resources. One archaeological site was found to have insufficient information to make an evaluation of National Register of Historic Places applicability and FDOT determined that the proposed improvements will have no adverse effect to this resource. The State Historic Preservation Officer provided concurrence on September 22, 2025.




FDOT determined that the proposed improvements will have an ***adverse effect*** on the State Road 70 over Kissimmee River Bridge. The State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) provided concurrence on July 17, 2024. A Section 106 Case Study was prepared and the State Historic Preservation Officer provided concurrence on September 22, 2025. Proposed mitigation strategies under consideration were discussed with the State Historic Preservation Officer on September 25, 2025 and are in the draft Memorandum of Agreement between the FDOT and the State Historic Preservation Officer. These include the salvage of the existing bridge plaque and relocation to a new location, an educational exhibit to be placed in close proximity to the bridge location, and a Historic American Engineering Record document.

Your input is sought concerning the project's adverse effect to the resource and proposed mitigation. This information is available for review tonight. The FDOT is also seeking a programmatic Section 4(f) evaluation and approval for the Kissimmee River Bridge. The hearing provides the opportunity for public comment on the project's effect on this resource.




The Preferred Alternative is consistent with the Highlands County and Okeechobee County Comprehensive Plans and Future Land Use Maps. The project area will continue to support agricultural along with conservation land uses and rural estates. The project will maintain existing access to surrounding agricultural uses and will result in only moderate conversion of frontage areas to the expanded roadway. Minimal construction effects are expected.

