



# Southeast Florida Transportation Council: Miami MPOs Develop Joint Plan

## Quick Information

**Organization(s):** Miami-Dade MPO; Broward MPO; Palm Beach MPO; Florida DOT District 4; Florida DOT District 6

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**Cooperation Topic(s):** Congestion Management; Economic Development; Freight Planning; Transit Planning; Regional Planning

**Cooperation Practice(s):** Forums for Communication and Idea Sharing, Project Partnerships, Joint Planning Products

**Cost Information:** One MPO establishes the contract for consultants; participating agencies share costs of consulting service.

Effective transportation provision by multiple agencies for a single metropolitan area requires close collaboration. For the three metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in the Miami Urbanized Area, the Southeast Florida Transportation Council (SEFTC) provides a forum to create shared transportation plans and initiatives. The Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach MPOs serve the three most populous counties in Florida. In the past decade, the MPOs have collaborated on multiple aspects of the planning process, including long-range and freight planning, public involvement, project prioritization and selection, regional modeling, and the implementation of highly-used express bus lanes.

## Motivation for Establishing the Collaboration

The Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach MPOs informally collaborated on transportation efforts for many years before the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) suggested combining the three agencies into one MPO. However, because each MPO is located in its own county and has different styles of development—Broward has the highest population density, Miami-Dade is highly transit-based, and Palm Beach has the lowest population density and the least traffic—the agencies elected to remain independent to more effectively address their unique contexts. The MPOs proposed formalizing their coordination efforts as a way of further integrating their planning processes. In 2006, Chapter 339 Section 175 of the Florida Statutes established SEFTC to address regional transportation challenges through coordinated planning. Over the past ten years the SEFTC MPOs have worked together through a process of trial and error to continually improve their cooperative planning framework.

## Collaboration Structure

SEFTC receives staff support and recommendations about technical decisions from the Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (RTTAC), which includes staff from the three MPOs, FDOT Districts 4 and 6, the Florida Turnpike Enterprise, the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority, the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, the four local transit agencies, and the two area Regional Planning Councils. The MPOs also take turns leading the SEFTC subcommittees, which address issues including travel demand modeling, public involvement, and freight planning.

The three MPOs rotate hosting duties for the quarterly RTTAC meetings so their membership has the opportunity to travel throughout the whole region and each agency achieves adequate representation. Developing an initial method for determining how to share costs was a critical part of the collaborative structure. As an example of cost sharing, the Palm Beach MPO established a contract with a consultant to compile agendas and minutes for RTTAC meetings, and all three MPOs contribute funding for the service. The regular meetings help MPO staff to establish stronger relationships and enhance the frequency and level of communication with each other. This allows them to tackle day-to-day planning challenges quickly (by phone) rather than waiting for the next official meeting to bring up issues.

To identify their shared goals and objectives, the MPOs created a [Regional Transportation Network Map](#) that shows key corridors on which to focus SEFTC's efforts and resources. Over the course of three years, the MPOs refined the map to ensure it represented each agency's interests and values, and it now serves as a shared framework to guide their plans and meetings.

Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach MPOs complete their own, separate cost-feasible transportation plans in addition to the SEFTC combined regional transportation plan (RTP). The MPOs recognized the potential benefit in evaluating the projects that did not make it into each MPO's cost-feasible plan through a collaborative, prioritization process. SEFTC designed its prioritization process to be as quantitative as possible by using a [benefit-cost analysis and evaluation criteria](#) agreed upon by all three MPOs. The purpose of this process is to lend a "common ground" perspective to guide future transportation investment prioritization across the greater Miami metropolitan area.

The MPOs measure the success of their initiatives by compiling monthly reports on factors like ridership and by soliciting feedback from the public on a regional scale. For instance, the partners encourage individuals in the

## Takeaways

- SEFTC's successes are the results of over 10 years of continuous improvement in collaborative planning.
- SEFTC produces a regional LRTP and freight plan every five years.
- Each MPO maintains its own LRTP in addition to the SEFTC LRTP.
- Rotating hosting duties for meetings allows SEFTC's membership to travel throughout the region and achieve adequate representation.
- One of SEFTC's greatest accomplishments was the implementation of the 95 Express Lanes project.
- SEFTC jointly owns the Southeast Regional Planning Model, which is housed by FDOT District 4; moving forward, they will work to improve MPOs access to the tool via a cloud-based system.

Miami Urbanized Area to provide comments on transportation infrastructure and services in all three MPOs, as the region's residents often travel between MPO jurisdictions for work and recreation and thus understand the transportation system on the regional scale. SEFTC's consultant attends public meetings in each MPO to document these cross-jurisdictional comments for incorporation in SEFTC's next regional transportation plan.

## Collaboration Accomplishments

SEFTC develops a new RTP every five years, and in October 2015, it published and adopted the [2040 Regional Plan](#). This plan reflects the shared vision and goals of the three MPOs in the Miami Urbanized Area. Many of the projects included in the RTP will advance into each MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a five-year program of prioritized transportation projects in each MPO region that is updated annually. The MPOs rotate the lead role for plan development each five-year cycle.

