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The Workforce Issue

Q&A with FDOT COO
Will Watts, Jr., P.E.
on Workforce Initiatives

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Strong partnerships between FDOT, FTBA, workforce organizations and state agencies are helping build pipelines that support today's needs while preparing for tomorrow's projects. When we invest in people, we strengthen our ability to deliver for decades to come.

Built to Deliver

One word defines what we do every day: deliver.

FTBA contractors deliver the roads, bridges and infrastructure that keep Florida moving. We deliver projects safely and efficiently. We deliver solutions to regions and communities that depend on reliable transportation. And increasingly, we are being asked to deliver these things faster and with a workforce that is stretched thinner than ever.

Workforce remains one of the most pressing challenges facing transportation contractors across the state. Without skilled operators, technicians, drivers, engineers and project managers, delivery becomes harder, more expensive and less predictable. FTBA contractors understand this reality better than anyone. That is why we strongly support efforts that expand career pathways, invest in training and reduce risk for contractors willing to bring new talent into the industry.

We are encouraged by the growing recognition that workforce development is fundamental to delivering Florida's transportation program. Strong partnerships between FDOT, FTBA, workforce organizations and state agencies are helping build pipelines that support today's needs while preparing for tomorrow's

projects. When we invest in people, we strengthen our ability to deliver for decades to come.

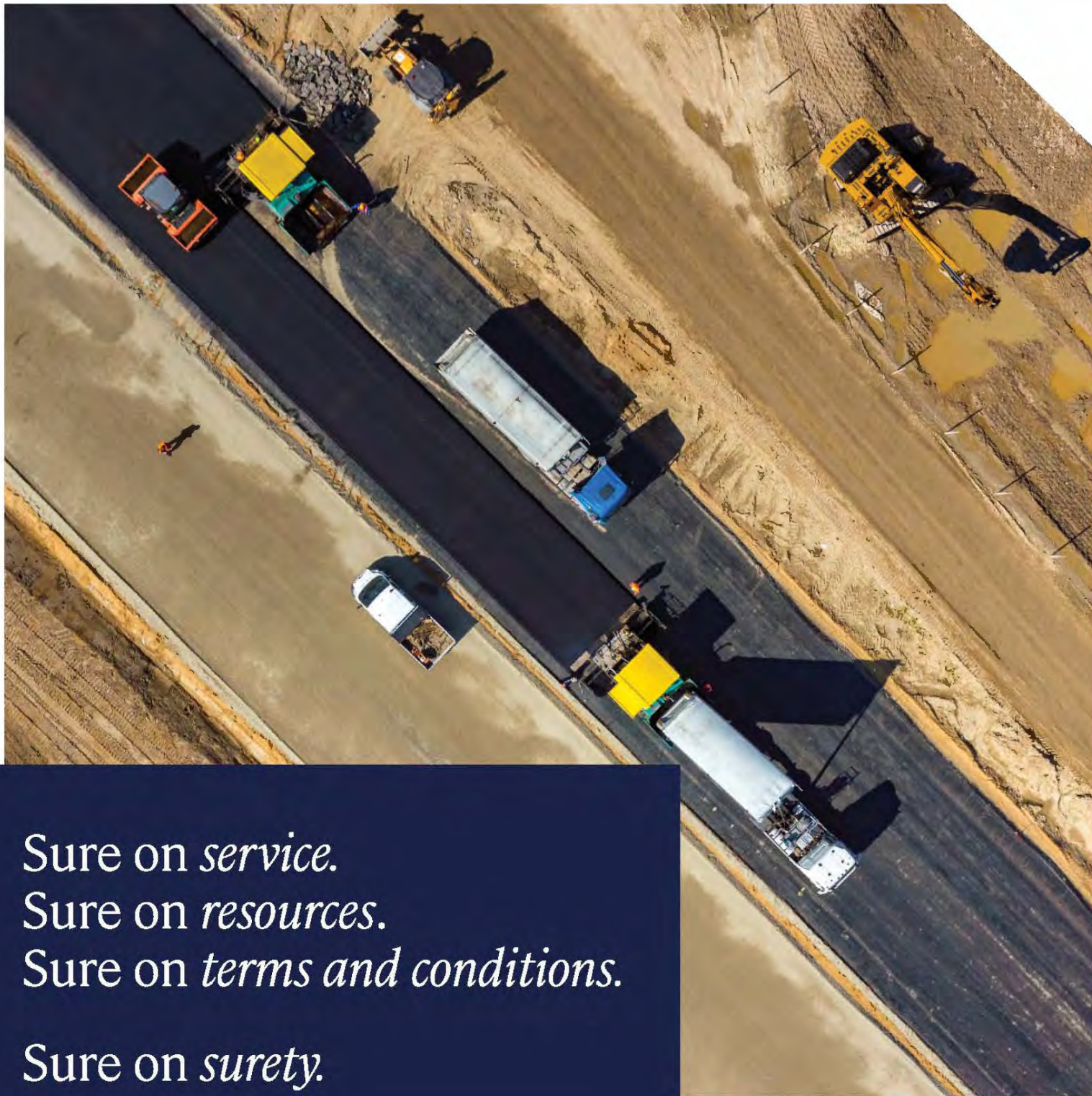
Delivery also matters at the policy level. As we move through this year's legislative session, FTBA continues to advocate for a reliable, strong transportation budget and fair contracting practices. A reliable budget allows contractors to plan, invest in equipment, hire and train employees and deliver projects with confidence. Timely payment and streamlined processes are essential tools that keep projects moving and protect the health of the contracting community.

