EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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ES.1 WHAT IS THE ST. JOHNS RIVER CROSSING PROJECT AND WHERE IS IT LOCATED?

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) identified the need for an improved highway corridor and bridge crossing the St. Johns River between Clay and St. Johns Counties, Florida. The proposed St. Johns River Crossing Project is an effort to identify the best solution to address that need, while trying to minimize the effects the project might have on the local communities and environment.

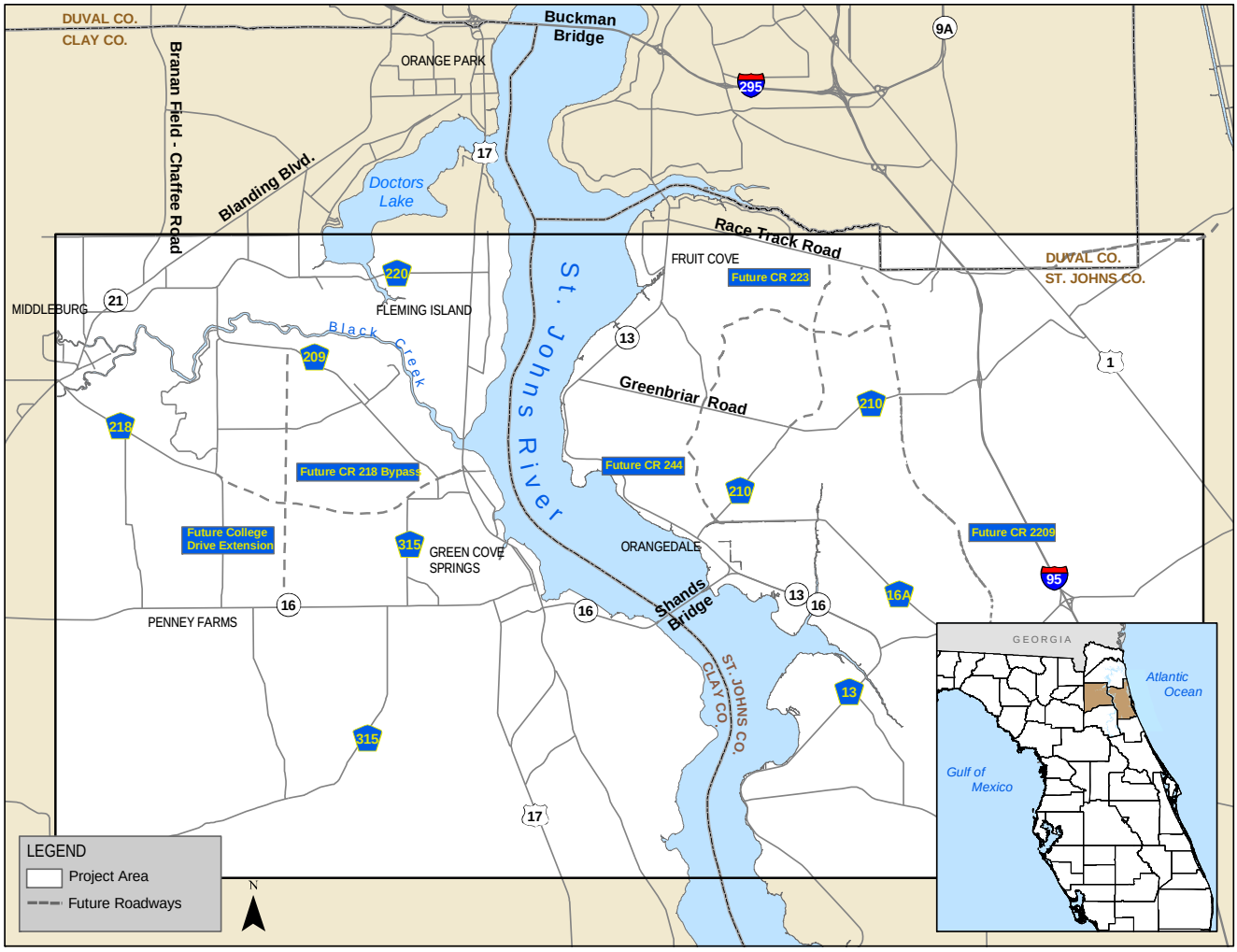
The project area, as shown in **Exhibit ES-1**, encompasses portions of Clay and St. Johns Counties in northeast Florida, south of Duval County. The St. Johns River separates Clay and St. Johns Counties, and the Shands Bridge is the only direct connection between the two Counties within the defined project area.