SEFTC devoted a great deal of energy to engaging the residents in its service areas in identifying their transportation wants and needs, and their involvement proved a critical component of the 2040 Regional Plan. Each county conducted public outreach and incorporated materials from its outreach efforts in its individual 2040 long range transportation plan (LRTP), and these materials were cross-referenced when the RTP was developed. Additionally, in November 2015, SEFTC conducted outreach on a regional level through an online survey to inform the 2040 RTP.

Additionally, SEFTC produces a regional freight plan every five years. Miami-Dade MPO was the first MPO in Florida to complete a freight plan, and after the other MPOs developed individual freight plans in subsequent years, the three came together with FDOT to produce SEFTC's first regional freight plan in 2010. The [Southeast Florida Regional Freight Plan 2014 update](#) highlights successes and challenges to paint a more complete picture of SEFTC's freight experience. Recent accomplishments include the completion of the Port Miami Tunnel and the development of Intermodal Container Transfer Facilities at Port Miami and Port Everglades.

In 2010 and 2011, Miami-Dade MPO and Broward MPO introduced the first two express bus routes on Interstate 95 (I-95), a high occupancy toll road. Express buses are operated by Broward County Transit and Miami-Dade Transit. After three years, monthly ridership in Miami-Dade and Broward counties increased by over 400 percent and overall transit ridership increased by 145 percent. Recent studies show that, since [95 Express](#) service began, travel speeds on I-95 have increased by 200 percent on local lanes and 300 percent on the express lanes. Tracking monthly ridership data and travel speeds has enabled the MPOs to demonstrate the benefits of 95 Express and promote the creation of more managed lanes in the region. Phase 2 of 95 Express began construction in November 2011 and continued through spring 2016; the project extends the 95 Express lanes through Broward County by converting existing high occupancy vehicle lanes into two express lanes in each direction. In October 2016, tolling began on a new segment between

Miami-Dade County and Broward County. The project's success has also encouraged many other major metropolitan areas in Florida to begin implementing managed lanes.

Another significant benefit of SEFTC's collaboration is the ability to quickly address regional issues through established means of communication and decisionmaking. For example, the partner MPOs settled a joint contract for a new activity-based transportation model, the [Southeast Regional Planning Model](#) (SERPM), within 90 days after deciding to adopt the model. SEFTC formally recognized the SERPM as the region's travel demand modeling tool during the development of its [2035 RTP](#). The three MPOs and FDOT Regions 4 and 6 developed a memorandum of understanding (MOU; see Appendix) in November 2014 to define future roles and responsibilities for the tool, including a funding breakdown. The MPOs recently upgraded the SERPM to feature a much more data-intensive model which required more advanced equipment, so the MOU made the FDOT Region 4 office responsible for developing and maintaining the current version. The activity-based model has allowed SEFTC to more accurately predict the regional effects of proposed projects.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

The success of SEFTC is the result of over a decade of continuous improvement in collaborative planning. The lines demarcating FDOT Districts pose a challenge to successful collaboration, as Miami-Dade MPO is in FDOT District 6, while Broward MPO and Palm Beach MPO are both in District 4. This boundary requires the MPOs to establish cooperative relationships with multiple partners at both the State and MPO levels. The MPOs have begun to address the challenge of working across FDOT District boundaries by proactively communicating with each district about their plans and priorities.

SEFTC is still working out challenges associated with ownership of shared tools. The FDOT Region 4 office develops and maintains the current version of SEFTC's travel demand modeling tool, SERPM. While this structure provides several benefits—namely, the FDOT Region 4 office houses the sophisticated equipment necessary to develop the tool—the MPOs no longer have immediate, in-house access to the model. They plan to address this issue as they move into the next generation. Ideally, the MPOs would all have access to the model at any given time; they are currently considering a cloud-based platform that would allow for improved access and collaboration.

The SEFTC MPOs plan to further improve cross-jurisdictional cooperation by developing metrics to quantify the benefits of working together on a regional scale. The partners know intuitively that they accomplish more through collaboration than they could separately, both because they can complete larger projects at lower cost than several smaller projects and because jointly applying for grants gives them a greater likelihood of success. However, they want to be able to more precisely communicate to the public and FDOT these cost savings and benefits of the SEFTC partnership.

SEFTC presents an intriguing example of collaboration across three counties and several MPO and State DOT district boundaries. Through joint transportation planning, the three Miami area MPOs provide more efficient and effective multimodal service for their region.

### **Additional Resources**

- [SEFTC 2040 Regional Plan](#)
- [SEFTC Regional Freight Plan 2014 update](#)
- [SEFTC Memorandum of Understanding for Rail Link Project](#)
- SEFTC Memorandum of Understanding for Travel Demand Modeling (see RMOH Handbook Appendix p. 45)
- [Southeast Regional Planning Model \(SEPRM\)](#)
- [95 Express Bus Service Website](#)