



**HERNANDO COUNTY TRANSPORTATION DISADVANTAGED
LOCAL COORDINATING BOARD (TDLCB)**

Thursday, September 11, 2025

MINUTES

The Hernando County Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (TDLCB) held a regular quarterly meeting on September 11, 2025, at 1:30 p.m. at the Hernando County Building Training Facility, 1661 Blaise Drive, Brooksville, Florida. The meeting was advertised in the Hernando Sun newspaper, on the Hernando-Citrus MPO website, and on the Hernando County website. The agenda was available on the Hernando-Citrus MPO website.

MEMBERS PRESENT

- Gretchen Samter, Vice Chair, Person with a Disability
- Michelle Sikavitsas, Florida Department of Transportation, District 7
- Sam Kinard, Representative from the Public Educational Community
- David Knazar, Florida Department of Children and Family Services
- Lindsay Braun, Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation or Blind Services
- Robert Werts, Veterans Service Representative
- Melissa Arceneaux, Citizen Advocate
- Darlene Lollie, Public Transit System (TheBus)
- Maia Watson, Florida Department of Health Care Administration
- Jeannette Estes, State of Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities
- Jose Infante, Regional Workforce Development Board

MEMBERS ABSENT

- John Allocco, Chair, Hernando County Board of County Commissioner
- Gerry Whitted, Citizen Advocate – Transit User as Primary Means
- Shanika Figueroa Rodriguez, Local Representative for Children at Risk
- Casey Ladd, Florida Department of Elder Affairs

OTHERS PRESENT

- Bob Esposito, MPO Executive Director
- Mary Elwin, MPO Coordinator
- Joy Turner, MPO Executive Assistant
- Jeff Cottrell, You Thrive Florida, Community Transportation Coordinator

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

- Vice Chair Samter called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.
- The Pledge of Allegiance and the introductions of Board, staff, and attendees followed the Invocation.
- A quorum was declared, and the affidavit of publication was read into the record.

APPROVAL/MODIFICATION OF AGENDA

Motion: A motion was made by Ms. Arceneaux to approve the modified agenda. The motion was seconded by Ms. Sikavitsas and the motion passed 11-0.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES – MAY 8, 2025, TDLCB REGULAR PUBLIC MEETING

Motion: A motion was made by Ms. Lollie to approve the May 8, 2025, Minutes of the TDLCB’s Regular Public Meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Werts and the motion passed 11-0.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Annual Expenditure Report (AER) of the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) – You Thrive Florida

Motion: A motion was made by Mr. Werts to approve the Annual Expenditure Report (AER) for submittal to the Commission of Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD). The motion was seconded by Mr. Infante and the motion passed 11-0.

2. Annual Operating Report (AOR) of the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) – You Thrive Florida

[It is noted for the record that TDLCB member, Melissa Arceneaux, excused herself temporarily from the meeting.]

Motion: A motion was made by Mr. Werts to approve the Annual Operating Report (AOR), authorize the Chair's signature thereon, and submittal of the executed AOR to the Commission of the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD). The motion was seconded by Mr. Infante and the motion passed 10-0.

REPORT

Quarterly Report for April 1 through June 30, 2025, by the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC), You Thrive Florida

[It is noted for the record that TDLCB member, Melissa Arceneaux, returned to the meeting.]

Jeff Cottrell, Director of Transportation at You Thrive Florida, reported an increase in the percentage of trip requests that could not be fulfilled over the past six months, primarily due to a rise in out-of-county transportation requests. The Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) had previously applied for an Innovative Service Development (ISD) grant to support these trips, which was not funded. However, the CTC has recently reapplied in hopes of securing funding to expand resources for out-of-county travel.

If an ISD grant is awarded, the grant would be used to obtain the resources needed to support transportation to key destinations such as the Veterans Administration hospitals in Hillsborough and Pasco counties, as well as medical centers and specialists in Pasco County that are currently inaccessible to Hernando County residents. Mr. Cottrell noted that trip requests typically increase during this time of year as clients exhaust the transportation benefits provided by their insurance plans.

Ms. Arceneaux commended You Thrive Florida for maintaining a record of zero chargeable accidents and praised the new vehicle wraps. Ms. Sikavitsas also recognized the organization for receiving 65 commendations and inquired about the nature of any policy-related complaints. Mr. Cottrell explained that most complaints stemmed from the inability to accommodate same-day trip requests or dissatisfaction with the standard two-hour pickup window. For example, clients may be scheduled for a 7:00 a.m. pickup for a 9:00 a.m. appointment, or dropped off at a medical office at 7:30 a.m. when the facility does not open until 8:00 a.m.

FEATURE PRESENTATIONS

1. Lindsay Braun, Representative of the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, delivered a presentation outlining the services offered by Florida Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) area offices. VR is a federal-state program designed to assist eligible individuals with disabilities in securing or maintaining meaningful employment. Ms. Braun provided an overview of the VR process, including eligibility criteria and financial participation requirements. She also highlighted the Pre-Employment Transition Services (PRE-ETS), a specialized VR initiative for students with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 21.

Chair Samter and Ms. Arceneaux, both clients of the VR program, expressed their appreciation and complimented Ms. Braun on the quality of services received.

2. Sam Kinard, Hernando County School Board Representative, provided an overview of the Hernando County School Transportation System, emphasizing the specialized services available for students with special needs. He reported that the system currently transports over 13,000 students across the county. Transportation is provided for students in pre-kindergarten, disability programs, and grades K–12, as well as for transportation-disadvantaged individuals, pregnant students or student parents and their children, welfare transition program participants, and out-of-zone students.

