

2.2 Project Purpose and Need

2.2.1 Purpose

The purpose of a new I-75 interchange at NW 49th/35th Street is to provide relief to the congestion and operational deficiencies at both existing contiguous I-75 interchanges, by providing an alternate access to I-75 for the projected increase in truck volumes resulting from the future commerce district.

2.2.2 Need

The overall study was initiated with a detailed, comprehensive analysis of existing/projected substandard conditions. In general terms, some of the most critical potential needs include:

2.2.2.1 Economic Viability and Job Creation:

The proposed interchange is needed to support the economic viability of the Ocala 489, a 489 acre industrial and commercial development, which is intended to serve as an economic engine for job creation in the region and is envisioned as a strategic central inland hub for freight-related traffic (see **Figure 2-2**). The Ocala 489 has been established as a Florida Enterprise Zone, a designation which provides numerous tax credits to businesses located within the Commerce Park. In addition, this commerce park includes a site, recently developed by AutoZone, that was designated as a CSX Select Site (the first in Florida). Select Sites are properties identified and vetted as capable locations for future manufacturing facilities along the CSX rail network. FedEx

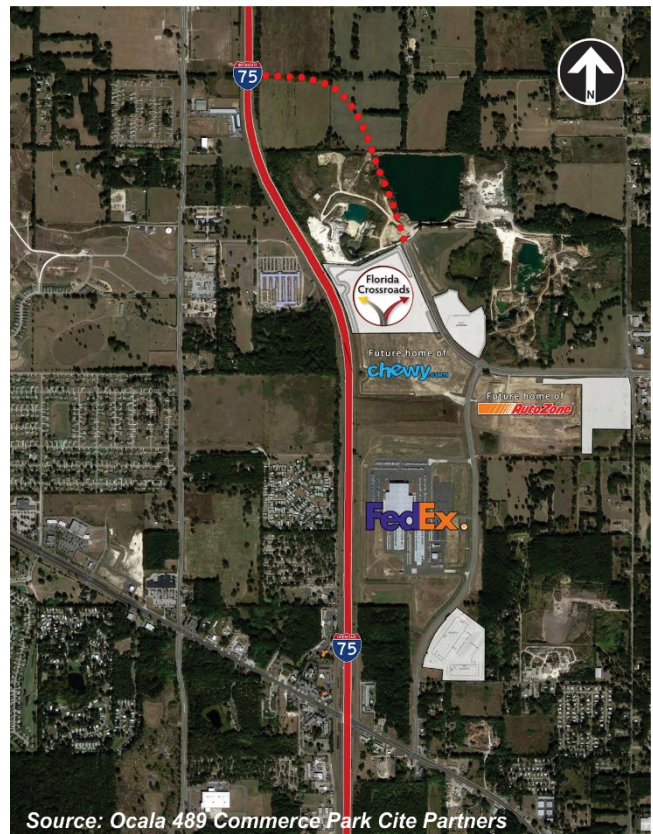


Figure 2-2: Ocala 489 Commerce Park

Ground, Florida Crossroads Logistics Center, and Chewy also completed new facilities within the Ocala 489. Marion County has already made infrastructure improvements within the Park with the extension of NW 35th Street as a divided four lane facility.

It should be noted that the Ocala 489 is zoned M-1/M-2 or Light/Heavy Industrial and the businesses that are intended to occupy the commerce park will depend heavily on interstate and regional movement to transport raw materials and finished goods, around the State and beyond. In summary, due to its strategic location and incentives, the Ocala 489 and the commerce district/employment center will provide needed jobs in the area.

2.2.2.2 Improve Interstate and Regional Mobility

The proposed interchange will provide a more direct and efficient access to I-75 thus facilitating interstate and regional mobility. As previously stated, I-75 is a vital north-south interstate facility connecting six different states. From a regional perspective (see **Figure 2-3**) Marion County is