ES.2 WHY ARE WE PROPOSING THE PROJECT?

FDOT established three goals to guide the development of potential solutions to existing transportation problems in the project area:

- Provide additional capacity to improve current and future transportation network deficiencies;
- Promote and support employment and economic development; and
- Improve emergency evacuation.

Exhibit ES-1: **Project Area and Vicinity**



ES.3 WHY IS THE PROJECT NEEDED NOW?

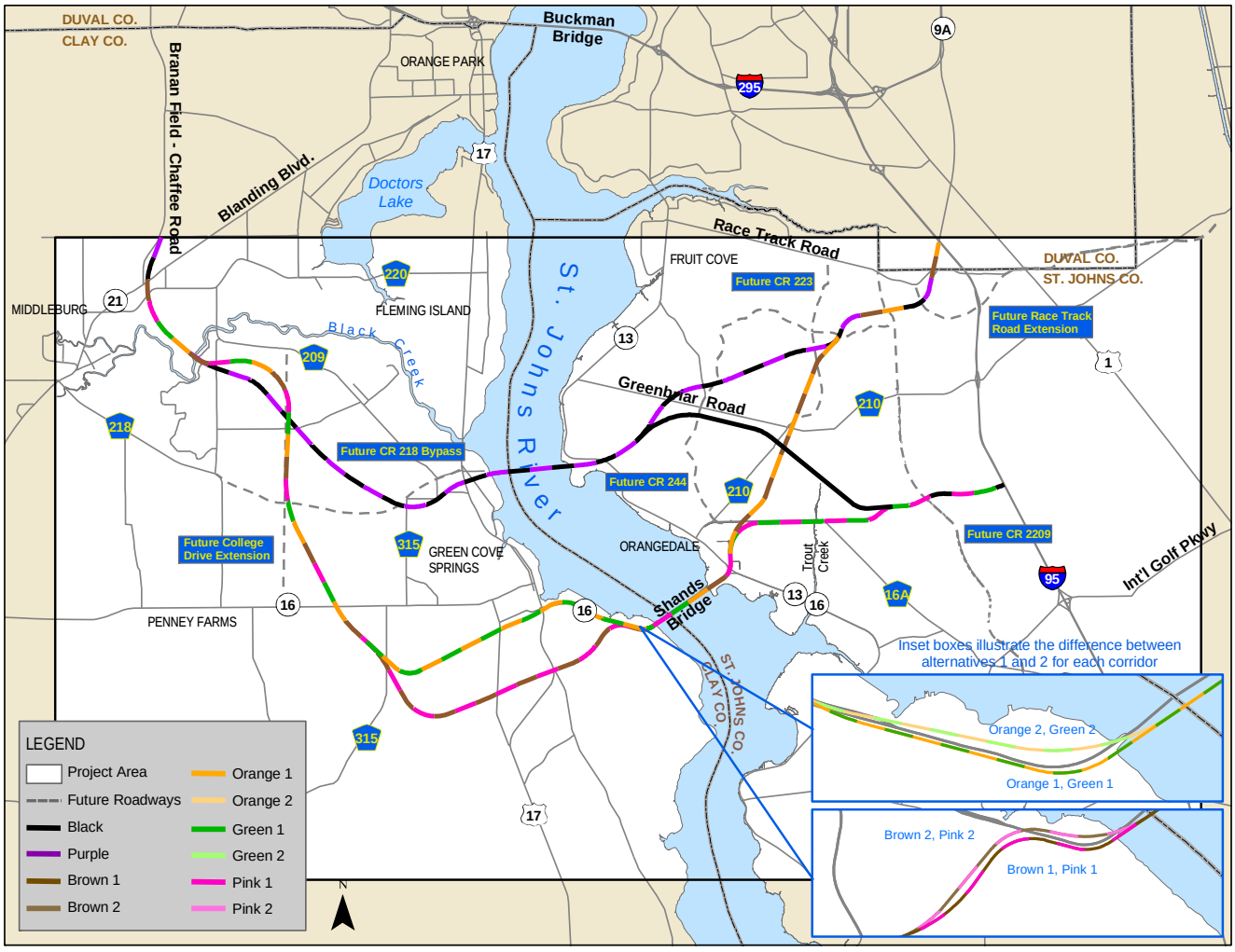
Rapid population growth in this area has resulted in additional traffic and congestion on local roads. When compared to recent years, growth in the area has slowed with the downturn in the economy, however, fluctuations in the market conditions are to be expected. By the year 2030, traffic congestion is still expected to worsen and there will still be a need for the project. Providing additional capacity to improve current and future transportation network deficiencies in the near term will help alleviate this congestion. In addition, providing access for residents to local employment centers will aid in promoting and supporting economic development. Perhaps most important, an improved crossing of the St. Johns River will result in more efficient emergency evacuation.