Mr. Kinard explained that students served may have physical, cognitive, emotional, or sensory disabilities. He detailed how attendants and specialized equipment are utilized on buses and vans to ensure safe transportation in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) tailored to each student's needs. He also underscored the importance of collaboration with families and support staff, and highlighted the specialized training provided to transportation personnel to support students with disabilities.

In response to a question from Ms. Estes regarding whether drivers are trained in reactive strategies for students with intensive behaviors, Mr. Kinard confirmed that staff receive specialized training in this area. Ms. Arceneaux expressed her appreciation for the district's commitment to LRE practices and commended the bus drivers for their dedication and professionalism.

After discussion concerning next meeting's feature presentations, Michelle Sikavitsas, Florida Department of Transportation, and David Knazar, Representative from the Florida Department of Children and Family Services, will provide the Feature Presentations for the November 13, 2025, meeting.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

There were no citizen comments.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

- Ms. Arceneaux expressed her appreciation for the services provided by TheBus and commended the drivers for their kindness, particularly in their interactions with her sister. However, she raised a serious concern regarding the decision to operate only the Mermaid Route on Labor Day, while suspending all other bus services. As a result, she was required to personally transport her sister to a dialysis appointment, sacrificing time with her family.

She emphasized that if transportation is available for recreational purposes—such as trips to the beach—it should equally be available for essential medical needs. From a public standpoint, she noted, the optics of prioritizing leisure over critical health services are deeply concerning.

- Ms. Lollie announced that since December 2024, TheBus has expanded its service by adding five new routes, bringing the total to nine countywide. The new additions include:
 - Route 5: Serving the area off SR 50 at US 41 to Ridge Manor
 - Route 6: An in-town circulator operating in downtown Brooksville
 - Route 7: Connecting Publix on County Line Road at Anderson Snow Road to Walmart on US 41 at Wiscon
 - Route 8: Running from Walmart on US 19 up County Line Road to Publix at Anderson Snow Road
 - Route 9: The Mermaid Route off Shoal Line Boulevard

Ms. Lollie also shared that additional routes are planned for 2026, including a direct route along US 19 from the Citrus County line to the Pasco County line. These service expansions have also increased the availability of ADA transportation options throughout Hernando County.

Ms. Samter noted that with the expansion of ADA services resulting from the addition of new bus routes, it may be an opportune time for You Thrive Florida to consider offering after-hours transportation support to

TheBus. She suggested this could help address medical transportation needs on holidays when regular bus service is unavailable.

- Mr. Infante expressed his gratitude to You Thrive Florida and TheBus for their support during the recent The Guardian Foundation/CareerSource Stand Down event for homeless veterans in Hernando County. He specifically acknowledged TheBus for providing a dedicated route for homeless veterans to the event.
- Ms. Lollie clarified a recent miscommunication regarding trip costs. She noted that information had circulated suggesting the cost per trip was \$200; however, she confirmed that the actual cost is significantly lower at \$17 for fixed-route service and \$79 for ADA service.
- Ms. Estes enthusiastically announced the appointment of Robert “Bob” Asztalos as Director of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD), as designated by the Governor. Asztalos has served as Deputy Executive Director of the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs (FDVA) since 2021, overseeing Florida’s eight state veteran nursing homes and one state veterans domiciliary. He previously served as interim Chief Operating Officer for a veteran-owned medical equipment company and spent decades in health care policy and advocacy at both the state and federal level. In Tallahassee, Asztalos served as Chief Lobbyist for the Florida Health Care Association and Government Relations Consultant for Easter Seals Florida. In Washington, D.C., he worked for the American Health Care Association, the American Physical Therapy Association, and the law firm Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering.

A Navy and Navy Reserve veteran with 29 years of service, Asztalos also served 17 years in the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. He holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from George Washington University and serves on several boards, including the Florida Veterans Foundation, Fleet Reserve Association Branch 34, Ladies Learning to Lead, and the Pines of Sarasota Rehabilitation & Senior Care Community. (2025, August 5) Governor Ron DeSantis Appoints Robert “Bob” Asztalos as Director of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. <https://flgov.com/eog/news/press>

MPO STAFF COMMENTS

Mr. Esposito shared the following updates:

- Mr. Esposito reported that Mary Elwin, MPO Coordinator, attended the Transportation Disadvantaged Training Session on September 3 in St. Petersburg. The session was held as part of the Florida Public Transportation Association (FPTA) Annual Conference and is a mandatory training required by the Florida Commission for Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) to support continued education and regulatory transportation-disadvantaged grant compliance.
- The MPO will issue a purchase order for traffic counts at 71 locations in both Hernando and Citrus Counties, along with a level-of-service analysis.
- The Notices to Proceed have been issued for Complete Streets and Congestion Management and the kick-off meetings were conducted on August 28, 2025.
- Mr. Esposito thanked FDOT for their partnership.

ADJOURNMENT AND NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Hernando County Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (TDLCB) is scheduled for Thursday, November 13, 2025, beginning at 1:30 p.m., at the Hernando County Building Training Facility, 1661 Blaise Drive, Brooksville, Florida. The meeting agenda and back-up materials are available online at: www.hernandocounty.us/hernandocitrusmpo.

Vice Chair Samter adjourned the meeting at 2:40 p.m.