

EAG Meeting Summary

State Road 515 Northeast Connector Expressway Phase 2 PD&E Study

State Road 515 Northeast Connector Expressway Phase 2 Project Development & Environment (PD&E) Study Environmental Advisory Group (EAG) Meeting No. 3

Date/time: March 12, 2026, at 1:30 p.m.

Location: Virtual meeting (Teams)

Attendees: 4 EAG members (Attendees list at end of summary)

Notifications

Invitation letters were emailed to 55 members of the EAG on February 19, 2026, and a reminder was emailed on March 9, 2026.

Welcome

Nicole Gough of Dewberry, the General Engineering Consultant to the Central Florida Expressway Authority (CFX), called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. Next, she provided virtual housekeeping information as well as Title VI information before turning the meeting over to Sunserea Gates, Consultant Project Manager with VHB, for the presentation.

State Road 515 Northeast Connector Expressway Phase 2 PD&E Study Presentation

Sunserea Gates, Consultant Project Manager with VHB, presented on the following information:

- **Project Background**

Ms. Gates explained that the SR 515 Northeast Connector Expressway is included in the CFX 2045 Master Plan and is identified as part of the Southern Beltway. The proposed connector would begin at Florida's Turnpike and continue northeast to serve as a regional beltway in eastern Osceola County. This expressway would provide system linkage to the planned Southport Connector Expressway and SR 534 expressway extension.

- **Project Development Process**

Ms. Gates gave an overview of the project development process, noting that the project is currently in the PD&E phase. The goal of the PD&E Study is to provide a Preferred Alternative for CFX Governing Board approval.

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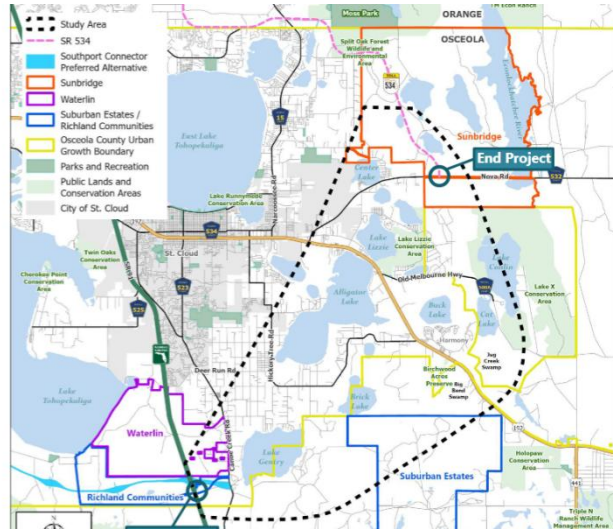
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- **Study Area and Related Projects**

This study is considering an approximately 15 to 20-mile expressway from Florida's Turnpike to SR 534 at Nova Road, with interchanges at Florida's Turnpike, Canoe Creek Road, US 192, and Nova Road. Ms. Gates showed a detailed map of the study area, followed by another slide listing other area projects.

Study Area

- 15- to 20-mile expressway
- **Southwest terminus:** proposed Southport Connector Expressway/ Florida's Turnpike
- **Northern terminus:** SR 534 at Nova Road
- **Full interchange:** US 192 and Canoe Creek Road



- **Purpose and Need**

Osceola County conducted the Osceola Transportation Southeast Area Transportation Study (SEATS), which concluded that the Northeast Connector Expressway would be needed by the year 2040. Osceola County is the fastest growing county in Central Florida, with a projected population increase of 56% by 2050. Ms. Gates also mentioned that there are 37 planned developments located within the study area.

- **Advisory and Stakeholder Group Input**

Ms. Gates reiterated that the purpose of advisory groups is to provide input to the study team about environmental, social and community concerns. Key input from advisory group members includes the need to preserve natural resources, concerns for floodplains and wetland connectivity, and a desire to avoid growth outside Osceola County's Urban Growth Boundary.