For the people of Florida, delivery means something even more personal. It means safer roads for families, reliable commutes for workers and infrastructure that supports economic growth and quality of life. Every project delivered by an FTBA contractor represents trust that the work will be done right and that public dollars will be spent responsibly.

I am proud of how our members continue to meet these expectations. You deliver under challenging conditions, tight schedules and evolving demands. You adapt. You innovate. And you show up every day to build the foundation of Florida's future.

I look forward to seeing you at the Construction Symposium in Orlando.





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Dan Hurtado, P.E.
President

Charting the Path Forward

Florida's transportation construction industry continues to operate at an extraordinary pace. Across the state, FTBA contractors are delivering complex projects that improve safety, reduce congestion and support economic growth in every region. As we begin 2026, the responsibility placed on our industry is significant – and so is the opportunity.

One issue rises consistently to the top of every conversation: workforce. Simply put, delivering Florida's transportation program requires skilled, trained professionals who can meet the demands of increasingly sophisticated projects. I was encouraged, and frankly energized, by the clear commitment FDOT is demonstrating to address this challenge head-on, particularly through initiatives like the Florida Transportation Academy and expanded workforce partnerships described by FDOT Chief Operating Officer Will Watts, Jr., P.E. in his interview on page 10.

What stood out most in that conversation was FDOT's recognition that a healthy transportation program depends on a healthy contracting industry. Programs such as paid job readiness training, craft and trade instruction, CDL training, mobile learning labs and new high school outreach efforts reflect a meaningful shift – one that acknowledges workforce development as a shared responsibility between the public and private sectors. These efforts reduce risk for

contractors, open new entry points into our industry and help build a more predictable, sustainable pipeline of talent statewide.

FTBA strongly supports this approach. Our association has long believed that solving workforce challenges requires collaboration, innovation and early engagement, not just competition for the same limited pool of workers. As Mr. Watts emphasized, regional solutions, proactive planning around major project corridors and leveraging experienced industry professionals as trainers are smart, practical steps that benefit everyone involved.

At the same time, FTBA remains focused on advocacy. As we enter the beginning of the 2026 legislative session – the final session of Governor Ron DeSantis' administration – FTBA is championing bill language aimed at streamlining FDOT contracting practices and ensuring contractors are paid in a timely manner. We are grateful for Governor DeSantis' leadership and his continued commitment to advancing transportation infrastructure across Florida.

Additionally, I am especially excited for the 2026 Transportation Symposium

in Orlando, where our theme will be "Deliver." That word perfectly captures what FTBA contractors do every day. You deliver projects. You deliver solutions. And you deliver value to the traveling public, often under challenging conditions and tight schedules.

FTBA's role is to support that work. We will continue to advocate for policies that strengthen our industry, partner with FDOT on workforce solutions that reflect real-world needs and create opportunities for members to connect, learn and lead.

Thank you for your continued engagement with FTBA and for the essential role you play in building Florida's future.

Our association has long believed that solving workforce challenges requires collaboration, innovation and early engagement, not just competition for the same limited pool of workers.



Preparing the Next Generation of Roadbuilders

A Conversation with FDOT COO
Will Watts, Jr., P.E.



