

# 1.0 Project Description

Interstate 75/State Road 93A (I-75/SR 93A) is a major interstate highway that is part of Florida's Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), a high priority network of transportation facilities important to the state's economy and mobility. I-75 primarily runs north-south along the western portion of the State of Florida and plays a critical role in transporting people, freight, and goods safely and efficiently between South Florida (at its terminus with SR 826/Palmetto Expressway) and the rest of the United States via its entry into the State of Georgia, approximately midway between Lake City in northern Florida and City of Valdosta in southern Georgia. County Road (CR) 582A (Fletcher Avenue) is a four-lane divided arterial roadway that serves several purposes: to provide access to residential communities located in Hillsborough County, to provide access to the University of South Florida (USF), and to form an east-west connection linking four primary north-south routes in the Tampa Bay Region (SR 597, US 41, and I-275 to the west, and I-75 to the east). East of I-75, Fletcher Avenue transitions to Morris Bridge Road, which is an arterial that provides access to SR 56 and SR 54.

Along with experiencing a significant growth in population in recent years, this area of Hillsborough County is also home to numerous nationally recognized medical facilities and business complexes that have placed a strain on the I-75 at Fletcher Avenue interchange. The interchange itself has not kept pace with these changes in the intensity of land use and currently fails to operate at current Level of Service (LOS) targets. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District Seven, in coordination with Hillsborough County, proposes to modify the I-75 at Fletcher Avenue interchange by installing a traffic signal at the southbound ramp terminal. This improvement, proposed as part of this Interchange Access Request (IAR), is intended to help alleviate traffic congestion and improve highway safety at the I-75 at Fletcher Avenue interchange.

Additionally, the ongoing I-75 Project Development and Environment (PD&E) Study from south of US 301 to north of Fletcher Avenue in Hillsborough County (WPID: 419235-3) is currently evaluating the need for tolled express lanes on I-75 by 2045. This PD&E Study has been screened through FDOT's Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) process (ETDM #8002). However, improvements proposed as part of this IAR are anticipated to have a design year of 2035, prior to the implementation of the PD&E Study's tolled express lanes. Therefore, the impacts of the tolled express lanes along I-75 have not been taken into account as part of this IAR.

This Interchange Operational Analysis Report (IOAR) documents the evaluation of the safety, operational, and engineering acceptability of the improvements proposed for the I-75 at Fletcher Avenue interchange in Hillsborough County, Florida. The IOAR is developed in accordance with the FDOT's *Interchange Access Request User's Guide (IARUG)* prepared by the Systems Implementation Office (SIO) and FDOT Topic No: 525-030-160-I (*New or Modified Interchanges*).

## 1.1 Purpose and Need

The purpose of this IOAR is to identify safety, operational, and engineering improvements needed for the I-75 at Fletcher Avenue interchange, that would not only provide for immediate relief to existing traffic congestion and highway safety deficiencies, but also allow for added highway capacity to support future growth and economic development. The need for this project is based on the following list of identified deficiencies:

- This interchange has been identified as a top priority for FDOT Traffic Operations because of the high number of left turn crashes that occur on Fletcher Avenue at the unsignalized southbound I-75 ramp terminal intersection. Historical crash data has shown that 34 left turn crashes have occurred from 2015 to 2019 for

the westbound Fletcher Avenue to southbound I-75 left turn movement, making up 38% of the total crashes for the intersection. Of the 34 left turn crashes, there was one fatality and 24 injury crashes, resulting in an economic loss of \$15.0 million for left turn crashes alone at the Fletcher Avenue and southbound I-75 ramp terminal intersection; and

- Significant delays and queues have been observed for the southbound I-75 off ramp to Fletcher Avenue due to the Two-Way Stop-Control (TWSC) operation of the ramp terminal intersection. Under existing year (2021) conditions, the southbound I-75 off ramp is operating at LOS F during the AM peak hour with the southbound I-75 to westbound Fletcher Avenue right turn movement exceeding the storage of the ramp, thereby causing traffic to backup onto the I-75 mainline. The queue spillback on the southbound I-75 off ramp is a safety concern as through vehicles on the 70 miles per hour (mph) facility must navigate around stopped/slow moving vehicles trying to access the southbound off ramp to Fletcher Avenue.

## 1.2 Project Location

The I-75 at Fletcher Avenue interchange is in northeast Hillsborough County, 1.1 miles north of the I-75 at Fowler Avenue interchange and 3.9 miles south of the I-75 at CR 581 (Bruce B. Downs Boulevard) interchange. Fletcher Avenue connects I-75 with US 41 (located 5.8 miles to the west), I-275 (located 6.0 miles to the west), and SR 597 (Dale Mabry Highway) (located 9.1 miles to the west). **Figure 1** graphically displays the location of the I-75 at Fletcher Avenue interchange and the spacing between adjacent interchanges on I-75. The northwest quadrant of the I-75 at Fletcher Avenue interchange is occupied by the Women's Care Tampa Veterans Affairs (VA) facility. The southwest quadrant is occupied by various hotels and restaurants. In the northeast quadrant, there is access to Flatwoods Park Trail. Currently, the southeast quadrant of the interchange is being developed into a single-family residential neighborhood. Access to this development is achieved via 127th Avenue and Old Morris Bridge Road.

## 1.3 Area of Influence

The area of influence for this IOAR includes the segment of Fletcher Avenue from west of Hidden River Parkway/Morris Bridge Road to east of the northbound I-75 on ramp, and includes the following intersections:

- Fletcher Avenue and Hidden River Parkway/Morris Bridge Road;
- Fletcher Avenue and southbound I-75 ramp terminal; and
- Fletcher Avenue and northbound I-75 ramp terminal.

The area of influence is graphically displayed on **Figure 2**. No adjacent intersection is included in the area of influence east of the Fletcher Avenue and northbound I-75 ramp terminal intersection because there are no state highways nor traffic signals located within 1.0 mile of the ramp terminal. The only access within 1.0 mile of the ramp terminal is Trout Creek, an unsignalized driveway serving a wilderness park.

## 1.4 Project Schedule

This IOAR is being prepared to document the safety, operational, and engineering acceptability of the improvements proposed for the I-75 at Fletcher Avenue interchange. A Methodology Letter of Understanding (MLOU) was completed and signed July 2021, and can be found in **Appendix A**. FDOT Traffic Operations will design and construct the proposed improvements at the southbound I-75 off ramp as part of the Design Push Button Contract (WPID: 254677-2) in fiscal year (FY) 2022/2023. Correspondence with the District Seven Traffic Operations Engineer about funding for the project can be found in **Appendix B**. Right of way (ROW) is not required for the construction of the proposed improvements.