- **Study Timeline**

Ms. Gates presented the study timeline, noting that the study team has completed the alignment alternatives analysis and is sharing the results with the advisory group members.

- **Advisory Group and Stakeholder Feedback**

This next slide listed feedback previously received from the ESC, EAG, PAG, and CEG groups, which included the desire to minimize impacts to environmentally sensitive lands, preserve natural resources, avoid impacts to existing and planned residential developments, and minimize social impacts.

- **Alternative Corridor Evaluation Recommendations**

Corridor B was eliminated, and Corridor F, Corridor D, and Corridor G have been retained for further analysis.



- **Sociocultural Constraints**

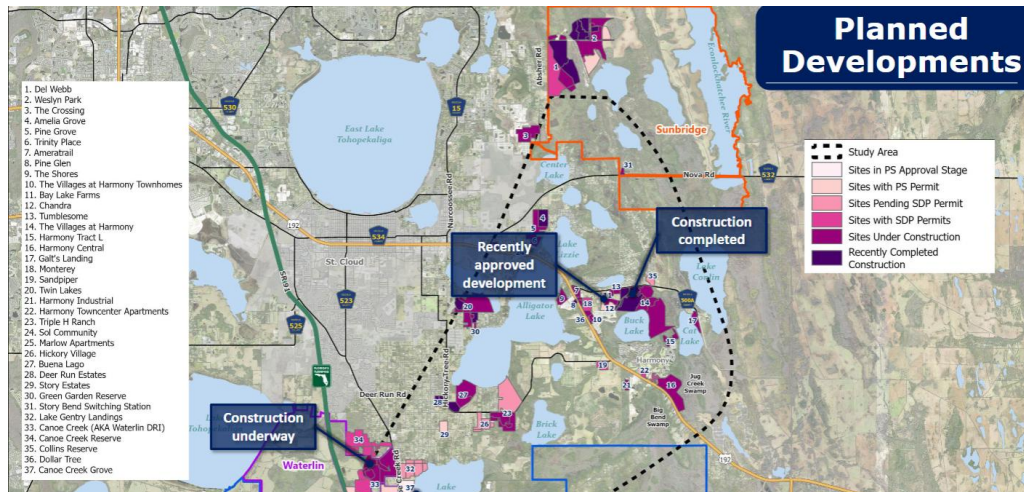
Next, Ms. Gates showed a map of the study area marked with color-coded social constraints, including existing residential land use, recent Osceola County acquisitions, and new residential land use parcels.

- **Planned Development**

Ms. Gates showed a map of planned developments in various stages: approval stage, permit, pending SDP Permit, sites with SDP and PS permits, sites under construction and sites with recently completed construction.