Chapter 1 of this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) more fully describes the purpose and need for the proposed project.

ES.4 WHAT ALTERNATIVES ARE BEING CONSIDERED?

FDOT has conducted studies since 2002 to identify potential solutions to the existing and future transportation issues in the project area. Through a series of technical studies, public meetings, and agency coordination efforts, FDOT identified and refined ten Build Alternatives to be evaluated in detail in this Draft EIS, along with the No Build Alternative. The Build Alternatives, shown on **Exhibit ES-2**, were developed based on their ability to meet the

Exhibit ES-2: **Final Build Alternatives**



project goals and minimize environmental effects. The No Build Alternative represents the baseline condition against which Build Alternatives are measured.

All Build Alternatives involve a new bridge across the St. Johns River. The two northern alternatives (Black and Purple Alternatives) would cross the river north of Green Cove Springs (**Exhibit ES-2**), and the existing Shands Bridge to the south would remain in place. The eight southern alternatives (Brown 1 and 2, Orange 1 and 2, Green 1 and 2, and Pink 1 and 2 Alternatives) would cross the river near the existing Shands Bridge, which would be removed after the new bridge was completed.

Chapter 2 of this Draft EIS describes the alternative development process and the public and agency involvement programs and activities.

ES.5 HOW WILL THE PROPOSED PROJECT BE FUNDED?

FDOT developed estimated project costs for construction, engineering and inspection, design, right-of-way acquisition, and wetland mitigation for each of the final Build Alternatives. The total estimated costs range from $1.9 billion for the Pink 1 Alternative to $2.5 billion for the Black Alternative. It became evident from these costs that the project could not be implemented using traditional methods of finance, so FDOT will need to design and implement the project as a tolled facility. However, FDOT has determined that if any of the southern alternatives are selected (where the existing Shands Bridge would be replaced), trips using the toll road solely to cross the river will remain toll free. This decision was made because, with any of the southern alternatives, an existing free crossing of the river (on the existing Shands Bridge) would be removed. Also, there would not be a non-tolled crossing option within a reasonable driving distance (see Chapter 2 for more detail).

FDOT conducted a preliminary toll revenue and feasibility study for the project in 2006 which indicated that the St. Johns River Crossing Project was not toll-feasible as a stand-alone project under any of the Build Alternatives. In response to these findings and based on the need for the project, FDOT will combine this project (for tolling purposes only) with the Branan Field-Chaffee Road (State Route 23) Project. This combined toll route will form a beltway

Public / Private Partnerships

The Department is also exploring developing this project through a public private partnership. The term "public/private partnerships," or PPPs, refers to a contractual arrangement by which public and private entities collaborate in the design, construction, operation and financing of a transportation project. As the public sponsor, the Florida Department of Transportation would shape the technical, legal, and financial features in delivering the project.

outside of the I-295 loop from I-10 to I-95. Combining tolling efforts for these two independent projects makes the St. Johns River Crossing Project toll -feasible. See Chapter 2, Section 2.11 of this Draft EIS for more information.

ES.6 WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL PROJECT IMPACTS?

Based on technical studies and public and agency input, FDOT refined the final Build Alternatives to avoid or minimize environmental impacts to the extent feasible. They then evaluated the ten final Build Alternatives and the No Build Alternative to identify potential impacts, both adverse and beneficial, that may occur as a result of implementing any of the alternatives. The project team documented their analyses in a series of technical study reports (included on the enclosed CD in electronic format and part of this Draft EIS), and summarized the results in Chapter 3 of this Draft EIS.