Attendees from the first Florida Transportation Academy class operate heavy equipment simulators, mastering a much-needed skill for job sites.

As Florida's transportation system continues to grow at record pace, few leaders are as focused on meeting the state's workforce demands as Will Watts, P.E., Chief Operating Officer and Assistant Secretary of the Florida Department of Transportation. From expanding hands-on training pipelines to launching innovative programs through the Florida Transportation Academy, Watts has become one of FDOT's most visible champions for developing the next generation of road and bridge builders.

In this conversation with *Florida Transportation Builder*, he shares how the agency is tackling workforce shortages head on, what new skills will be needed in the decade ahead and how strong partnerships with FTBA contractors will shape the future of Florida's infrastructure.

Q: From your seat as FDOT's Chief Operating Officer, how would you describe the workforce challenge facing Florida's road and bridge builders right now?

Our agency is a building agency, so we want to continue to create congestion relief and safety solutions for all Floridians.

In order to complete projects, we need people to help build them. Getting people into the construction industry has been very successful from a local standpoint, but we also have seen gaps and hurdles for all contractors statewide.

Traditionally, we would leave this up to industry to self-solve, but with initiatives that have resulted from multiple legislative sessions, we have been able to work with legislators to give us the tools we need to help provide training and recruitment for contractors.

Another way to look at it is, if the folks who help build our projects are not there, we have a risk from both a pricing and a job completion standpoint. So if anything, it should be part of the agency's responsibility to help reduce that workforce risk for the contractor community. We started supporting the industry with one of the initial corridor programs in 2019 where we were able to utilize the first workforce development dollars. That first program, Contractors Job-Readiness Hiring and Training through Statewide Workforce Development, is still in existence today, and that program involves taking an at-risk type of employee and training them on the job with the contractor, and FDOT pays the first couple months of sal-



Will Watts, Jr., P.E.

ary. In that case, we are opening up that risk profile to the contractor to say, maybe I wouldn't have hired this person before, but I'm going to give them a chance now, because there's an incentive.

We are seeing about a 40% retainage rate on that program, which is pretty good, because that is recruiting and attracting folks who may or may not have come into the construction industry. That program has served many thousands of new entry points to construction in Florida. We have continued to expand that program, not only for contractors, but for other industries too, and we're proud what we are doing there.

When we have big projects like I-4, we want to try to take a specialty approach. We have been very successful at project-level recruitment events in Tampa and other places where you can attract local people to work who have less hurdles to get to the job site. We have taken that program and expanded it for I-4 and Osceola and Polk Counties. In those counties, we expect a pretty good spike of need for a couple of thousand workers, and to have four or five contractors organically grab those and pull them into industry is a good thing.

We are working to come up with additional solutions, and the first solution is to create a construction component of the Florida Transportation Academy focused on skilled labor, craft labor and CDL-A and CDL-B training. We held our first class in Kissimmee in June of this year, and we have graduated five or six classes since. The goal is to graduate 500



Kunjalakkadu Varghese Mathew works on heavy equipment CDL as part of his training.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FDOT.

new entry points into construction for that market every year until we fill the need for I-4, which will take us two or three years.

We've had three different classes that we recruited through some of our FDOT events in the area, and we are putting about 40 individuals through per class. It takes about a month to get through the craft and trade class. We built out a classroom setting first, and it has 14 simulators, different types of Caterpillar equipment and semi-truck simulators as well.

The first class of four weeks is taught by our contractors in the industry but also by staff we have on site to teach things like OSHA and the basics of operating heavy equipment. That gets trainees a certificate program after four weeks. We have 100% placement coming out of that program.

We have had two graduating classes out of that program. One is the practical side, so they will get practical experience on the actual equipment. That is a two-week class. We also offer a CDL-B, which

"We all have to work to educate folks that construction is an alternative to other types of trade schools or academia."

FDOT COO Will Watts, Jr., P.E.

is dump truck operator training that the industry really needs. We have also put through two classes of CDL-A, which is semi-trucks, and we have put about 45 people through that class.

We are in our fifth month now, and we are filling out that classroom as quickly as we can recruit. We are using a lot of local industry partners to help recruit, and we have had a high success rate so far. We will focus on craft and trade to build that pipeline for the region, but we also want to flex that CDL component because a lot of contractors need CDL-B drivers. We really need the craft and trade for I-4, but we need CDL-B drivers statewide, so there is an opportunity to start sending existing employees down to the Kissimmee campus as well.