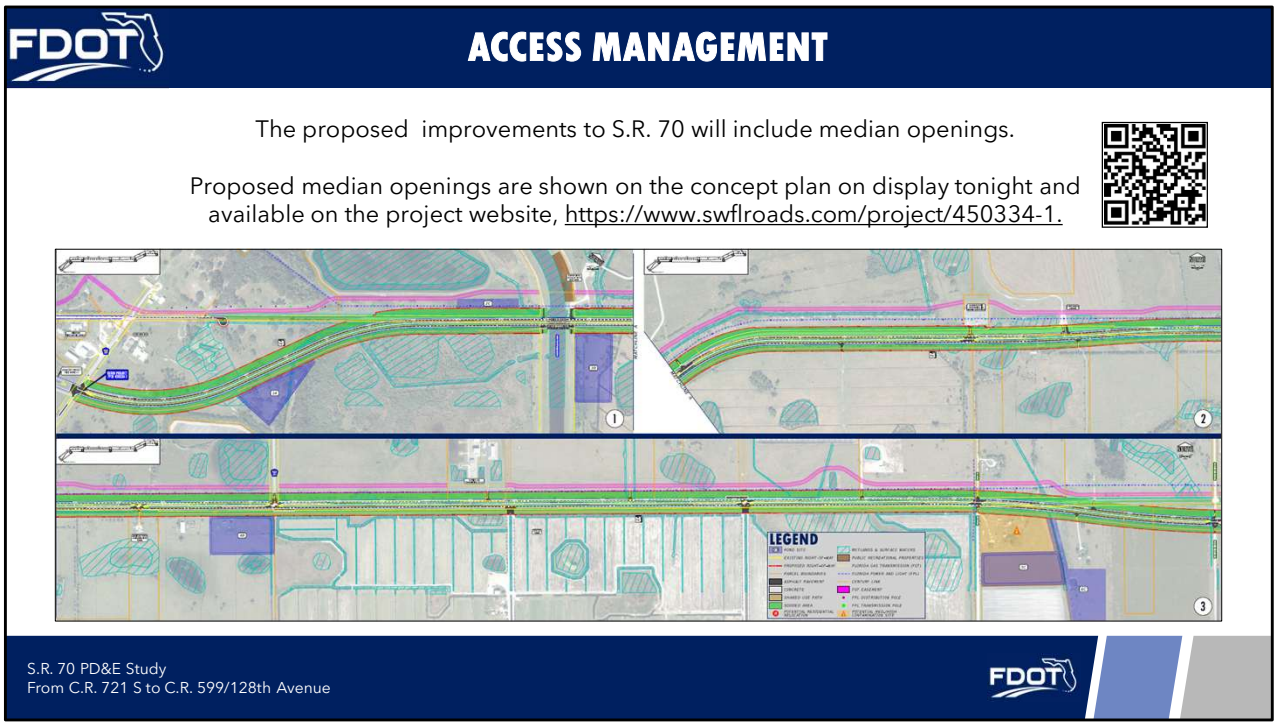



One of the unavoidable consequences on a project such as this is the necessary relocation of residences or businesses. On this project we anticipate the relocation of two residences. All right-of-way acquisition will be conducted in accordance with Florida Statute, Section 339.09 and the "Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970", commonly known as the Uniform Act.

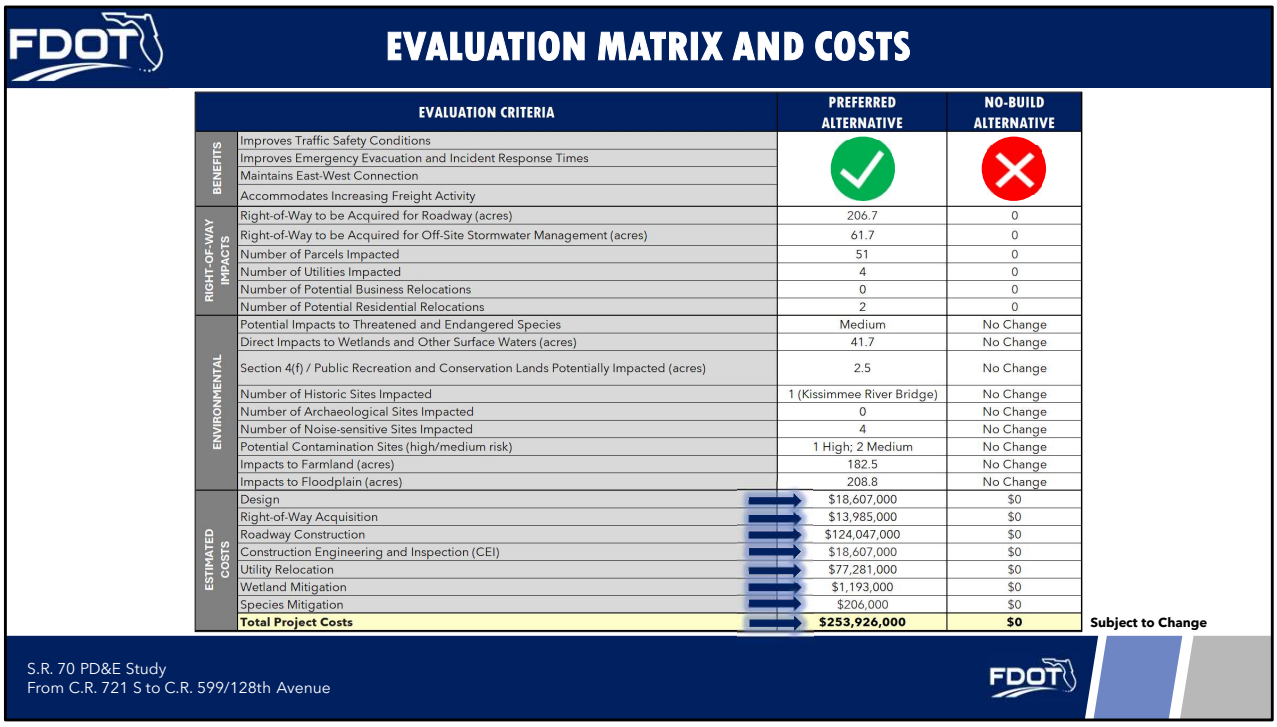
If you are required to make any type of move as a result of a Department of Transportation project, you can expect to be treated in a fair and helpful manner and in compliance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance Act. If a move is required, you will be contacted by an appraiser who will inspect your property. We encourage you to be present during the inspection and provide information about the value of your property.

