

Appendix A

Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) Advisory Board Meeting

Minutes of the Meeting

Online only

February 24, 2026 · 1:00 – 2.45 PM ET

- Call to Order: Meeting called to order by Chair Ron Howse at 1:00 PM ET.
- Roll Call

Advisory Board Members and Designees (P = Present, T = Teams, A = Absent)

	Name	Title	Organization	Designee	
T	Ron Howse, Chair	Chair	Florida Transportation Commission		Statute
T	Jared Perdue, P.E. (A)	Secretary	Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)	Kelli Bradley, FDOT District 7 (T)	Statute
T	Kimberlee DeBosier	Vice President, Transportation Division	WGI, Inc.		
T	J. Alex Kelly (A)	Secretary	Florida Department of Commerce	Scott Rogers, FDEO (T)	
A	Ram Kancharla	Vice President, Planning and Development	Port Tampa Bay		
T	Alexis A. Lambert (A)	Secretary	Florida Department of Environmental Protection	Lindsey Weaver (T)	Statute
T	Thornton J. Williams	Managing Partner	Williams Law Group, P.A.		
T	Ysela Llort	Principal	Renaissance Planning Group, Inc.		
T	LK Nandam				
T	Ralph Yoder	Executive Director	Florida Transportation Commission		Ex-Officio
T	Lisa Bacot	Executive Director	Florida Public Transportation Association		Ex-Officio

Guests

CUTR Leadership

- Dr. Fred Mannering, CUTR Director
- Lisa Staes, CUTR Associate Director

CUTR Program Directors

- Julie Bond
- Sisinnio Concas
- Victoria Perk

CUTR Presenters

- Zachary Haber
- Sarah Perez
- Jennifer Flynn
- Sudarsana Mangapati

Agenda

Welcome and Introductions. *Ron Howse, CUTR Advisory Board Chair*

Topic #1: Approval of Minutes. *Ron Howse, CUTR Advisory Board Chair*

- Quorum is met for the meeting.
- **Motion:** Approval of prior meeting minutes
- **First:** LK Nandam
- **Second:** Thornton Williams
- **Outcome:** Motion passed unanimously without revisions

Topic #2: FDOT Update

FDOT update by Kelly Bradley, Director of Transportation Development, D7. She acknowledged the great support to FDOT by Gov. DeSantis. The Floridians First Budget \$15.4 billion was passed (with investments identified as HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION: \$4.9 BILLION, BRIDGE MAINTENANCE: \$873 MILLION, RESURFACING: \$1.4 BILLION, AVIATION: \$295.5 MILLION, FREIGHT & RAIL: \$233.2 MILLION, SEAPORTS: \$155.5 MILLION, SPACEPORTS: \$93.4 MILLION, SAFETY ENHANCEMENTS: \$269.2 MILLION). The Governor's philosophy is to leave communities better than they were 7 years ago. 2026 legislative session is underway. This session will have had 12 different presentations and panel discussions during committee weeks. Talent, tools and technology are the legislative focus areas. Keep working on workforce, recruit and retain. Grateful for continued support of Florida's legislators. FDOT also has over 840 facilities to maintain statewide (HVAC, plumbing, keeping buildings up to code, modernizing cutting edge technology, security, etc.). Recent activities include:

- FDOT is addressing winter weather response. 2nd year in row to address snow removal in Florida. The EOC was activated and ready to respond. New equipment has been purchased to address winter weather.
- America 250 Duel at Daytona- FDOT partnered with Daytona International Speedway to celebrate America's 250th birthday and encourage safe driving. Booths at Speedway
- Transportation Day at the Capitol - 20+ interactive booths at the Capitol on 2/17/2026.
- Shared pictures of ongoing projects and completions, i.e. Howard Frankland Bridge Replacement, Westshore Interchange Ultimate Rendering, Ultimate Reo St/Kennedy Blvd, SR 60 Ultimate Section near TIA, Downtown Tampa Interchange, and I-4 Single Express Lane and Future Ultimate Express Lane
- Ysela... thank you to Kelly for representing FDOT.