We are on week three of launching a mobile version where we built out semi-trucks with simulators that have become a mobile classroom. We are in the Jacksonville region right now with that mobile class, and the idea is very similar. We want to accommodate about 500 students, but instead of just focusing on I-4, now we can take a mobile setting around the state and recruit new entry points to this industry and train them for basic skills. We want to train them in the region where they can ultimately work.

The overarching goal of the transportation academy is to develop curriculums and processes to educate and train people to enter directly into transportation industry workforce. We started with the Construction Division that is offering the Craft and Trades Program and CDL Training, then the mobile learning labs sets up on-the-job, hands-on learning opportunities and training for technical professions on FDOT projects.

The third component out of the industry bill that we are very excited about,

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Instructor Willie of the Academy's Construction Division demonstrates how to operate CDL simulators.

which is the high school entry point. How do we really attract students from high schools? We are going to take a similar concept and build out 10 trailers with simulators that have multiple joysticks, foot pedals and different interaction points so the user can change the type of equipment based on software.

The idea there is that we would have a trainer and leave the trailer with the school for a month or two and let them put through their cycle of students who can start gaining some interest and basic skills. The ultimate goal would be that as we move those trailers around the state, we start to pique students' interest and start pointing them out into the industry.

One of the big things that you often hear is, 'How do you attract people to work outside?' and I think we work to truly convey the message that this is a career path. Working in construction isn't just an hourly job; it can be very rewarding – both financially and as a career – so we have to tell that story better. ACAF has worked on marketing material to help us do that.

That is another area where we can do better at the high school entry points and the training trailers. That can be a very positive experience for those students but also let them know that they can come into a job not making \$13 an hour, but \$50 grand a year. In multiple years, they will increase that income based on skill level and interest. We all have to work to educate folks that construction is an alternative to other types of trade schools or academia. We need good people in all facets of road-building.

Q: How would you describe The Florida Transportation Academy's role, and how it will help create a more predictable, statewide talent pipeline for road and bridge construction?

The Academy gave us the authority to create programs based on what we are trying to accomplish. We are working on Road to Your Future events, which help recruit and retain people in-house. We are also working on recruitment events with STEM and the ACEC, where we are working on our bridge-building boxes.

We have needs in every sector, both FDOT and contractors, and one of the issues we run into, especially in Central Office, is finding medium to senior technical people because they are running programs, they are setting policies and they have the technical expertise that people lean on. We also need to grow that sector, so we're working on different plans for that.

Q: You mentioned Road to Your Future events. Can you talk a little more about that and how FTBA members can be involved?

Road to Your Future events have been primarily focused on in-house hiring opportunities, where we flexed a lot of our contractor support. The Construction Career Day events around the state are more of a coalition between our CI partners, our FDOT folks and contractors. We have seen some significant hires from Road to Your Future. We have had same-day hiring, which is significant. But at both of those events, we are piquing some interest in pay, opportunity and excitement.



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Q: How are you leveraging CDL training within the workforce program?

CDL-B – dump truck drivers – are a huge resource need, both for hauling divisible loads and asphalt right on the job site. Getting more CDL-B drivers does help relieve the strain of a big job or multiple jobs around in that region. One thing we have done, at least for entry points in the Academy for the I-4 area, is to help with compensation.

When you go to truck driving school, you are not working. You are going to

school, so you are not getting paid for two or four weeks of classes, based on the CLD-A or CDL-B. We have taken away that hurdle, and we are paying students at least minimum wage and feeding them lunch. They get paid to train. That is one of our slogans: Paid to train.

That is something we would encourage for existing employees who want to get a CDL-B. Instead of going to truck driving school, they will get a lot more one-on-one attention with one of our classes. We have industry-taught educators and people who care about this industry who will



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give a lot more attention to those truck drivers to make sure they are successful.

What we have seen overwhelmingly is the sense of pride that these people have because they feel like they are taken care of, they feel supported, they feel like somebody is looking out for them, and I think that helps a lot – the atmosphere we create with these classes. You can go to a commercial truck driving school, which is still great. But we are kind of fixing our own issue with people who love this industry.

Q: FDOT is leaning into advanced technologies – from innovative construction methods to emerging mobility solutions. What skills do you think our workforce will need over the next decade to build and maintain that system?