You may also be eligible for relocation advisory services and payment benefits. If you are being moved and you are unsatisfied with the Department's determination of your eligibility for payment or the amount of that payment, you may appeal that determination. You will promptly be furnished necessary forms and notified of the procedures to be followed in making that appeal. A special word of caution – if you move before you receive notification of the relocation benefits that you might be entitled to, your benefits may be jeopardized.

The relocation specialists who are supervising this program are here tonight. They will be happy to answer your questions and will also furnish you with copies of relocation assistance brochures.

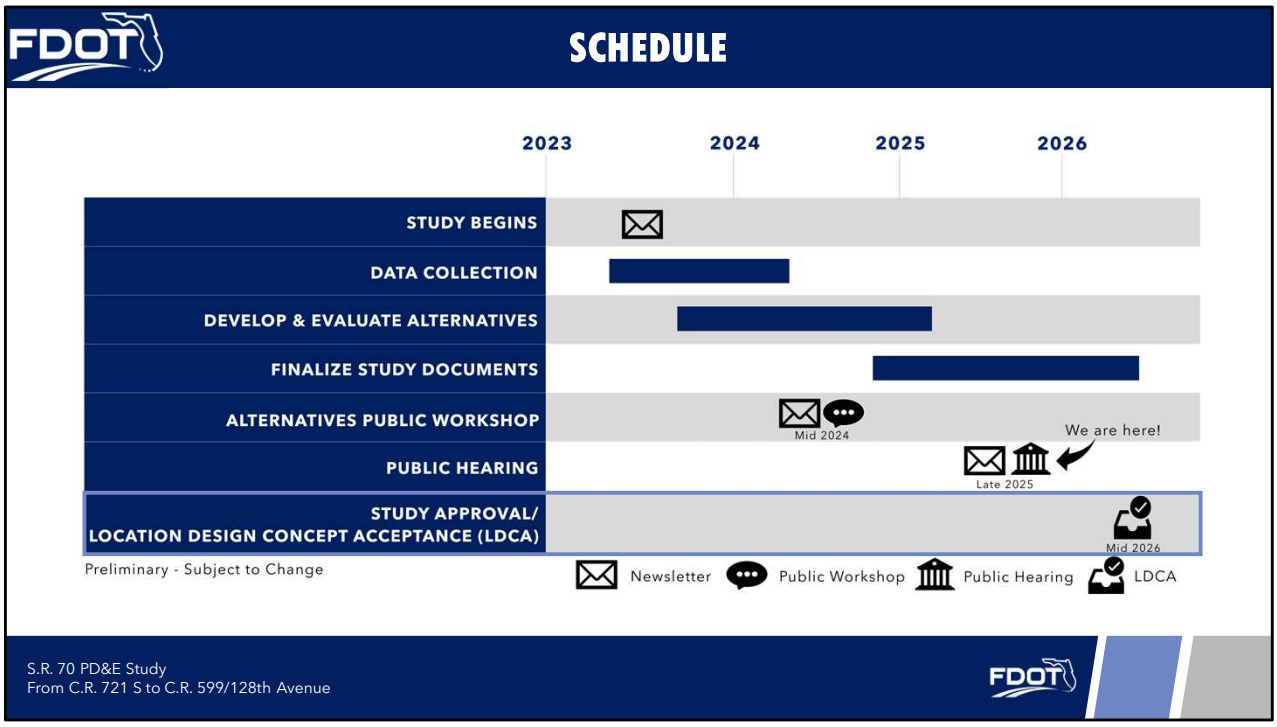



In accordance with Rule 14-97 of the Florida Administrative Code, the proposed improvements will include a median to control the movements, or access, of turning traffic. These changes are presented in compliance with Section 335.199 Florida Statutes (Transportation projects modifying access to adjacent property). Proposed median openings are shown on the concept plan on display tonight and available on the project website, https://www.swflroads.com/project/450334-1.