Exhibit ES-3 provides a summary comparison of some of the key technical and environmental impacts and benefits of each alternative. The impacts shown on this exhibit represent potential, direct impacts prior to the application of any mitigation measures. Chapter 3 provides details on all potential impacts and benefits, including indirect and cumulative impacts, followed by a more detailed comparison matrix of the alternatives.

FDOT also considered measures to reduce the extent or severity of impacts from the proposed project. **Exhibit ES-4** summarizes mitigation measures that FDOT has proposed or will consider further depending on their applicability, feasibility and effectiveness once a Preferred Alternative is selected. Chapter 3 provides more detail on mitigation. Some impacts will remain after mitigation measures are implemented. These are summarized in Chapter 4.

Exhibit ES-3: **Summary Comparison of Key Impacts and Benefits of Project Alternatives**

Resource or Parameter	No Build	Black	Purple	Brown 1	Brown 2	Orange 1	Orange 2	Green 1	Green 2	Pink 1	Pink 2
ALTERNATIVES CHARACTERISTICS											
Length of Alternative (miles)	N/A	36	26	34	34	33	33	31	31	31	31
Number of Local Access Interchanges	N/A	8	6	9	9	9	9	7	7	7	7
Total Cost Including Wetland Mitigation ($ billions)	N/A	$2.51	$1.94	$2.17	$2.25	$2.28	$2.32	$1.99	$2.03	$1.88	$1.97
TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION (Section 3.3)											
2030 Network Performance (volume/capacity)	0.897	0.836	0.843	0.835	0.835	0.827	0.827	0.833	0.833	0.842	0.842
2030 Annual Congestion Cost ($ billions)	$11.84	$8.4	$8.4	$8.5	$8.5	$8.2	$8.2	$8.6	$8.6	$8.9	$8.9
Emergency Evacuation Lane Miles West of River	96.0	124.12	124.59	146.57	146.57	144.05	144.05	144.05	144.05	146.57	146.57
Evacuation Effectiveness (vehicles in queue east of river)	61,723	54,298	54,175	48,373	48,373	49,038	49,038	49,038	49,038	48,373	48,373
NOISE (Section 3.5)											
Noise Impacts (number of sites)	N/A	35	35	28	27	28	28	35	34	35	33
LAND USE (Section 3.6)											
Total Acres Converted to Right-of-Way	N/A	1,907	1,301	1,724	1,710	1,654	1,639	1,590	1,576	1,661	1,647
SOCIOECONOMICS (Section 3.7)											
Total Displacements and Relocations (residential, commercial, churches)	N/A	58	57	31	42	42	53	45	56	34	45
Developments Served By Proposed Interchanges (number within miles)	N/A	10	8	12	12	12	12	8	8	8	8

Exhibit ES-3: **Summary Comparison of Key Impacts and Benefits of Project Alternatives (cont)**

Resource or Parameter	No Build	Black	Purple	Brown 1	Brown 2	Orange 1	Orange 2	Green 1	Green 2	Pink 1	Pink 2
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE – MINORITY AND LOW-INCOME POPULATIONS (Section 3.8)											
Total EJ Displacements (residential and commercial)	N/A	1	0	11	22	23	34	17	28	4	15
Potential Disproportionate Impacts from Displacements?	N/A	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Potential Disproportionate Impacts from Tolling?	N/A	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
CULTURAL RESOURCES (Section 3.9)											
Known Resources Potentially Eligible for NRHP Listing	N/A	6	6	1	1	5	5	5	5	1	1
SECTION 4(f)RECREATIONAL RESOURCES – BAYARD CONSERVATION AREA IMPACTS (Section 3.10)											
Direct Impacts – Right-of-Way Take (acres)	N/A	N/A	N/A	34.5	0	23.6	0	23.6	0	34.5	0
PUBLIC SERVICES AND UTILITIES (Section 3.11)											
Blacks Ford Swamp Effluent Disposal Site (acres)	N/A	3.5	3.5	9.3	9.3	9.3	9.3	0	0	0	0
VISUAL QUALITY (Section 3.12)											
Additive Visual Impact Rating (higher numbers indicate higher impacts)	NA	37.1	33.8	41.0	38.3	42.3	39.6	36.3	33.6	35.0	32.3
AIR QUALITY (Section 3.13)											
Carbon Monoxide	No exceedances of the 1-hour or 8-hour National Ambient Air Quality Standards										
WATER RESOURCES (Section 3.14)											
Clean Water Act Section 303(d) Basins Affected	N/A	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3
WETLANDS (Section 3.15)											
Total Acres	N/A	1,812	1,163	1,240	1,210	1,194	1,170	1,257	1,234	1,305	1,278
UMAM Debit	N/A	643	408	430	417	413	406	435	427	450	438
WILDLIFE AND HABITAT (Section 3.16)											
Total Habitat (acres)	N/A	2,044	1,395	1,840	1,817	1,751	1,731	1,609	1,571	1,679	1,657
FISH AND AQUATIC RESOURCES (Section 3.17)											
Total Habitat (acres)	N/A	46	31	30	18	36	28	46	28	40	28
CONTAMINATED PROPERTIES (Section 3.20)											
Total Contaminated Sites	N/A	9	9	8	10	18	18	18	18	8	10

