



A National  
Transportation  
Research  
Nonprofit

[www.tripnet.org](http://www.tripnet.org)



# KEEPING RURAL FLORIDA CONNECTED

FEBRUARY 2026

Founded in 1971, TRIP® of Washington, DC, is a nonprofit organization that researches, evaluates and distributes economic and technical data on surface transportation issues. TRIP is sponsored by insurance companies, equipment manufacturers, distributors and suppliers; businesses involved in highway and transit engineering and construction; labor unions; and organizations concerned with efficient and safe surface transportation.

Florida's rural transportation network is critical to the quality of life in Florida's rural communities and provides the first and last link in a regional, state, national and international supply chain that connects the state's rural areas to markets both nearby and around the globe.

With travel increasing on many of Florida's critical rural routes, it will be necessary for the state to modernize these roadways to improve reliability and safety. Investments in Florida's rural roadways have not kept pace with growth in the movement of people and goods and are straining to accommodate increased population, agricultural production, and economic activities in rural areas.

Florida's rural roads face multiple challenges: they lack adequate capacity in some corridors to support growing freight and passenger vehicle travel; they do not provide needed levels of connectivity to some communities; they lack some needed roadway safety features; and they carry a higher share of large trucks than urban roadways, including large trucks needed to support agricultural production, causing increased wear and tear on these road surfaces. Good transportation is essential in rural areas to provide access to jobs, to facilitate the movement of goods and people, to access opportunities for health care and education, and to provide links to social and recreational activities.

TRIP's "Keeping Rural Florida Connected" report examines critical components of the state's rural transportation system and evaluates, statewide and regionally, their adequacy in providing reliable and safe mobility.

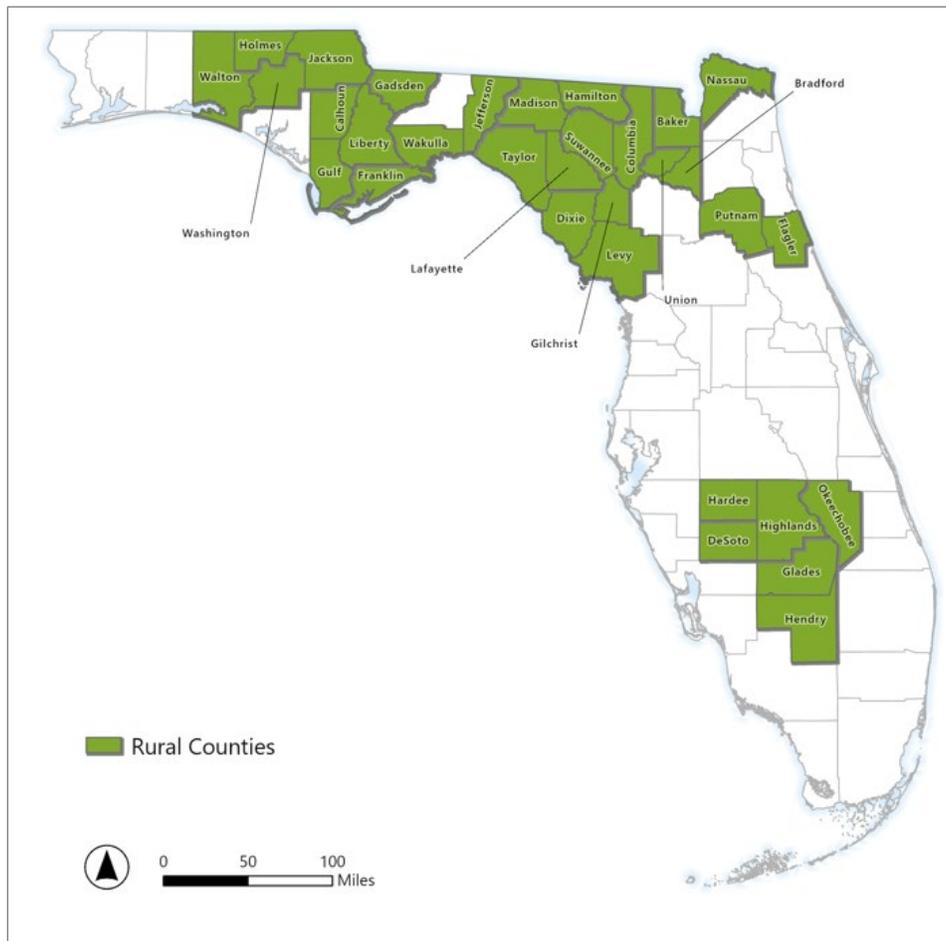
## **RURAL FLORIDA POPULATION AND ECONOMY**