Our next wave of needs will be having more electrical technicians in the field. We need a lot of them to help with ITS and signals. These are the same skill sets needed for vertical construction, data centers, automated vehicles and advanced air mobility.

Electrical technicians are going to be in high demand in the future, so our next phase of workforce development is going to be focused on some of those technical trades, which will be focused on electrical trades. You can see how projects are performing around the state, and that is one area that seems to lag sometimes, mainly because there are limited resources of who can do that work. You are going to see us really step that up.

Q: From your perspective, what does a really strong workforce partnership between FDOT and FTBA contractors look like? What are the best examples you're seeing around the state right now?

A strong partnership means that both sides are leaning in to help solve the problem, and sometimes that means helping a region versus just helping a particular owner or a particular brand. You are starting to see that emerge in a couple of different markets where people are willing to work together to solve the workforce need.

We like to hear from the contractors to see what ideas they have for solutions, and we understand that if the contractors aren't successful, we can't be successful. We all have to solve this problem together.

One of the worst situations we can have is multiple contractors competing off that same resource. If we start building regional solutions like we are doing on I-4, and replicate that in different areas around the state, that is a great partnership where FTBA can help us. We are not going to solve all problems at once, but where we see a spike in big projects, like the Tampa Bay and Orlando regions where we have big project groupings together, let's think about it a year or two in advance and start putting plans together to recruit and train people so we are not fighting for the same resources.

One thing that I think FTBA members have been very successful at doing – and this is a kind of a new concept – is utilizing folks who have worked in the industry their whole career, but they cannot physically handle the field work anymore. Those are great teaching opportunities.

Those people can come back in the classroom. They can teach people how to run equipment. They teach people how to look at a problem and solve it. We have a few contractors around the state who retain those talents to teach, develop and train. They may have retired otherwise, but now they can come back, stay in the workforce and help the next generation grow. It's a good way to think about it.



Students participate in various learning opportunities, including this classroom setting from the first Academy class.



FDOT semi at the CDL testing pad in Davenport.



First Academy class attendee Terryl accepts his job with The de Moya Group.

Mission Ready

The Veteran Workforce Advantage

By Amy King



Florida's transportation builders are facing one of the tightest labor markets in memory, but they are also sitting on one of the strongest talent pipelines in the country. With 22 military bases, over 1.5 million veterans and thousands of service members transitioning out of the military each year, contractors have access to a deeply skilled workforce that aligns with high-demand roadway roles.

Across the state, organizations like Veterans Florida, CareerSource and Helmets to Hardhats are simplifying the process for FTBA members to connect with veteran candidates. Together they offer MOS code translation, SkillBridge placement, GI Bill-supported training paths and recruiting assistance. What once felt complex has become a low-friction, employer-friendly system.

"Florida's system is built so contractors don't have to guess," said Joe Marino, Executive Director of Veterans Florida. "If an employer is trying to fill immediate job positions, CareerSource is their best option. If they want a long-term pipeline that brings separating service members from all over the country into Florida, they can come to us to build that connection."

Getting Veteran Candidates in Days

The simplest and fastest entry point for FTBA contractors starts with CareerSource. Every region in Florida operates its own local CareerSource, but each uses the same statewide platform – Employ Florida – to post job openings, manage candidate referrals and flag positions for veteran priority service.

"We keep it simple," said April Torregiante, Vice President of Program Services for CareerSource Tampa Bay. "Contractors contact their local CareerSource, we learn what projects they're hiring for, we create or update their employer profile in Employ Florida, and we flag the job orders for veteran priority. Once the posting is in the system, our veteran staff begins sourcing and pre-screening candidates. Most employers are fully set up and seeing veteran referrals within a few business days."

Along with Employ Florida, there is also Employ Florida Vets. Both run as parallel systems with the exception that one is

"A lot of infantry and artillery guys lean toward construction. They're familiar with heavy machinery, they're mechanically minded and they show up every day ready to work. That's exactly the talent you want on a job site."

Graham Hadley, Southeast Representative for Helmets to Hardhats

general and one is veterans-specific. Employers can post on both platforms to maximize visibility. CareerSource assists with the process at no cost, and they can help edit job postings to make them easily understood by transitioning service members.

"One of the basic services we offer is helping employers translate job descriptions so veterans can clearly see how their MOS experience connects with civilian roles," Torregiante said. "We sit down with the employer, review their posting, suggest alternatives and even link it to military occupational codes."