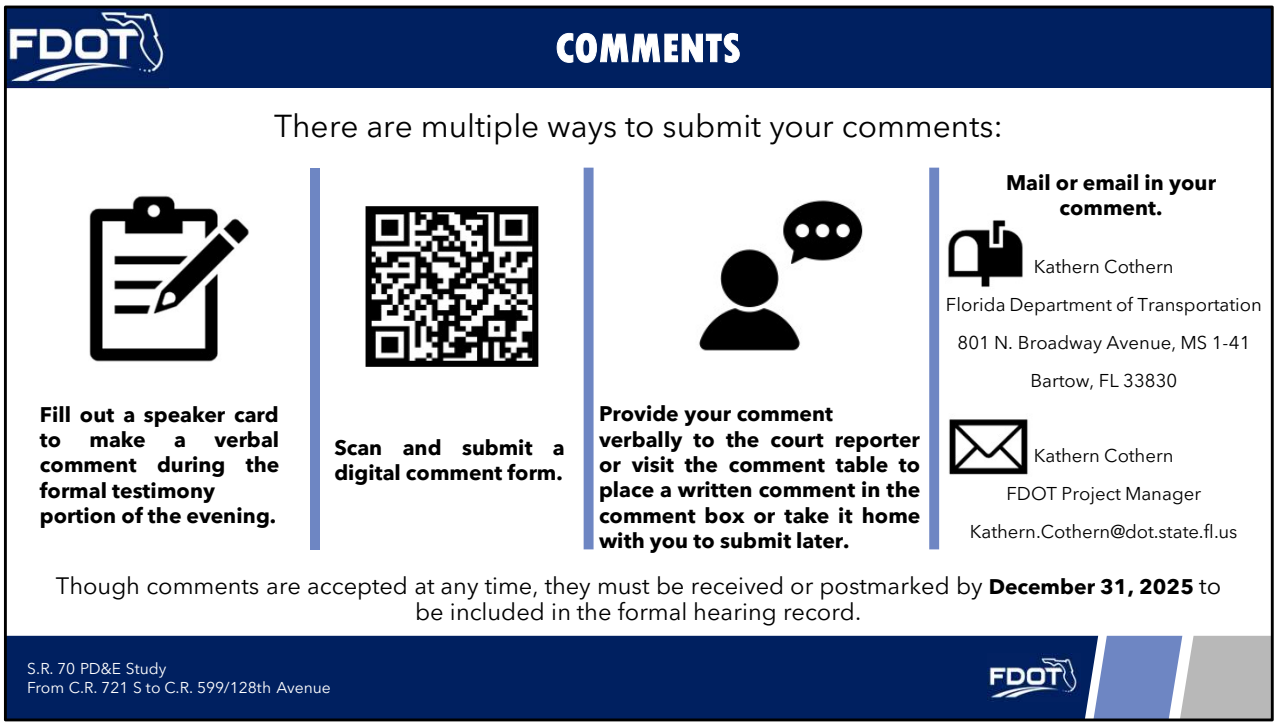



An evaluation matrix showing a detailed comparison of the preferred alternative and the no-build alternative is provided in the project handout and is also on display here this evening. The matrix shows potential effects to the social, cultural, natural, and physical environments, and identifies preliminary costs.

The estimated costs to widen State Road 70 from County Road 721 South to County Road 599/128th Avenue include 18.6 million dollars for final design, 1.4 million dollars for mitigation and 14 million dollars for right-of-way acquisition for roadway and stormwater management areas. The total estimated construction cost for the project is 124 million dollars. The cost for utility relocation is 77.3 million dollars and construction engineering and inspection is estimated at 18.6 million dollars. The Department's preliminary estimate of total project cost is 253.9 million dollars.