Quality of life and a strong economy continue to attract new residents and businesses to Florida. From 2000 to 2024, Florida's population increased by 46 percent, from 16 million to 23.4 million.<sup>1</sup> This is the sixth highest increase in the nation during that time and more than double the U.S. average of 21 percent. Florida's population is anticipated to increase another 22 percent by 2050, reaching 28.5 million.<sup>2</sup>

The state of Florida defines rural counties as those with a population below 75,000 or a county with a population below 125,000 that is contiguous to a county with a population below 75,000.<sup>3</sup> Of the state's 67 counties, 32 are classified as rural. Approximately 1.1 million Floridians live in predominantly rural counties.<sup>4</sup> Florida's rural counties provide 460,000 jobs and have an annual gross domestic product (GDP) of \$33 billion.<sup>5</sup>

Major economic sectors in Florida's rural counties include agriculture, agri-businesses (which includes transforming agricultural products into finished goods), distribution, e-commerce, transportation and logistics, health services, hospitality and tourism.<sup>6</sup> Rural Florida's historic agricultural roots have broadened into other higher-wage industries focusing on the manufacturing, logistics, health services, tourism and agri-businesses that transform raw agricultural products into finished goods.<sup>7</sup>

The quality of life in Florida's rural areas, and the health of the state's rural economy, from the production and transport of goods and services, to attracting tourism, is highly reliant on the quality of the state's transportation system.



## RURAL FLORIDA TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

Traffic crashes are a major source of fatalities in Florida, particularly in the state’s rural areas. Florida’s rural, non-Interstate roads have a significantly higher fatality rate than all other roads and highways in the state. Because rural Interstate routes are built to very high safety standards and do not have the significant traffic safety deficiencies common on many rural roads, they were excluded from the safety analysis in this report.

In 2023, traffic crashes claimed the lives of 3,396 people in Florida.<sup>8</sup> Traffic crashes on Florida’s non-Interstate rural roads resulted in 625 fatalities in 2023-- 18 percent of all traffic fatalities in Florida.<sup>9</sup>

The fatality rate on Florida rural non-Interstate routes in 2023 was 2.12 for every 100 million VMT, more than one and a half times the fatality rate of 1.32 fatalities per 100 million VMT on all other routes in Florida.<sup>10</sup> A disproportionate share of fatalities take place on rural roads compared to the amount of traffic they carry. While 12 percent of all vehicle travel in Florida in 2023 took place on rural, non-Interstate roads, 18 percent of traffic fatalities occurred on these roads.<sup>11</sup>

Many rural roads have been built with narrow lanes, limited shoulders, significant curves and steep slopes alongside roadways.<sup>12</sup> Traffic fatality rates on rural roads are higher than on urban roads, partly because rural roads are less likely to have adequate safety features and are more likely than urban roads to have only two lanes. Rural routes have often been constructed over a period of years. As a result, they may have inconsistent design features for such things as lane widths, curves, shoulders and clearance zones along roadways.

The severity of serious traffic crashes could be reduced through roadway improvements, where appropriate, such as converting intersections to roundabouts; removing or shielding roadside objects; the addition of left-turn lanes at some intersections; the signalization of intersections; adding or improving median barriers; improved lighting; adding centerline or shoulder rumble strips; providing appropriate pedestrian and bicycle facilities, including sidewalks and bicycle lanes; providing wider lanes, wider and paved shoulders; upgrading roads from two lanes to four lanes; providing better road and lane markings; and, updating rail crossings.

Investments in rural traffic safety have been found to result in significant reductions in serious traffic crashes. A [2012 report by the Texas Transportation Institute \(TTI\)](#) found that improvements completed by the Texas Department of Transportation on 1,159 miles of rural state roadways that widened lanes, improved shoulders and made other safety improvements resulted in 133 fewer fatalities on these roads in the first three years after the improvements were completed (as compared to the three years prior).<sup>13</sup> TTI estimates that the improvements on these roads are likely to save 880 lives over 20 years.<sup>14</sup>

## RURAL FLORIDA TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIVITY

Growing economic activity in urban and rural communities, if not accommodated with improved and expanded transportation facilities, particularly a network of modern highways, can result in a lack of adequate connectivity within rural areas and between rural and urban communities. This lack of connectivity and adequate transportation facilities can impede a region's potential for economic growth.