For small and midsize contractors without in-house recruiters, this support can become an extension of their HR department. CareerSource staff pre-screen candidates, refer vetted applicants, organize hiring events and even coordinate veteran-focused group interviews or site-based hiring days that allow employers to meet multiple candidates at once.

"We act as their recruiting partner at no cost," Torregiante said. "We can support outreach, referrals, hiring events or whatever else the employer needs."

Connecting Military Careers to Civilian Job Roles

Many contractors assume they must learn dozens of Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) codes before hiring veterans. In reality, Florida's veteran talent pool naturally aligns with transportation construction be-

cause many service members already operate heavy equipment, manage logistics, maintain machinery or lead crews.

"Navy Seabees and the Army Corps of Engineers have the most directly transferable experience to roadbuilding," Marino said. "Although, across the military, you're going to see maintenance, project planning, equipment operation and logistics. A lot of military folks have transferable skills even if they don't have direct highway experience."

Air Force civil engineering units such as RED HORSE, which stands for Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineer, regularly perform jobs with skills that overlap with roadway work like runway, pavement and horizontal construction. Florida's National Guard engineer battalions also frequently complete missions that are similar to grading, paving, earthwork and bridge support.

"A lot of infantry and artillery guys lean toward construction," said Graham Hadley, Southeast Representative for Helmets to Hardhats, an organization that partners with construction trade unions to connect transitioning military members into the industry through registered apprenticeship programs. "They're familiar with heavy machinery, they're mechanically minded, and they show up every day ready to work. That's exactly the talent you want on a job site."

Even when MOS codes are not a direct match, the underlying competencies often are. Diesel mechanics maintain multi-million-dollar vehicles. Aircraft maintainers follow strict safety and technical procedures that parallel equipment diagnostics. Combat engineers build under pressure, manage risk and follow structured operational plans that are nearly identical to project execution on road and bridge crews.

"The easiest way for an employer to understand MOS skills is to hire a veteran onto their recruiting team," Marino said. "A veteran on staff can look at a resume and instantly know if that service member is a fit."

Building a Long-Term Pipeline through SkillBridge

While CareerSource handles immediate openings, Veterans Florida manages longer-range pipelines through the Department of Defense's SkillBridge program,

which allows service members in their final months of active duty to work full time with a civilian employer while the military continues to pay their salary and benefits.

"It's essentially an unpaid internship for the employer," Marino said. "The service member is still on active duty and receiving full pay, but they're at the employer's site for 40 hours a week learning the industry."

SkillBridge requires a memorandum of understanding between Veterans Florida and the employer. Once enrolled, employers can host service members from any branch, often for 90 to 180 days depending on branch rules. Service members typically begin planning their next steps one to two years before separation. That long runway allows employers to schedule SkillBridge participants months in advance.

"It's not a two-week resume cycle," said Jeremy Sinnemaki, Deputy Executive Director of Veterans Florida. "It's pipeline development. The military ultimately dictates start dates, but employers that engage early get access to candidates before they even hit the job market."

This structure reduces hiring risk dramatically. Contractors only extend job offers after seeing candidates work in real conditions for several months. This allows both sides to determine whether they are a right fit for each other.

Funding Offsets and No-Cost Training Supports for Contractors

Florida's workforce system includes several funding streams that help offset training costs for new veteran hires. CareerSource regions manage federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) dollars, on-the-job training (OJT) reimbursements and work-based learning grants that can cover a portion of a new employee's wages while they learn the job. The availability varies by region, but every CareerSource center can help contractors identify eligible programs.

Veterans also bring additional funding pathways. Many construction apprenticeships allow use of the GI Bill, which provides a monthly Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) during training. While most FTBA contractors are non-union, understanding GI Bill benefits is increasingly relevant as more employers build their own structured training paths.

"What's unique is veterans can use their GI Bill while going through an apprenticeship that costs them nothing," Hadley said. "They receive a BAH payment every month, which helps them support their families while they learn."

Veteran Roadway Boot Camps

One of Florida's strongest veteran-to-infrastructure pipelines emerged from a collaboration between CareerSource Tampa Bay, FDOT's OnBoard Tampa Bay initiative and local contractors. Together, they host Roadway Training Boot Camps designed specifically for veterans. The boot camps combine classroom instruction, hands-on exposure, job site tours and direct connection to contractors that are hiring for grading, flagging, CDL and equipment roles. The results have been so remarkable that CareerSource regions across Florida are now replicating it, creating a multi-county pipeline into roadway roles.