At this time, FDOT's Adopted Five-Year Work Program does not include funding for subsequent project phases, consisting of design, right-of-way and construction. The Department anticipates completion of this PD&E study by Summer 2026. The study schedule is on display this evening.




We encourage you to review project information tonight and provide us your feedback. There are multiple ways to provide comment – during the live in-person event by completing a speaker card and handing it to anyone with a nametag during the upcoming intermission; providing your comment to the court reporter; by mail to the address shown on the screen; or by email or through the project website. All comments carry equal weight and should be submitted or postmarked by Wednesday, December 31, 2025, to become a part of the formal hearing record.

## DOCUMENTS FOR REVIEW

All hearing materials presented tonight are available to the public on the project webpage and will remain posted for your review: **https://www.swflroads.com/project/450334-1**

Project documents will be available for public viewing through December 31, 2025, in-person at the locations listed below.




Okeechobee Public Library (863-763-3536)
206 SW 16th Street
Okeechobee, Florida 34974
*Tuesday - Saturday: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.



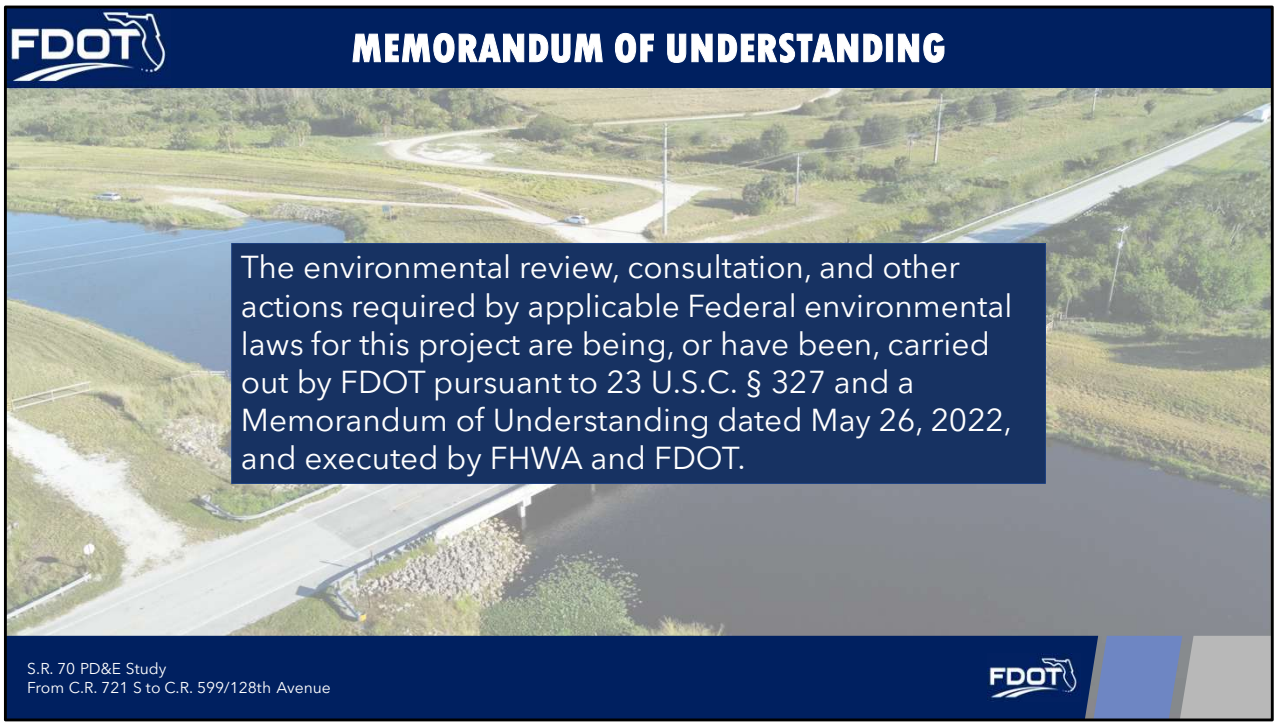
FDOT Heartland Operations Center (863-471-4848)
4722 Kenilworth Boulevard
Sebring, Florida 33870
*Monday - Friday: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