"Maintaining connectivity is essential not only to serve rural communities, but also to support the shifting agricultural and energy extraction and production needs of a growing population and economy," a [report](#) by the U.S. Transportation Research Board concluded.<sup>15</sup>

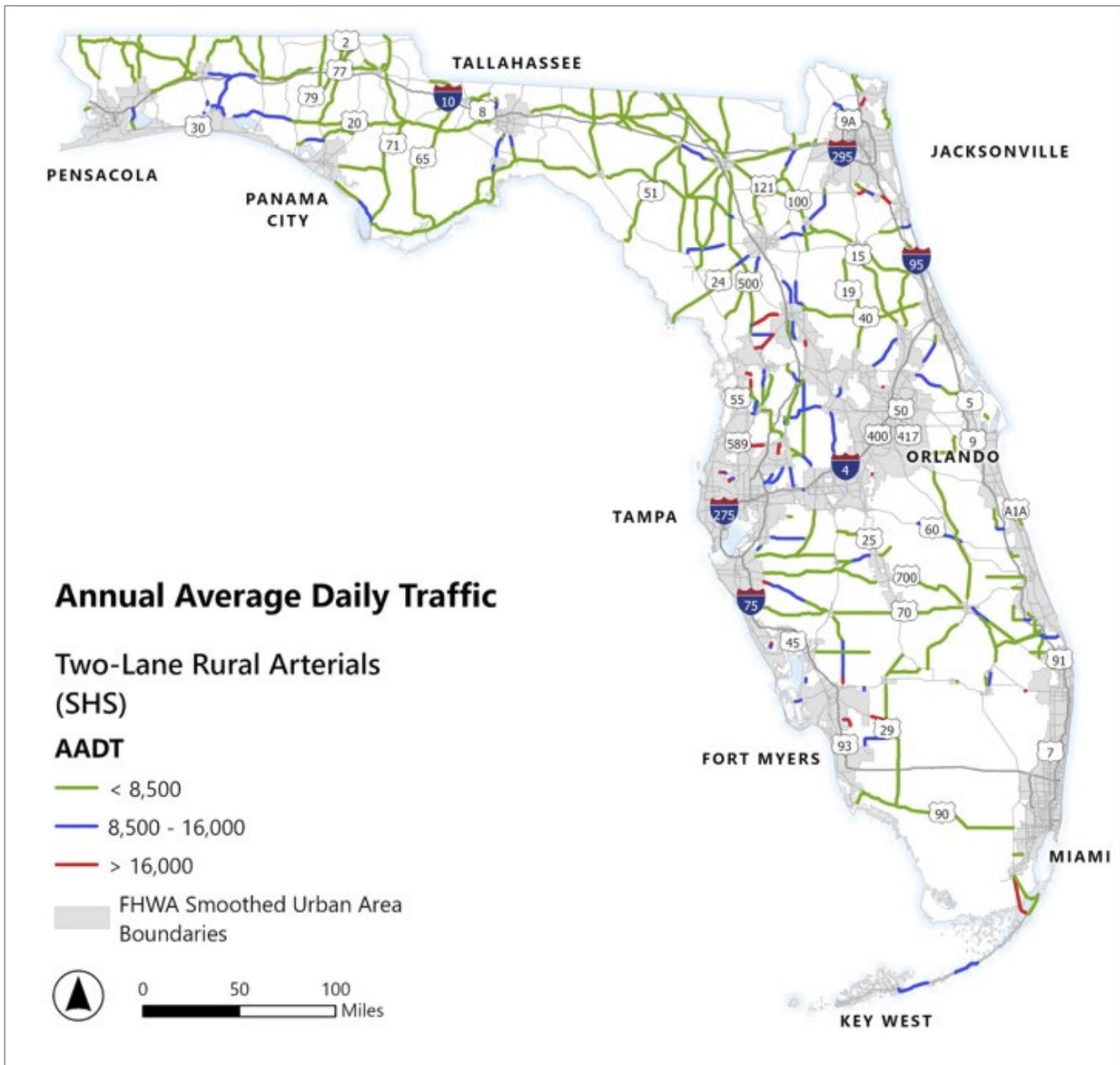
Florida's freight transportation network provides for the movement of raw materials, intermediate goods, and finished products from one location to another. Annually, 890 million tons of freight, valued at \$1.1 trillion dollars, are shipped to and from sites in Florida.<sup>16</sup> The majority of freight shipped in Florida is transported by trucks, which carry 69 percent of freight by value and 78 percent by weight annually.<sup>17</sup> By 2050 freight movement in Florida is expected to increase by 94 percent by value, when adjusted for inflation, and 48 percent by weight.<sup>18</sup>

## FLORIDA'S KEY RURAL CORRIDORS

Providing an adequate level of safe and efficient access in Florida's small communities and rural areas to support quality of life and enhance economic productivity will require Florida to continue to implement transportation policies that will improve rural transportation connectivity and safety.