"In Tampa Bay, our veteran boot camps have a 95% placement rate with FDOT contractors," Torregiante said. "We even bring previous boot camp graduates back as guest speakers because many of them have been promoted to foremen or supervisors. Seeing one of their own succeed gives new candidates a lot of hope."

First-Year Retention: Keeping Veterans in the Industry

Contractors frequently report that veterans rise quickly once they join road crews. Their reliability, discipline and comfort with structured operations translate directly into production.

"A lot of service members come out with experience leading teams, managing projects and maintaining expensive equipment," Marino said. "They're ready from day one."

"Retention starts immediately with clear expectations, hands-on training, regular check-ins and a peer mentor," Torregiante said. "Giving veterans a written 30-60-90 day plan as structure is something they value, along with clearly communicating your mission and advancement opportunities. They want to know the larger mission they're working for. They want to see a pathway."

What Contractors Can Do Now

For contractors who have never recruited through a veteran-serving organization, the starting point is simple: Contact your local CareerSource, ask for the Veterans Employment Team or Business Services and upload your current openings into Employ Florida. Along with that, contractors ready to build a longer-term pipeline should contact Veterans Florida at vetsteam@veteransflorida.org to explore SkillBridge opportunities.

"You're not just filling jobs; you're building long-term career pathways for people who served our country," Torregiante said.

On the talent side, veterans are looking for industries like roadbuilding.

"There are a lot of veterans looking to get into construction right now," Hadley said. "They want stability, good work and a chance to grow. Road and bridge work gives them that."

For FTBA members, the moment has never been better. Florida's veteran workforce is aligned, motivated and available, and the state's partners have made the path into your company clear, supported and built for long-term success.

"Florida is becoming a national model," Marino said. "The veteran talent is here, the systems are in place and employers who engage now will have a competitive advantage for years."

For More Information:

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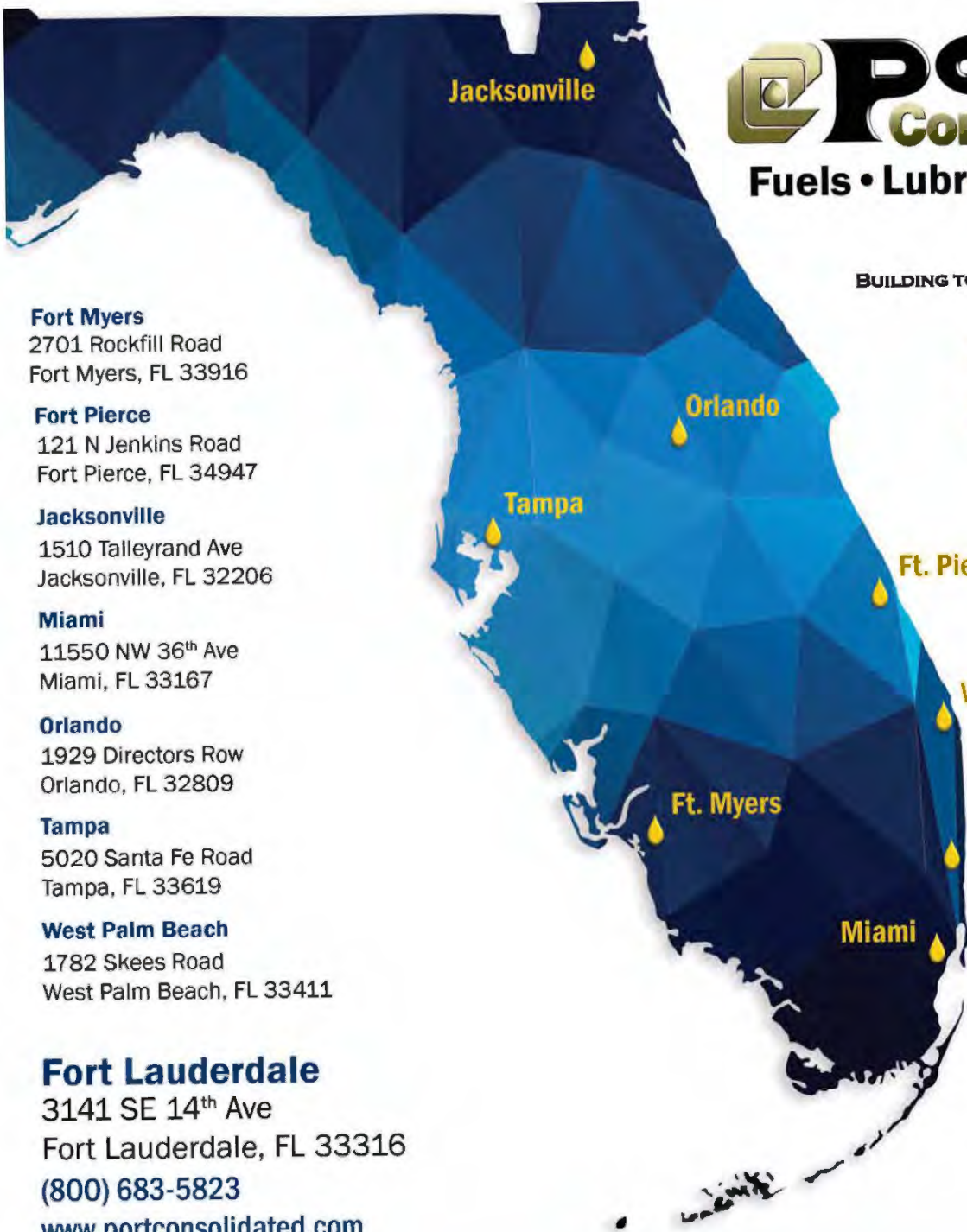
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Hiring from the Inside Out