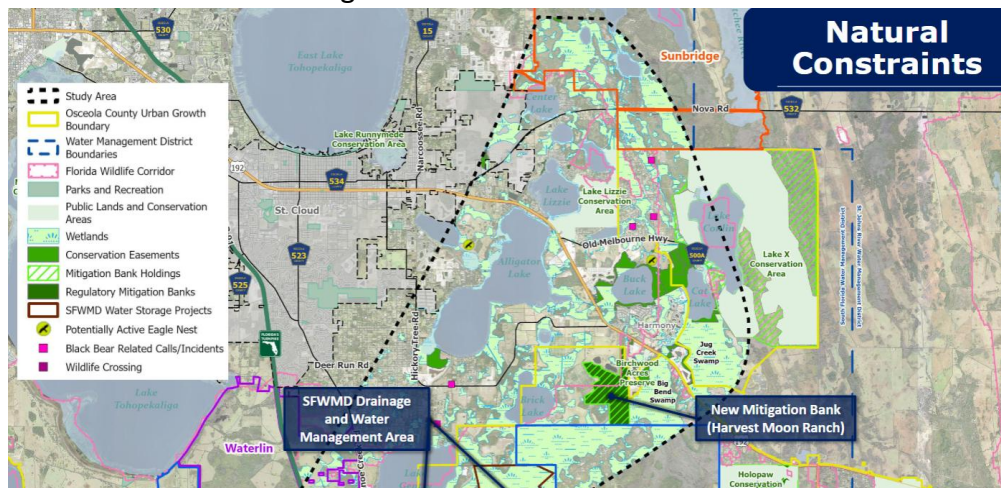
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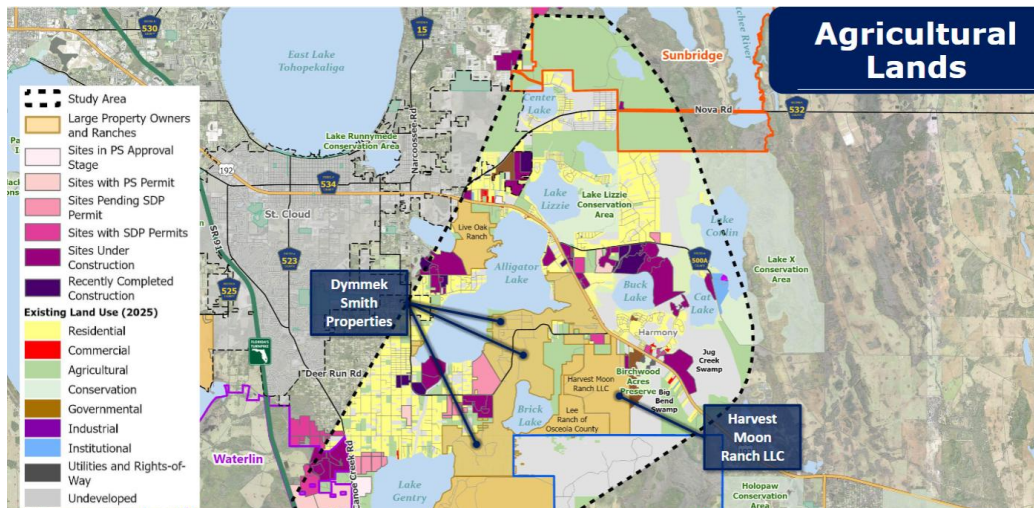
- Natural Constraints**

The next map showed various natural constraints, including the recently established Harvest Moon Ranch Mitigation Bank.



- Agricultural Lands**

The next map showed various agricultural land uses, both existing and planned. Ms. Gates noted that Harvest Moon Ranch LLC and Dymmek Smith Properties were recently added to the map.



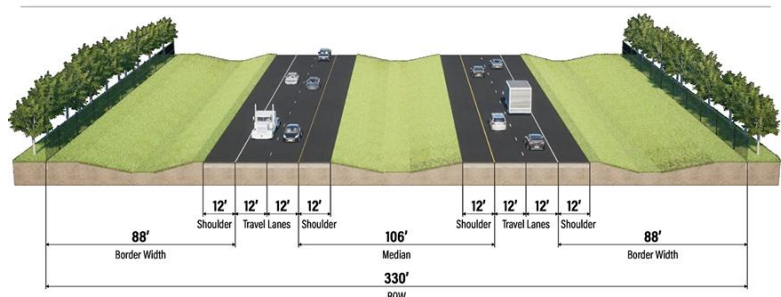
- **Florida Wildlife Corridor**

The next slide showed the Florida Wildlife Corridor, with indicators showing public lands and conservation areas, parks and recreation, the Florida Wildlife Corridor, conservation easements, mitigation bank holdings and regulatory mitigation banks. A second map included the Osceola County Urban Growth Boundary along with the planned Waterlin and Richland Communities residential developments.

- **Mainline Typical Section**

The typical section is 330 feet in total right of way, with a 106-foot median and two travel lanes in each direction. This will allow for multimodal travel and leaves room for future expansion.