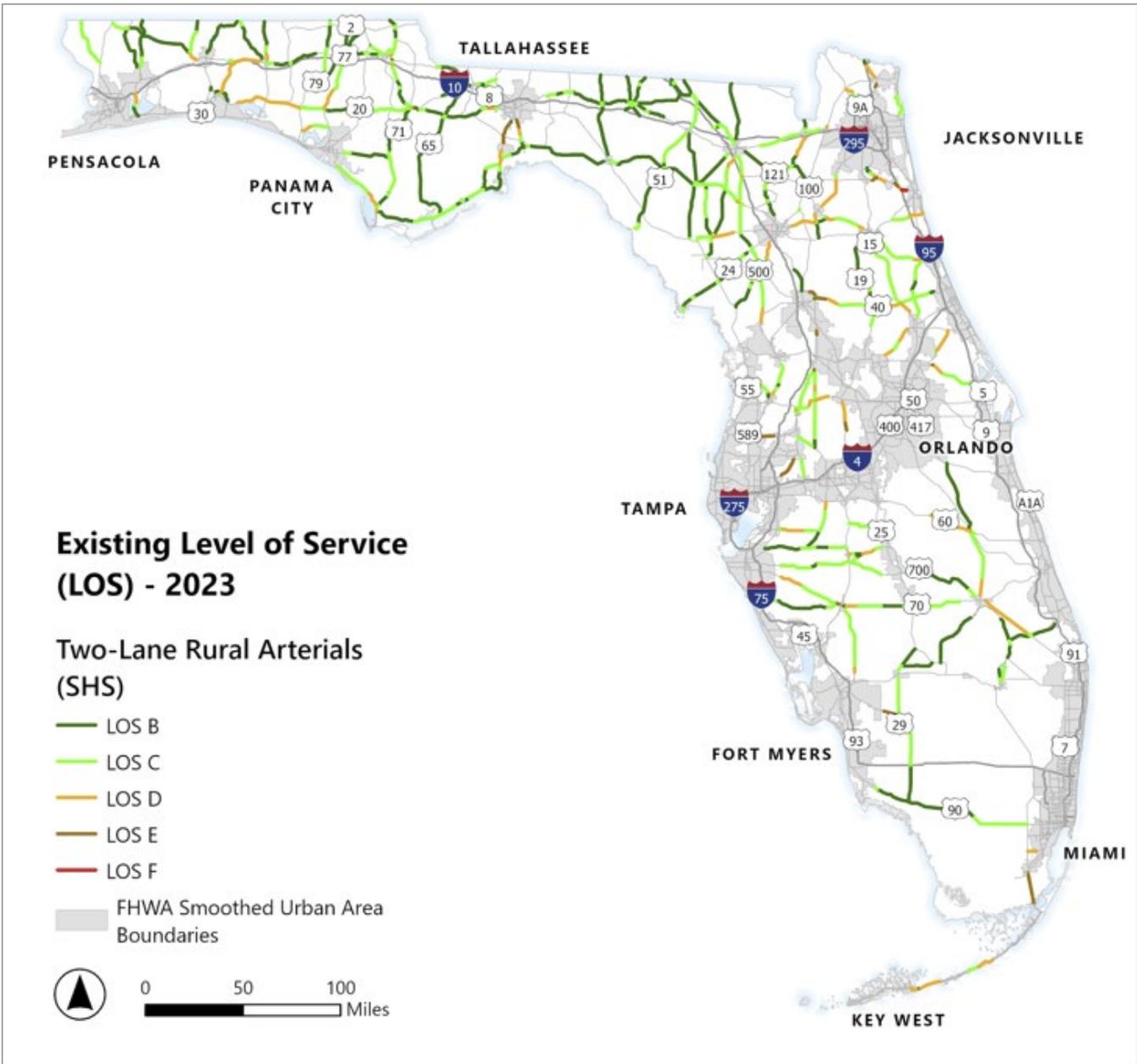
The Florida State Highway System (SHS) is a critical component of Florida's transportation network. Florida's SHS includes major highways and roadways in the state, including a network of rural highways that are vital to rural mobility in Florida. These routes connect the state's rural communities and provide access to Florida's urban centers as well as aviation and maritime ports.