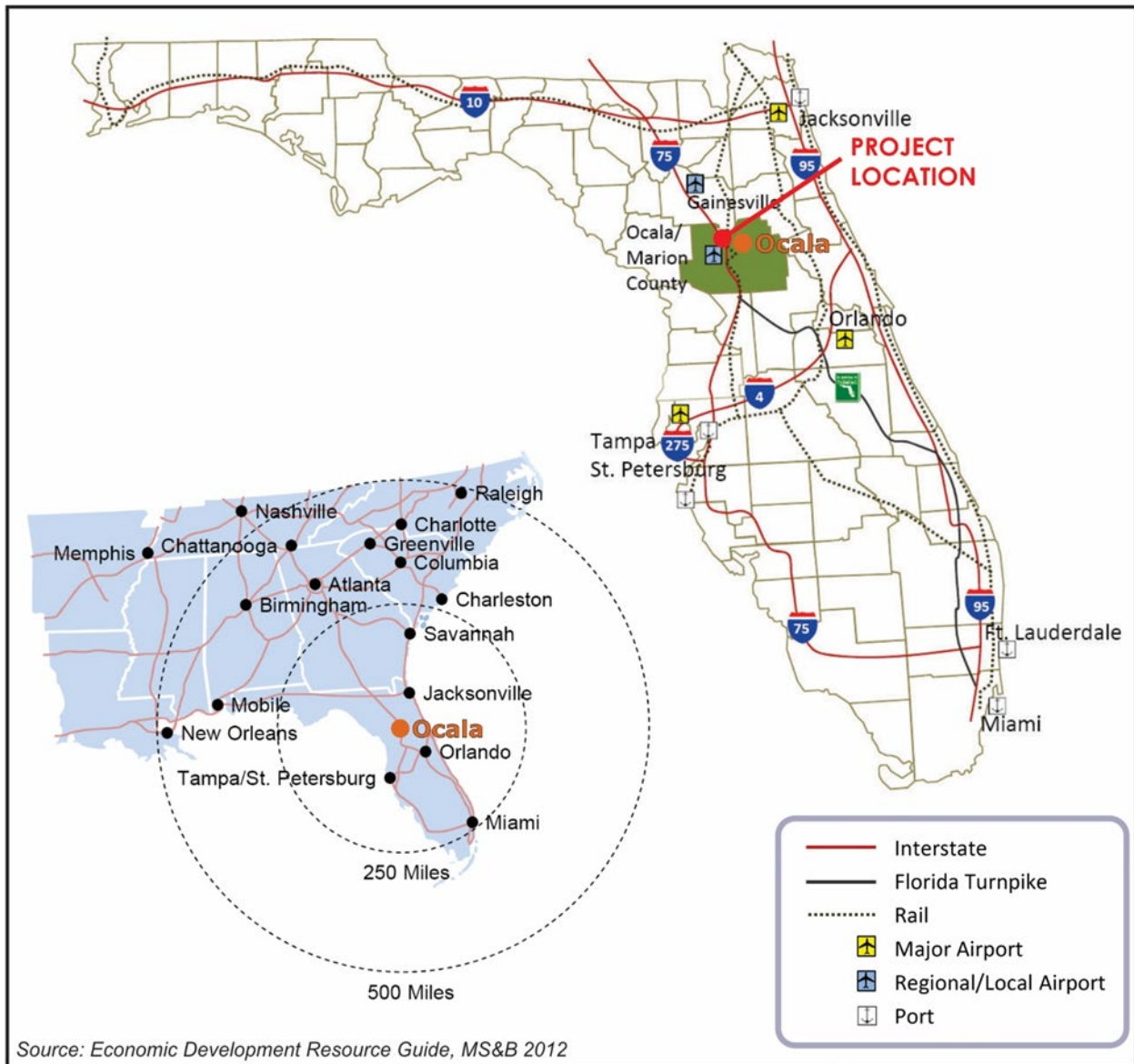


Figure 2-3: Regional Map

approximately midway between Miami and Atlanta and occupies a strategic location due to its relative proximity to other important metropolitan areas such as Jacksonville, Orlando, and Tampa. This strategic location coupled with the presence of a major interstate facility such as I-75 makes this area a key potential hub for commercial industry. The proposed interchange is thus needed to support the efficient movements of goods.

2.2.2.3 Address Locally Supported Long Term Regional Needs

The proposed project is needed to provide important access to I-75 as part of a locally supported long range vision to provide a future east-west corridor parallel to US 27 and SR 326. This east-west corridor begins at NE 36th Avenue, east of I-75 and Downtown Ocala and terminates at NW 70th Avenue, west of the proposed I-75 interchange. In conjunction with this new east-west corridor is a connection to US 27 at NW 35th Avenue Road and at NW 60th Avenue.

The proposed I-75 interchange is currently listed as the number one (1) priority project on the Ocala/Marion TPO FY 2025 Priority Projects List. Excerpts from plans published by FDOT, Marion County and the Ocala Marion TPO that reflect corresponding planned and programmed projects are provided in **Appendix A**. The County has completed a number of improvements in the area in support of the proposed interchange and the Ocala 489 (see **Figure 2-4**), including extension of NW 35th Avenue Road. Phase 2A of the NW 35th Avenue Road extension was recently completed by the County, Phase 2B is a Marion County project currently in Final Design and programmed for construction in 2021, and Phase 2C (see **Figure 2-4**) is the connection between the proposed interchange and the future NW 35th Avenue Road (Phase 2B) that will be completed as part of the proposed interchange.