Exhibit ES-4: **Summary of Avoidance, Minimization and Mitigation Measures**

Resource Area	Proposed or Potential Mitigation Measures[1]
Traffic and Transportation	▪ Implement traffic management plan to reduce congestion and delays, keep public informed of construction activities, and maintain access for emergency services, businesses and residences
Noise Impacts	▪ Contractor will adhere to FDOT guidance on construction ▪ FDOT will reevaluate feasible noise abatement measures as part of final design ▪ Noise barriers found to be ineffective due to right-of-way constraints ▪ Will evaluate noise barriers at Bayard Conservation Area if applicable
Land Use	▪ Restore any temporary staging areas to pre-construction condition ▪ Minimize to extent practical the footprint of right-of-way for roadway and interchanges during final design
Displacements	▪ Relocate all residents, businesses and churches that are displaced as specified under the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4601 *et seq),* and FDOT guidelines ▪ Relocate in same vicinity if feasible and desired by residents and businesses
Community Cohesion	▪ For any permanent barrier effects, evaluate feasibility of maintaining access or connectivity during final design ▪ Measures could include maintaining or restoring pedestrian crossings or informal pathways within communities, where feasible and safe
Environmental Justice	▪ Relocate displaced residents and businesses as specified under the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4601 *et seq),* and FDOT guidelines
Cultural Resources	▪ Complete detailed survey of selected alternative as necessary ▪ Consult with State Historic Preservation Office to evaluate appropriate measures, which may include avoidance, recordation of resources, or excavation ▪ Develop inadvertent discovery plan to address potential resources uncovered during construction

[1]Some mitigation measures listed above remain under consideration by FDOT, and will be further evaluated for applicability, feasibility and effectiveness, depending on which Build Alternative, if any, is selected as the Preferred Alternative.

Exhibit ES-4: **Summary of Avoidance, Minimization and Mitigation Measures (cont)**

Resource Area	Proposed or Potential Mitigation Measures[1]
Section 4(f) Properties – Bayard Conservation Area	▪ Convey 51.5 acres of land adjacent to BCA to the SJRWMD for incorporation into the conservation area (if applicable alternative is selected) ▪ Reconstruct parking areas, caretaker residence, trails affected as applicable ▪ Construct multi-use trail along north side of roadway
Public Services and Utilities	▪ Implement a coordinated utility plan to avoid service interruptions and identify necessary utility relocations ▪ Implement traffic control plan to maintain access for emergency services, and coordinate with all service providers and school officials to minimize disruption ▪ If alternatives impact acreage at Blacks Ford Swamp effluent disposal site, relocate site
Visual Quality	▪ Use selective clearing of vegetation to extent feasible ▪ Incorporate landscaping in project design ▪ Use or retain vegetative screening where feasible for sensitive viewing locations ▪ Maintain clean work sites and stage equipment away from sensitive land uses where practical during construction
Air Quality	▪ Appropriate fugitive dust suppression controls, such as spraying water on haul roads adjacent to construction sites, daily street sweeping, covering loaded trucks, and washing haul trucks before leaving the construction site. ▪ Adhere to FDOT's most current edition of *Standard Specifications for Road and Bridge Construction (Florida, 2007).* ▪ Revegetate disturbed areas as soon as possible after construction ▪ Avoid excessive equipment idling ▪ Route heavy truck traffic away from schools and residences when feasible ▪ Maintain construction equipment and ensure proper pollution controls are working ▪ Preserve existing vegetation to extent possible
Water Resources	▪ Meet all permit requirements for water quality through project design, including treatment of stormwater runoff ▪ Implement Best Management Practices during construction to minimize water quality impacts
Wetlands	▪ Mitigate for wetland impacts through use of federally permitted mitigation banks or equivalent offsite mitigation ▪ Design methods will be incorporated that will avoid and minimize wetland impacts
Wildlife and Habitat	▪ Dispose of debris, construction muck and other materials in detention areas or off-site ▪ Implement special provisions for protection of protected species potentially occurring in project area, including shortnosed sturgeon, eastern indigo snake, and manatees. Provisions will include a construction education program ▪ Consider design of underpasses, large culverts, or other wildlife passage ways that may be used to link public land
Fish and Aquatic Resources	▪ Continue coordination with National Marine Fisheries Service, Corps of Engineers, and US Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct detailed field reviews of selected alternative and develop specific mitigation measures and construction procedures ▪ No blasting for Shands Bridge demolition