Florida's non-Interstate rural roads carried 29.4 billion miles of vehicle travel in 2023.<sup>19</sup> Approximately one-third of two-lane rural roads on the Florida State Highway System carry at least 8,500 vehicles per day.<sup>20</sup> Of the 1,881 miles of rural two-lane SHS roadways in Florida, 571 miles currently carry from 8,500 to 16,000 vehicles per day and another 99 miles carry more than 16,000 vehicles per day.<sup>21</sup>

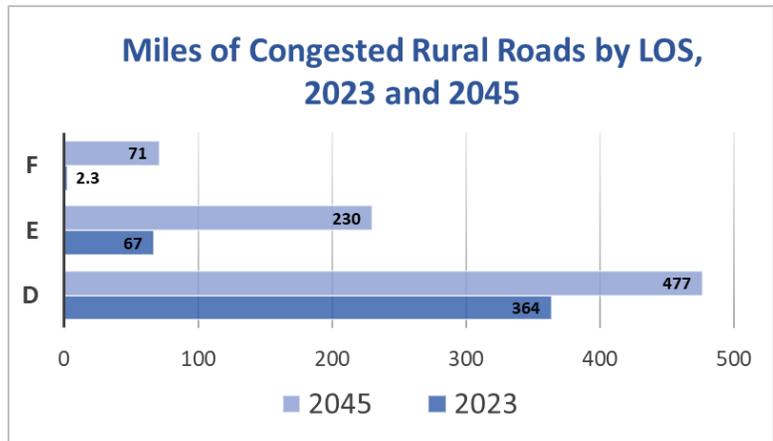


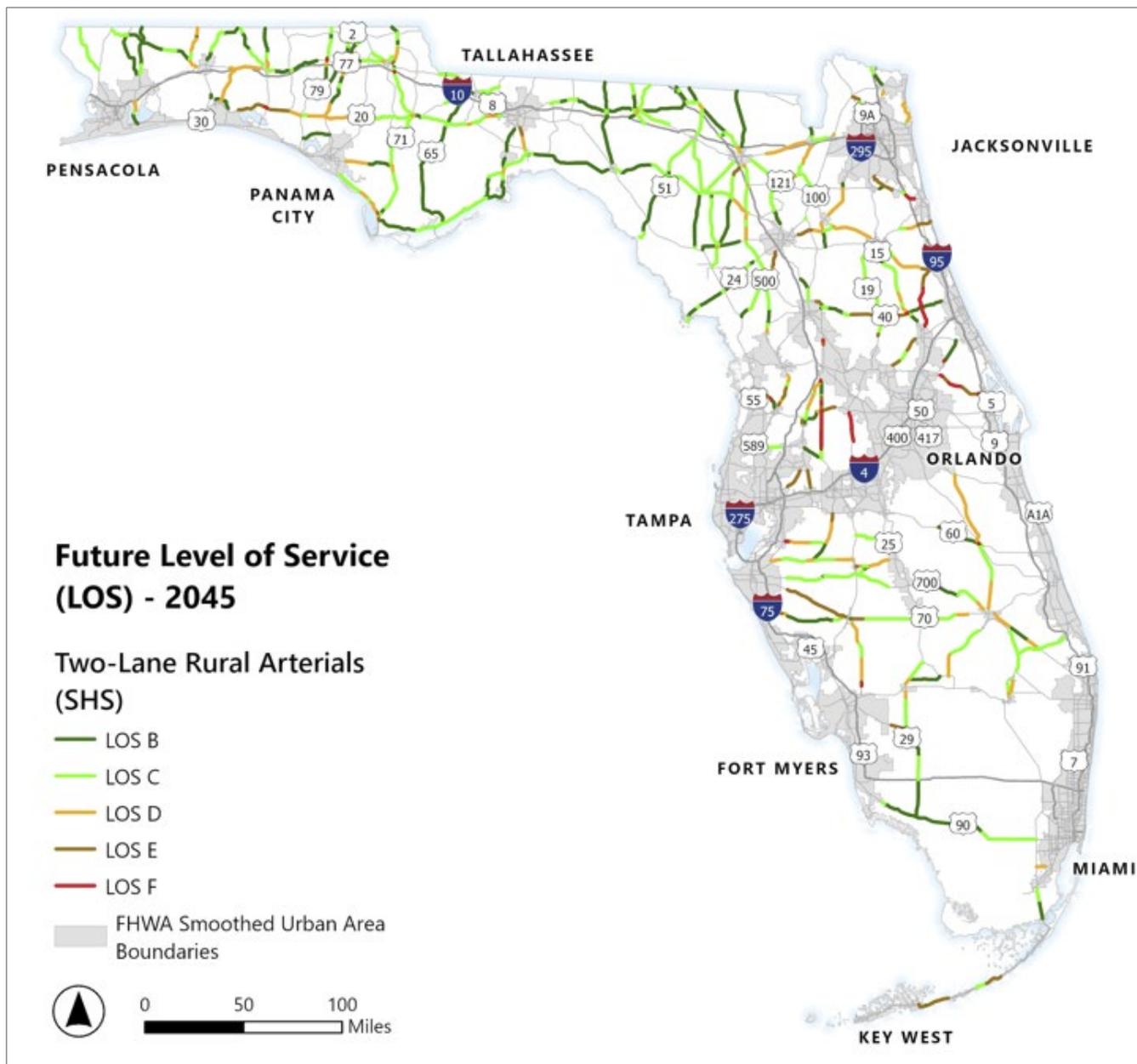
The Level of Service (LOS) on a road measures the quality of traffic on a road and categorizes traffic flow to assign quality levels from “A” through “F” based on factors including speed, congestion and density. Roads with a LOS of “A” have free flowing traffic, while a LOS rating of “D” indicates moderate traffic congestion and a LOS of “F” denotes severe traffic congestion, with very low speeds, long delays, stop-and-go traffic and traffic volumes that exceed the capacity of the roadway.<sup>22</sup>