Topic #3: CUTR Advisory Board Updates/Business

- Chair Howse spoke about the upcoming development of the Florida Transportation Research Institute (TRI); there will be a workshop this spring. Agreements are being drafted, an executive director will be hired, and an administrative committee will be chosen.
- Ysela: prudent to discuss what is in best interest for CUTR regarding the TRI since this is primarily for universities (and CUTR, while at USF, is not specifically identified). Universities will divvy up work as needs are identified. At this time, it is not clear as to how the TRI will be organized and how CUTR may work within the TRI through USF.
- Ron suggested that we invite the Provost to speak with CUTR Board as to the role that would/could develop for CUTR. Lisa will reach out to schedule the Provost for the CUTR meeting.

Topic #4: CUTR Updates

Director

- Fred shared that the entire UTC competition has been put on hold. Rumor is there is another Tier 1 center being added to the group of 6 bringing the group to 7 members. 80 universities are competing for the seven slots.
- In the meantime, the current UTC has three Tier 1 UTC proposals ready: 1) Tier 1: Center for Human-Centric, Outcome-Driven Intelligent Choices through Emerging Technologies for Safety, 2) Tier 1: Center for Cyber Assured Lifeline Energy Transportation (ALERT Center), and 3) Tier 1: Center for Innovative Mobility for People and Cargo Transportation (IMPACT). If SIMPACT is not accepted, it will be resubmitted as a National UTC during the next full competition.
- Dr. Zachary Haber, who serves as an Assistant Professor in Civil & Environmental Engineering, spoke to the board about a CUTR Infrastructure / Civil Engineering Thrust Area.
- Dr. Haber gave a personal bio of his engineering experience. Discussed FDOT perceived needs and/or challenges to be FDOT/USF Student Connections, Ad-Hoc Technical Assistance, Training and Professional Development, Continuing Education, and the Needs and Challenges we do not know about yet. Zach

identified the thrust area and capability suite and created the thrust area strategic planning and pilot activities. On-site hands-on experimental learning would also be included.

- Fred: FDOT is very interested in having a consistent means of communicating with CUTR and Dr. Haber to ensure timely responsiveness and provide CUTR the opportunity to better support FDOT.
- Ysela added this is in line with what Secretary Hall said previously. Training opportunities, labor opportunities, and getting students on the path toward FDOT careers. This could be a great opportunity for all parties involved.
- Lisa and Fred spoke with the Dean about the Thrust program and working with FDOT. Kelly will share this info with Justin; everyone will follow-thru and follow-up with reports at the next meeting. Ron said this is exactly what we want to do – everyone is on board. LK mentioned CUTR could be the partner to build a program around what the practices are but also create a gateway to workforce development. Great job!
- Lisa: dashboard has been on the drawing board for some time. Sarah Perez, CUTR has created a dashboard presentation. While the dashboard is not complete, everyone was very pleased with the layout, information provided, and progress to date.

Associate Director

- Lisa gave overview of the research funding and contract values of CUTR. We are on target to exceed 2025. Sponsor details FY 25 vs. FY 26 were given. Proposals and success rates (2023-2026*) indicate CUTR continues to grow and climb above previous years since 2023, with 79% success rate. We are currently running about 8 months backlog.
- Lisa provided the date for the 2026 Hall of Fame is November 18, 2026 in Tampa. Lisa asked for volunteers to serve on the Selection committee to review nominations and provide final selection of the 2026 recipient. The selection committee will be Ysela, Ram, LK, Kim DeBosier and Ron Howse.

Marketing and Communications Updates

- Sarah Perez gave highlights of the CUTR 2025 Annual Report, which will be available soon. Program activities, contract completions rates and completed Projects during the year were identified. 159 presentations, 37 new publications, and over 100,000 publication downloads were recorded by USF Digital. A 5-year financial recap will be included in the annual report. Research Impact Highlights, Projects and Initiatives (NEW) are featured. Concluded projects, Publications & Knowledge Dissemination counts are also included.
- The CUTR interactive Dashboard will soon be posted on CUTR website, with high level metrics as well as timely updates by quarter. Sarah shared the development steps taken to develop the dashboard, and the resources that will be pulled to populate the dashboard. She shared where data will be accessed to be utilized. She asked for feedback, or questions from the board. Ron suggested everyone take time to review and reach out to Lisa and Sara for thought. Major kudos to Sara for the dashboard (to date). It is an exceptional accomplishment.