Mainline Typical Section



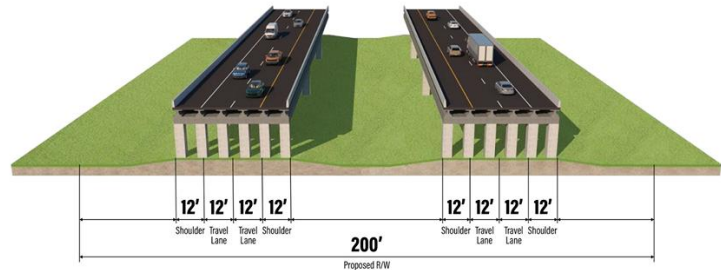
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- **Bridge Typical Section**

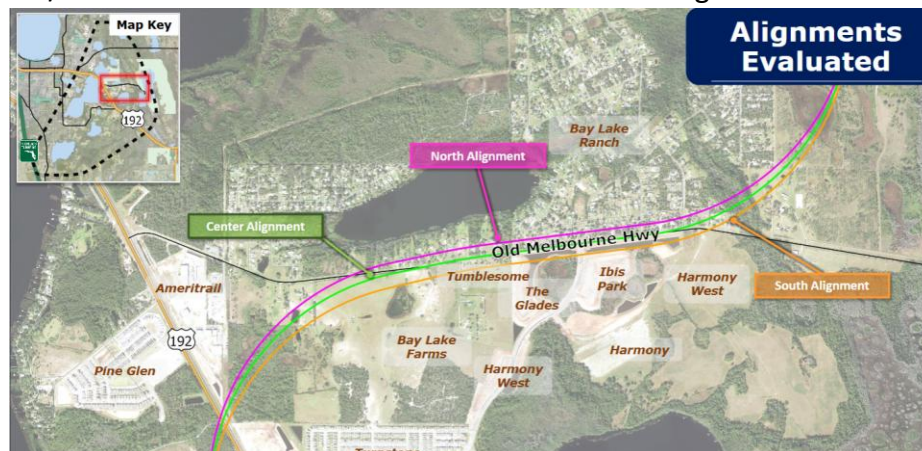
The bridge typical section will be further refined once a preferred alignment is selected.

Bridge Typical Section



- **Old Melbourne Highway Constraints**

Next, Ms. Gates showed a series of slides related to the Old Melbourne Highway area and how each alignment impacted the area. Through analysis, it was found that the North Alignment had the least impacts to residential parcels and homes, stormwater/common areas and the least total cost for this segment.



- **Alignment Alternative Evaluation Matrix**

The next series of slides showed different evaluation criteria for each of the five Alignments, including:

- Design
- Physical impacts – such as utility conflicts
- Natural environment
- Social impacts

Based on the comparative study, the study team has recommended that Alignment F and Alignment D be eliminated from consideration, with Alignment G recommended for further refinement.



- **Regional Conservation Opportunities**

Ms. Gates concluded the presentation by presenting opportunities for wildlife conservation, including utilizing bridge structures in sensitive areas, and mitigation opportunities.

Following the presentation, Nicole Gough opened the floor for comments, noting that because of the smaller attendance she would first recognize raised hands before inviting additional discussion from participants.

Amanetta Somerville of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency thanked the project team for the presentation and the explanation of how various alignments had been eliminated. She expressed significant concern regarding the higher wetland impacts associated with Recommended Alignment G and asked why another alignment could not be advanced despite the environmental impacts.

Sunserea Gates explained that the project team carefully evaluated the comparison between environmental and community impacts across all of the corridors studied. While Alignment G results in greater wetland impacts, the other alignments would have substantially greater impacts to existing communities, including approximately 71 homes, multiple residential subdivisions, neighborhood entrances, and planned developments. She explained that CFX determined impacts to wetlands can generally be mitigated through established environmental permitting processes, whereas impacts to established neighborhoods and community cohesion are largely permanent and cannot be effectively mitigated. As a result, the agency determined

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that Recommended Alignment G provides the best overall balance between environmental, engineering, and community considerations.