Florida’s rural roads are increasingly congested, carrying traffic volumes that routinely lead to reduced speeds. A total of 433 miles - 23 percent - of rural two-lane SHS roadways in Florida were considered congested in 2023, with a (LOS) rating of “D” (364 miles), “E” (67 miles) or “F” (2.3 miles).<sup>23</sup>

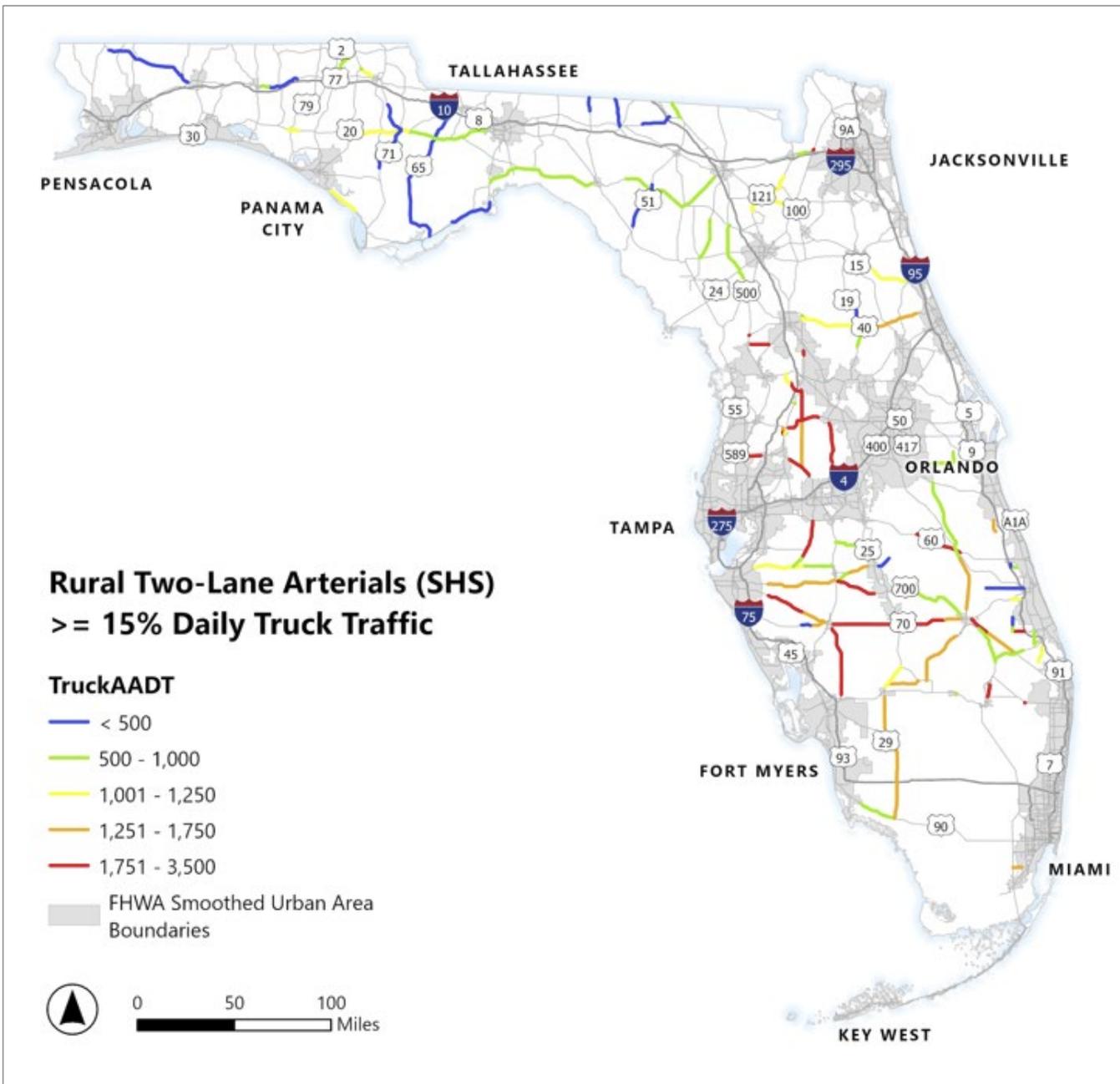


The level of congestion on Florida’s rural two-lane SHS roads is expected to increase significantly in the future. FDOT projects that by 2045, 748 miles - 40 percent - of rural two-lane SHS roads will be considered congested, with a LOS rating of “D” (447 miles), “E” (230 miles) or “F” (71 miles).<sup>24</sup> This is a 73 percent increase over 2023, when 433 total miles of rural two-lane SHS roads were considered congested.

