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For immediate release

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Citrus Transportation Planning Organization is born

County and city officials met with the District 7 secretary of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) on July 8 in an historic signing ceremony in the Old Courthouse to create the Citrus County Transportation Planning Organization (TPO).

The new organization brings together FDOT, Citrus County and both Inverness and Crystal River city governments to facilitate coordinated planning of transportation projects by all four jurisdictions. The TPO will allow Citrus County to participate as full voting partner in regional transportation planning, prioritization of funding allocations and receiving state and federal transportation grants.

It will monitor and prioritize a Long Range Transportation Plan and a Transportation Capital Improvement Plan and also assist FDOT by providing information relating to access management, classification of roadways and data collection.

The actual membership of the TPO will consist of three county commissioners and two members from each city council. In addition, the TPO will establish a Citizen's Advisory Committee and a Technical Advisory Committee to better facilitate public input and project evaluation.

The current system of establishing TPOs relies upon a federally determined population density requirement that leaves those areas of a state that do not meet the requirements without local representation when federal transportation dollars are allocated to different regions in the state.

Recognizing this lack of representation for Citrus, the Citrus County Economic Development Council (EDC) undertook the creation of the TPO as a project. The EDC, county and cities successfully negotiated with FDOT to form the first TPO located outside a federally-mandated TPO jurisdiction, making it the first of its kind in that sense.

The next step in the process is for each jurisdiction to select its representatives and then the TPO to hold its inaugural meeting. The TPO will then adopt by-laws, set a meeting schedule and elect officers.

Local officials expect the new TPO to be an important tool in future planning, as it will improve their access to more state and federal transportation dollars and help get higher ranking for needed local roadway improvement projects.

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