Janet Bowman of The Nature Conservancy reiterated concerns previously submitted regarding Alignment G and emphasized the rapid pace of development occurring throughout eastern Osceola County. She noted that although the Northeast Connector Expressway has been discussed for many years, there appears to be little coordination between transportation planning and local land development decisions. She expressed concern that by the time the PD&E Study is completed, additional residential developments will further constrain corridor options, resulting in roadway alignments being pushed farther into environmentally sensitive conservation lands.

Sunserea Gates acknowledged the unprecedented pace of growth occurring in eastern Osceola County and explained that county representatives have indicated they are limited in their ability to preserve a transportation corridor until an approved alignment has been identified through the PD&E process. She noted that Osceola County remains highly engaged throughout the study, participates in monthly coordination meetings, attended the Project Advisory Group meeting earlier that day, and continues to work closely with CFX as the study advances.

Will Hawthorne of CFX added that until a preferred alignment is officially approved, Osceola County has limited legal authority to prevent otherwise entitled developments from moving forward. He explained that attempting to deny development applications without an adopted corridor could expose the County to legal challenges. Consequently, advancing the PD&E Study and establishing an approved alignment remains the most effective path toward preserving the corridor.

Ms. Bowman acknowledged these challenges but suggested that developers could voluntarily reserve future right-of-way during the development process. She reiterated her concern that the current planning process unintentionally creates pressure to shift transportation corridors farther into undeveloped conservation areas. Mr. Hawthorne responded that CFX has no authority over local land-use decisions but understands and appreciates the concerns regarding the relationship between transportation planning and future development. Ms. Bowman concluded by observing that the disconnect between land-use planning and transportation planning leads to less efficient infrastructure development, while emphasizing that her comments were directed at the overall planning system rather than the project team.

While awaiting additional comments, Sunserea Gates reviewed the upcoming project schedule. She explained that the Environmental Stewardship Committee would meet later in the month, followed by an Alternatives Public Workshop scheduled for April. During the workshop, CFX will present the recommended alignment, gather public input, and continue advancing the PD&E Study toward identification of a Preferred Alternative.

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She also noted that additional Environmental Advisory Group (EAG), Project Advisory Group (PAG), and Community Engagement Group (CEG) meetings are anticipated during the fall to provide updated project information, with a formal Public Hearing planned in 2027.

Nicole Gough observed that portions of the study area overlap with important wildlife corridor connections and suggested there may be opportunities to preserve or expand protected lands as the project advances.

Janet Bowman agreed, emphasizing the importance of maintaining wildlife connectivity and noting that conservation efforts become increasingly difficult when adjacent lands continue to experience development pressure.

Nick Lulli noted that a written comment had been submitted through the Microsoft Teams Q&A feature.

Daniel Smith of the University of Florida echoed Janet Bowman's concerns, stating that the existing planning process is not well suited for this type of rapidly developing area. He commented that regional transportation planning should take precedence over parcel-by-parcel land-use decisions and stated that he does not support Recommended Alignment G. However, he encouraged CFX to incorporate the maximum feasible design modifications to reduce impacts to the regional wildlife corridor while enhancing wildlife connectivity.

Nicole Gough thanked Mr. Smith for his comments and confirmed they would be considered as the study continues.

Sunserea Gates concluded the meeting by thanking participants for their collaboration and valuable feedback. She reminded attendees that project information, presentation materials, and future updates are available on the CFX project webpage and encouraged stakeholders to remain engaged as the PD&E Study progresses.

The meeting concluded at 2:38 p.m.

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Attendees

EAG Members

Janet Bowman, The Nature Conservancy

Laura DiGruttolo, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Daniel Smith, University of Florida

Amanetta Somerville, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Project Team

Sunserea Gates, VHB

Nikki Melendez, VHB

Kevin Freeman, VHB

Jimmy Mulandi, CDM Smith

Will Hawthorne, CFX

Chuck Smith, VHB

Nicole Gough, Dewberry

Amy Sirmans, VHB

Kelli Muddle, Volkert

Brian Hutchings, CFX

Jonathan Williamson, Dewberry

Tiany Sousa, Quest

Nick Lulli, Quest

Mary Brooks, Quest