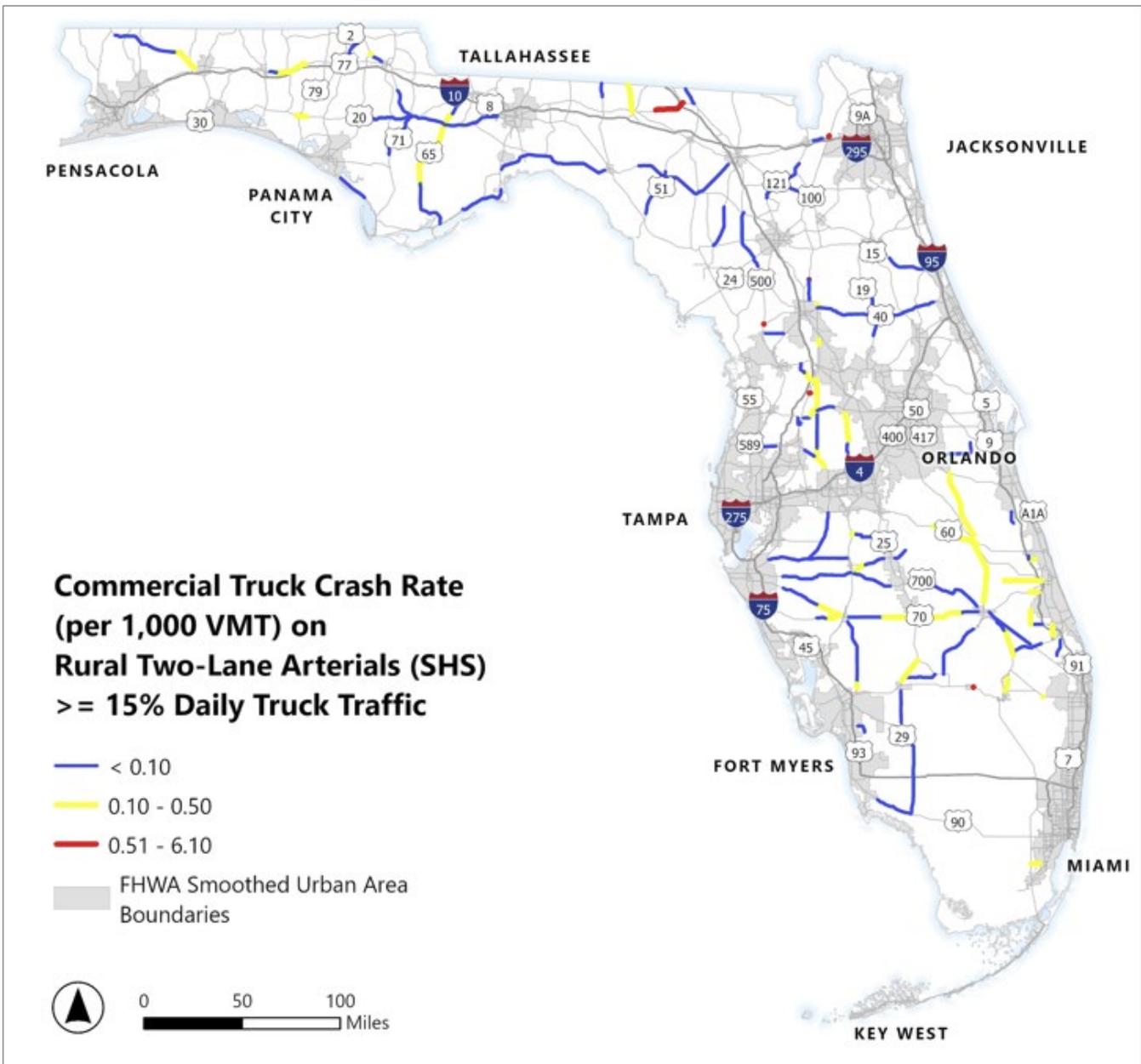




Florida’s SHS system carries significant commercial truck travel, with large truck travel accounting for more than 15 percent of all vehicle travel on 1,410 miles of Florida’s rural SHS roadways. The following map details the portions of Florida’s rural SHS routes carrying the largest share of large truck travel.



Crashes involving large trucks in Florida result in a significant number of traffic fatalities. In 2024, 272 people were killed in Florida crashes involving commercial trucks. From 2017 to 2021, an average of 336 people were killed in Florida crashes involving large trucks, with an average of 48 deaths among large truck occupants and 288 among non-large truck occupants. The chart below indicates portions of Florida’s rural SHS routes with high rates of traffic crashes involving commercial trucks.



## IMPROVING FLORIDA'S RURAL CONNECTIVITY

Rural Florida is experiencing economic and population growth that is straining its transportation system, the safety and reliability of which will play a vital role in quality of life and a strong economy in the state's rural communities. The state's rural transportation network faces significant challenges including increasing levels of traffic, a lack of adequate connectivity and the need for additional roadway safety features.

The state's ability to invest adequately in its rural transportation system will be impacted by inflation in the cost of road, highway and bridge repairs. The Federal Highway Administration's national highway construction cost index, which measures labor and materials cost, increased by 47 percent from the beginning of 2022 through the first half of 2025.<sup>25</sup>



Providing Florida with a rural transportation network that will support further economic growth and maintain its quality of life will require continued investment in a rural transportation system that is safe and reliable and that provides adequate mobility and connectivity to the state’s rural communities.

###

## ENDNOTES

- 
- <sup>1</sup> TRIP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.
- <sup>2</sup> Cooper Center (2024). National Population Projections. <https://www.coopercenter.org/national-population-projections>