[1]Some mitigation measures listed above remain under consideration by FDOT, and will be further evaluated for applicability, feasibility and effectiveness, depending on which Build Alternative, if any, is selected as the Preferred Alternative.

Exhibit ES-4: **Summary of Avoidance, Minimization and Mitigation Measures (cont)**

Resource Area	Proposed or Potential Mitigation Measures[1]
Geology and Soils	▪ Implement Best Management Practices for the disposal of wastes and the control of erosion and sedimentation
Contaminated Sites	▪ Complete full evaluation of sites warranting further investigation within the selected corridor ▪ Develop response plan to avoid or remove sites that may be affected, and for handling unexpected sites that may be encountered during construction ▪ Develop a spill plan to be implemented in case of any hazardous materials releases during construction
Navigable Waterways	▪ Provide vertical and horizontal bridge clearances in final design that are acceptable to maritime community ▪ Coordinate with the US Coast Guard to develop and implement marine traffic management plans during construction and to provide public information on construction activities that affect navigation
Floodplains	▪ Avoid any longitudinal encroachments in final design ▪ Design facility to be consistent with applicable regulatory and design standards, with no significant changes to base flood elevations or flood limits ▪ Size all culverts to quality for a FEMA Zero Rise for any regulatory floodways ▪ Design cross drains to maintain natural and beneficial floodplain values ▪ Implement Best Management Practices to minimize erosion and sedimentation effects during construction

[1]Some mitigation measures listed above remain under consideration by FDOT, and will be further evaluated for applicability, feasibility and effectiveness, depending on which Build Alternative, if any, is selected as the Preferred Alternative.

Government Actions Required

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), which is also acting as a cooperative agency on this project, will require a permit for activities within navigable waters of the United States pursuant to Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 U.S.C. §403) and regulate discharge of fill material into waters of the United States pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. §1344). See Chapter 4 for additional detail.

ES.7 WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

This Draft EIS has been published for review and comment by the public. At the end of the 45 day comment period for this document, a Final EIS will be prepared, addressing comments received on the Draft and any new information that may develop between now and then.

FDOT has identified the Pink 1 Alternative as the Locally Preferred Alternative, based on input from scoping, local jurisdictions and alterative analysis. A final Preferred Alternative will be selected after the Draft and Final EIS processes are complete. The Preferred Alternative will be identified in FHWA's Record of Decision for the proposed St. Johns River Crossing Project.

If a Build Alternative is selected as the Preferred Alternative, FDOT would continue developing the facility design, and initiate more detailed surveys of resources within the selected corridor as required by regulations. These surveys would address resources such as cultural resources and protected species of plants, animals and fish. FDOT would also initiate permit applications that must be submitted to and approved by various regulatory agencies. Major permits that would be required for the project are noted in Chapter 4.

Prior to the Final EIS, FDOT will also revise the North Florida Transportation Planning Organization Long Range Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Plan and the FDOT State Transportation Improvement Program. These plans currently include the St. Johns River Crossing Project as a four-lane facility. Revisions will vary depending on the selection and requirements of the Preferred Alternative.