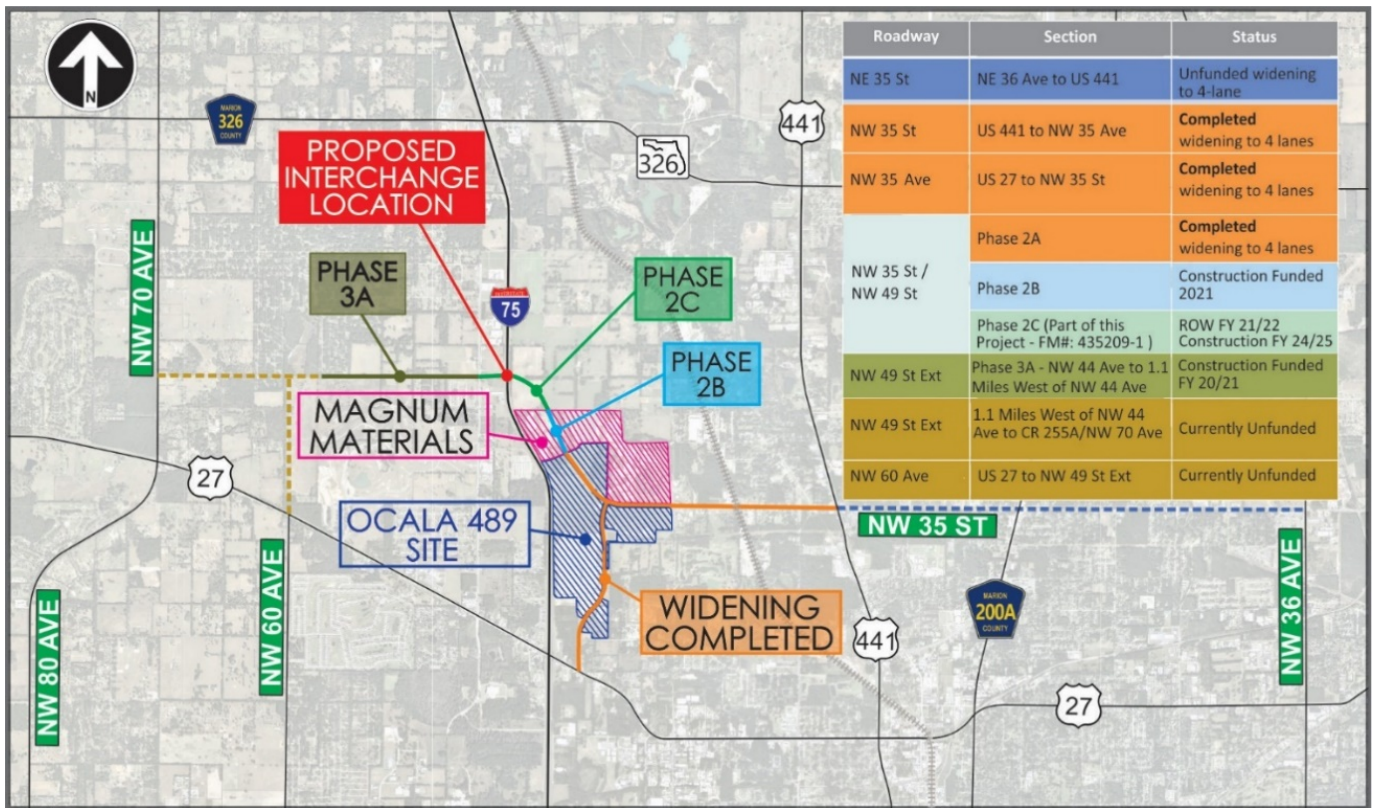


Figure 2-4: Adjacent Projects

2.2.2.4 Accommodate Future Traffic Growth

As previously stated, one of the primary justifications for the new interchange is to accommodate projected future year traffic volumes. Marion County has experienced a significant and sustained growth in population since 1970. This significant growth rate is expected to continue in the future. According to the currently adopted CFRPM socio-economic data for 2010 and 2040, the projected population for Marion County is expected to grow from approximately 325,199 to over 490,204 in population by 2040. As a result of this population growth, traffic volumes are increasing and will continue to increase in the future. As shown on **Table 2-1**, the proposed interchange will result in a reduction in the design year (2045) traffic volumes on US 27 and SR 326, the two contiguous I-75 interchange locations, as well as NW 35th Avenue Road, generally resulting in reduced delays and improved levels of service.

It should be noted that the existing SR 326 interchange located north of the proposed interchange would be a rather indirect option for trucks serving the Ocala 489 and therefore most of the truck traffic associated with the Commerce Park would likely utilize the US 27 interchange, severely degrading operations and safety at the interchange throughout the day. The need for the new interchange is based on projected traffic volumes in design year 2045 from build-out of not only the Ocala 489 but also the adjacent commerce district/employment center totaling 5,000