***Holidays may affect facility hours***

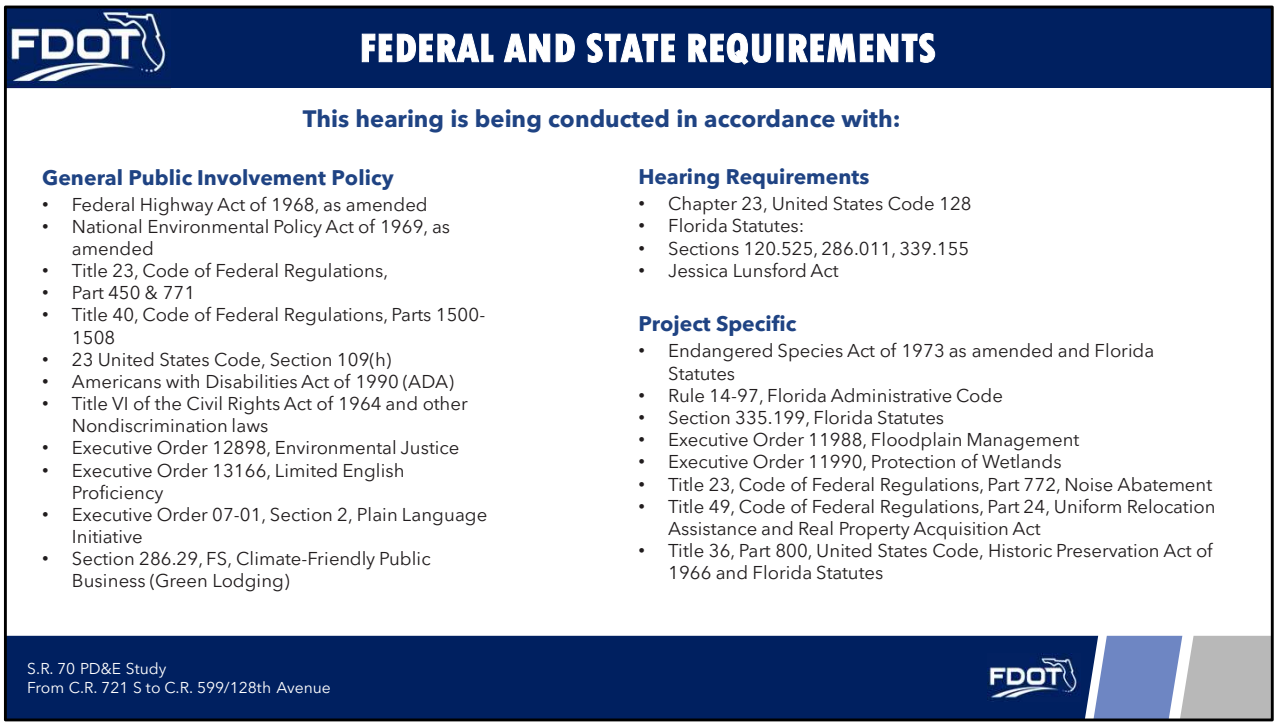
S.R. 70 PD&E Study
From C.R. 721 S to C.R. 599/128th Avenue

All hearing materials presented tonight are available to the public on the project webpage and will remain posted for your review. The technical documents are also available for review in person at the Okeechobee Public Library, located at 206 SW 16th Street, Okeechobee, Florida 34974, Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., phone number (863)-763-3536 and the FDOT Heartland Operations Center, located at 4722 Kenilworth Boulevard, Sebring, Florida 33870, Monday - Friday: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., phone number (863)-471-4848 until Wednesday, December 31, 2025. Please call in advance to confirm holiday hours.

