

The Recommended LPA selection process involved numerous considerations, which balanced engineering and environmental considerations and local preference gleaned through the public involvement process and meetings with stakeholders and local officials. FDOT presented the Recommended LPA at the public hearing that FDOT held on February 25 and 27, 2020. As a result of coordination with the City of Tampa and public comments on the TIS Draft SEIS, FDOT made some refinements to the Recommended LPA to mitigate potential safety issues, which resulted in the Preferred Alternative.

Considering all the social, economic, and environmental evaluations contained in the Final SEIS, with input received from other agencies, organizations, and the public, the FHWA has determined that the TIS Preferred Alternative is hereby the selected alternative. On September 15, 2020, the FHWA granted Location and Design Concept Acceptance (LDCA) for the TIS SEIS, Record of Decision (ROD), and Section 4(f) Evaluation. All the improvements considered as part of the SIMR are consistent with the approved SEIS Preferred Alternative.

2.1 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the project is to evaluate potential capacity improvements to the existing interchanges located along I-275 from the north end of the Howard Frankland Bridge to the Ashley Drive/ Tampa Street interchange, including an evaluation of improvements at various interchanges within the study area that were not previously considered in the 2001 SIMR. Such improvements include the addition of express toll lanes along the interstate mainline within the SIMR area of influence and, specifically, for the interchange at I-275 and State Road (SR) 60 / Memorial Highway. The SIMR will document the existing conditions in the study area, the future year travel demand forecasts, and the analysis of future conditions for express toll lanes, general use lanes, ramps, and ingress/egress points between the interstate mainline and the express toll lanes system.

The need for this project is to alleviate existing traffic congestion and excessive vehicle delays on I-275 and at its interchanges. Moreover, the segment of I-275 from the north end of Howard Frankland Bridge to Ashley Drive exhibits a crash rate of 1.947 that is more than two times the statewide average for similar interstate facilities across the State of Florida. Ensuring safe and efficient operations along I-275 is critical, given that I-275 is a designated hurricane evacuation route.

The I-275/SR 60 interchange provides mobility within the Westshore District of Tampa. The Westshore District is Tampa's largest employment center with approximately 4,000 businesses and over 97,000 employees. In addition to the commercial and industrial uses, Westshore has about 15,000 residents and is expected to add another 1,000 units over the next year. Major destinations within the Westshore District include Tampa International Airport, Raymond James Stadium, International Plaza, Westshore Plaza, and George Steinbrenner Field.

2.2 LOCATION AND AREA OF INFLUENCE

The project is located along I-275 from north of the Howard Frankland Bridge to Ashley Drive/Tampa Street interchange and along SR 60 from Kennedy Boulevard to the north of Cypress Street in Tampa. Although I-275 is, in general, a north-south limited access facility, the alignment of this roadway within the area of influence is east-west. Throughout the document, the directional orientation of I-275 and SR 60 is described as north-south and east-west, respectively.

The study area consists of two major facilities (I-275 and SR 60). Per guidance provided in the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Interchange Access Request Users Guide (IARUG, September 2020, Version 2.0), the area of influence adopted for microsimulation modeling is composed of 7 interchanges and 33 signalized intersections. The