Topic #5: CUTR Project Presentations

- Lisa described the CUTR Internal Grant Award, which provides \$10k to selected projects with ultimate hope of securing additional funding or leveraging the work for future research activities. Projects are chosen twice yearly in May and November. Today, we will have two presentations.

Microtransit in Florida: Strategic Considerations and Research Needs

Presenters: Jennifer Flynn, Senior Research Associate Victoria Perk, Transit Research Program Director

- Jennifer Flynn and Dr. Vicky Perk shared their presentation, Microtransit in Florida, noting that a new era of rapidly developing transportation ecosystem is upon us. Microtransit offers new capabilities between public transit and Uber/Lyft. Agencies are looking for comprehensive answers of how microtransit fits into the model. Specifically, Microtransit is a tech-enabled transit service that allows customers to plan, book, and pay for, and track trips through a mobile app, and operates on demand by dynamically generating routes in response to ride requests.
- The goal was to identify the needs of microtransit. Task 1: Literature search, Task 2: review microtransit trends, and task 3: peer panel engagement. Microtransit uses smaller vehicles, shared rides and flat/nominal fees. There are 12 county microtransit systems operating in Florida. It has become one of the most frequently studied emerging mobility strategies in Florida.
- Dr. Perk gave statistics on US vs. Florida transit ridership, which has not recovered since the pandemic of 2020. Florida's ridership is recovering well. Microtransit is one strategy that many agencies are using to better meet community needs and increase ridership. However, current challenges in tracking ridership trends for microtransit services include microtransit data being co-mingled with other demand-response data. Jenn discussed the early generation of a local microtransit, HART's HyperLINK (2016-2018). It was discontinued due to cost-sustainability. More recent cases included MetroConnect in Miami-Dade County, Breeze OnDemand in Sarasota County and ART of Demand in St. Lucie County. The key takeaways for microtransit are that it performs best in targeted use cases, successful initiation depends on clearly defining the problem to be solved, data access is foundational, and demand management is essential. The financial sustainability is a central concern, and scalability is limited for the future of microtransit. A comprehensive inventory of microtransit service is needed.
- The next steps for this project are to transfer knowledge through CUTR's networks and continue peer panel engagement. COMMENTS: LK noted the success of Sarasota County's Breeze OnDemand, and that it would serve as a good model for other Florida agencies. Ysela requested a copy of the White Paper. The paper will be disseminated to all CUTR channels and the board.

Optimizing Access to Interoperability Resources in Mobility through Context-Aware Large Language Models (LLMs): Leveraging Generative AI to Automate Discovery, Classification, and Knowledge Transfer in Transportation Standards

Presenters: Sudarsana Varma Mandapati, Vishal Kummetha, Ph.D.; Sisinnio Concas, Ph.D.; Lisa Staes, MSM

- Sudarsana described the challenge of navigating fragmented mobility resources. There are many guidelines and documents that help buses, trains, bikes, and apps “talk” to each other. This project suggests a Smart Search AI-powered tool to help discover, explain, and connect these resources in one place. System searches the repository and shows the top 5 best matches. If no strong match is found, it suggests 3 improved queries; administrators add new resources and the system generates summaries and tags.
- The ingestion pipeline to integrate several mobility operators to ensure ease of user booking, payment, and operations was described. Ultimately and unlike ChatGPT, the tool returns the TOMP-API standard directly, with a short summary and link to the official document for implementation.
- The model was evaluated using 330 real-world mobility interoperability questions. The responses reviewed by two different AI models (Llama and Copilot) and most responses rated as medium to high relevance (6-8). Sudarsana demonstrated the Interface and Usability, and how this AP helps riders by saving time and money for agencies, makes knowledge sharing easier and the same framework can be utilized in other areas of transportation. The tool can be accessed at <https://www.maasresources.com/>. There were no questions regarding this presentation.

Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.