If you would like to review these materials at the District One Office, please make an appointment by contacting FDOT ’s project manager, Kathern Cothern, using the contact information included in your handout. You may also visit the project web site at https://swflroads.com/project/450334-1 for the latest study information, schedule and upcoming events.



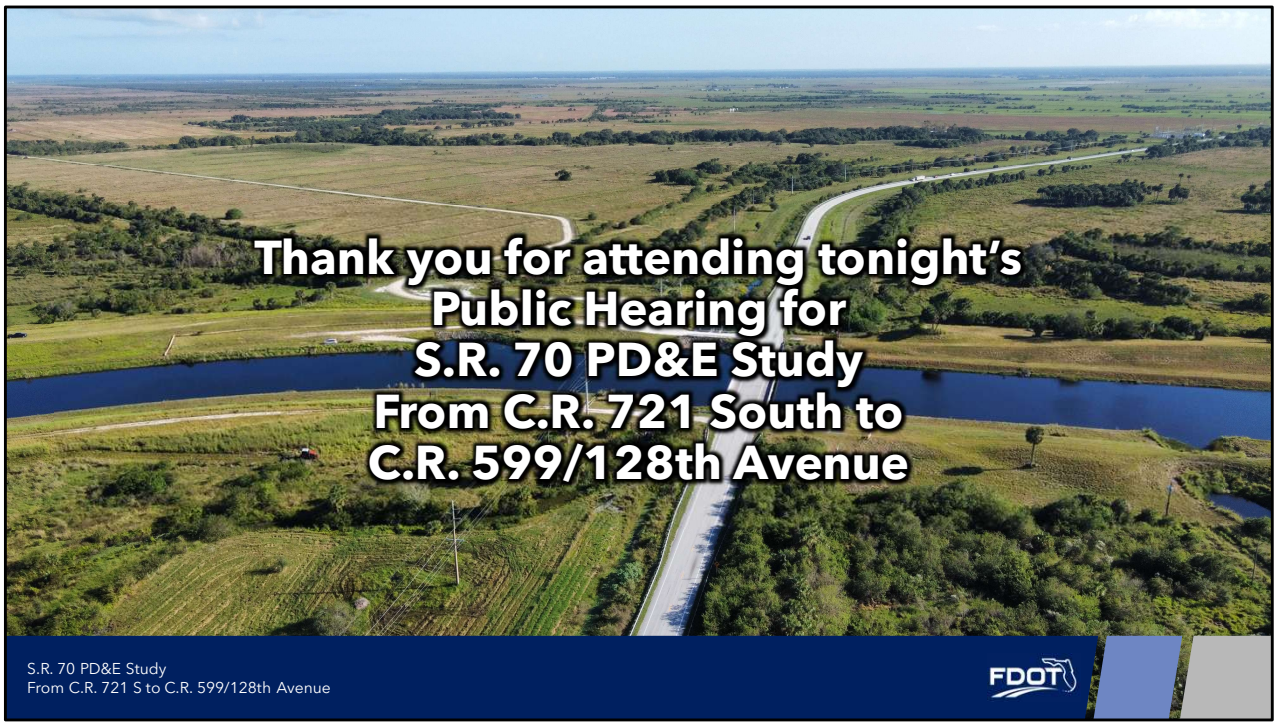

This PD&E study is being conducted and completed according to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and other related federal and state laws, rules, and regulations, which will qualify future phases of this project for federal funding, and this hearing was advertised consistent with those requirements. Please see the statute display board for all other applicable requirements.




This hearing is also conducted in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes. Anyone who feels he or she has been discriminated against with regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability, or family status may complete one of the forms located at the sign-in table and mail the completed form to the address listed on the poster board.




And finally: an FDOT safety moment. Drinking and driving don’t mix. Drive sober or get pulled over. FDOT thanks you for making safety a continued priority!




Thank you for your interest and participation in the State Road 70 Project Development and Environment study public hearing and for taking the time to join us this evening.