- <sup>3</sup> Florida State Legislature. The 2024 Florida State Statutes. [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&URL=0200-0299/0288/Sections/0288.0656.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0200-0299/0288/Sections/0288.0656.html)
- <sup>4</sup> The Florida Council of 100. Rural Florida. <https://fc100.org/economic-competitiveness/rural>
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> TRIP analysis of National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Federal Highway Administration data (2023).
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> County Engineers Adopt Rural Road Safety Program. Minnesota Local Technical Assistance Program.
- <sup>13</sup> Adding Highway Shoulders, Width, Reduce Crash Numbers and Save Lives (August 9, 2012). Texas Transportation Institute. <https://tti.tamu.edu/2012/08/09/tti-study-analyzes-roadway-improvements/>
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> National Cooperative Highway Research Program, Transportation Research Board (2007). Future Options for the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways. ES-ii.
- <sup>16</sup> Federal Highway Administration, Freight Analysis Framework (2025). Data is for 2022. [https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/freight\\_analysis/faf/](https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/freight_analysis/faf/)
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Federal Highway Administration (2023). Highway Statistics. Table VM-2. <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2022/>
- <sup>20</sup> Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) response to TRIP survey. 2025.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation (2021). Evolving Use of Level of Service Metrics in Transportation Analysis – Introduction [Evolving Use of Level of Service Metrics in Transportation Analysis - Introduction](#)
- <sup>23</sup> Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) response to TRIP survey. 2025.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Federal Highway Administration (2026). National Highway Construction Cost Index. <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policy/otps/nhcci/>