



For Immediate Release

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**Floridians Voice Support for Southwest-Central Florida Connector
Ahead of M-CORES Task Force Meeting**

Tallahassee, Fla. – Florida voices came together today to express their support for the Southwest-Central Florida Connector ahead of the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (M-CORES) program task force meeting to be held today in Polk County, Florida.

Senator Ben Albritton said, “I believe this plan, especially the Southwest-Central Florida Connector, is the best thing to happen to rural Florida and our community, as it will strike the right balance between the need to grow our local economy and the need to protect Florida’s Heartland. The Southwest-Central Florida Connector will connect us to our neighboring counties, bringing more jobs to our local area, so the Heartland can focus on and grow Florida’s agribusiness in the long term. The connector will also make commuting easier, providing more convenient routes for our ranchers to move their livestock and citrus growers to transport their products. It will improve different types of infrastructure, such as broadband, water and sewer services, so that our farmers and all our rural neighbors can thrive this day in age. Improved infrastructure will also allow businesses to open and operate in our communities without being chained to urban areas. The plan will help rural Florida grow economically and become more connected, while still protecting our precious natural resources. The task force for the Southwest-Central Florida Connector will study and address our environmental needs, taking wildlife habitat, water quality and other environmental issues into concern. Although we must grow our local economy, we cannot turn our backs on our natural environment, which is part of what makes our community and state so unique.”

Alligator Ron Bergeron with Bergeron Family of Companies said, “Florida is growing, there’s no doubt about that, and we need to start planning now for future transportation needs. The creation of new transportation infrastructure through the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance Program will bring much-needed roads to our state. This is a big project with a lot at stake with an ever-growing state and a one-of-a-kind environment. We can use the Tamiami Trail collaboration as a model to bring everyone to the table for creating successful

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transportation products that don't harm our unique environment. Raising the Tamiami Trail is an important component of Everglades restoration and will restore the natural flow of water to the Everglades and Florida Bay. The effort to raise the Tamiami Trail started more than 30 years ago and the full effort is projected to be completed in 2023. It is a perfect example of how transportation infrastructure can exist in Florida's unique environment."

Florida Greenways & Trails Foundation President Dale Allen said, "As a member of the Florida Greenways and Trail Foundation, I am willing to test this new idea of multiple-use corridors. The M-CORES program has a unique opportunity to acquire land and close wildlife gaps in Florida's 'Ecological Greenway' system as well as significantly advance long-distance paved bicycle trails in rural areas as envisioned in the SUN Trails priority maps. If done correctly, these wider corridors will advance important ecological connections and improve public access to conservation lands."

Highlands County Resident Kaylee Tuck said, "As you may know, the State of Florida is gaining approximately 1,000 new residents per day. And, while this is good news for our businesses and local economy, there are many factors we must consider in tandem with this growth. Luckily, Florida has looked down the path of the future, taking the steps necessary to plan for future infrastructure needs by planning three new roads throughout Florida. The corridors, including the Southwest-Central Florida Connector right here in our local area, will have a profound impact on Florida's rural communities, including Hardee, DeSoto, Highlands, Glades and Hendry Counties, especially for traveling on roadways. The corridors, for example, will provide needed additional routes for families and buses to safely and conveniently transport children to and from their schools."

The Southwest-Central Florida Connector is one of the three corridors being studied as part of the M-CORES program. The Southwest-Central Florida Connector study corridor extends from Collier County to Polk County and includes Polk, Hardee, DeSoto, Highlands, Charlotte, Glades, Lee, Hendry and Collier Counties.

The M-CORES program, as detailed on the Florida M-CORES website, "is intended to revitalize rural communities, encourage job creation and provide regional connectivity while leveraging technology, enhancing the quality of life and public safety, and protecting the environment and natural resources. The program was signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis on May 17, 2019."

In addition to the Southwest-Central Florida Connector, the other two regional corridors being studied are the Suncoast Connector and the Northern Turnpike Connector. According to the Florida M-CORES website, "the task force will summarize the results of its analysis in a final report by October 1, 2020."

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