Corrections Partners Create Skilled Pipelines for Transportation Builders

By Amy King

Like many industries, Florida's transportation construction industry continues to battle a workforce shortage. At the same time, more than 20,000 individuals leave the Florida Department of Corrections (FDC) system every year, many with prior construction experience, industry-recognized credentials and a desire to return to stable employment.

While these two realities operate on parallel tracks, partnerships between FDC's Bureau of Re-Entry and Transition, Florida HIREs and the Florida Foundation for Correctional Excellence (FFCE)

are creating consistent, low-friction ways for FTBA members to meet qualified, pre-screened candidates to join their teams.

"Contractors who are serious about building their workforce pipeline should look closely at this pool of talent, because it is deep," said Colleen Englert, Executive Director of Florida HIREs. "If you need people, then partner with us. We'll find and train them to do exactly what you need. This is an untapped workforce that is motivated, trained and ready. Let us help you build your talent pipeline from the inside out."

Meeting Candidates Before Release

The pre-release hiring system rests on several pillars: FDC's extensive career and technical education footprint, Florida HIREs' targeted 180-day workforce readiness approach and FFCE's industry-integration model, which brings employer partners directly into facilities.

Florida HIREs provides soft-skills training, employability instruction, interview coaching, financial literacy and alignment to in-demand industries to individuals who are within 180 days of return-



dates suitable for transportation builders. In several regions, FDOT, Florida HIREs and FFCE jointly host in-facility job fairs for individuals preparing for release, allowing contractors to interview and extend conditional offers on the spot.

"Pre-release hiring is one of our most successful pathways because the employer meets the candidate, understands their training background and can arrange placement before release," said Melissa Comerford, Bureau Chief for FDC's Bureau of Re-Entry and Transition. "Probation is critical to success, which is why 75% of individuals who successfully complete supervision are employed, and inmates who receive correctional education are 13% more likely to obtain employment after release compared to those who do not."

Credentials That Transfer

Across Florida's prisons, multiple training programs produce credentials that map directly to transportation and other construction careers. Polk Correctional Institution's Heavy Equipment Operator (HEO) and Core Construction programs are operated through Florida HIREs and have been very successful. Participants learn supervised start-up, maneuvering and shutdown of excavators, loaders, skid steers, bulldozers, backhoes,

tractors and telehandlers.

They practice reading grade stakes, understanding soil and compaction fundamentals, interpreting load charts and communicating through standard hand signals and radio protocols. They also learn tool use, maintenance practices and OSHA safety standards.

Graduates earn NCCER Core Construction, NCCER Job Site Safety and NCCER Heavy Equipment Operation Level 1 credentials, along with OSHA 10, CPR, First Aid, AED, Temporary Traffic Control and pre-apprenticeship certificates. There are even HEO and construction training programs at the all-female Lowell Correctional Institution to reflect the growing need for female operators and field staff.

For commercial driving roles, the state operates a CDL-B training program at its Kissimmee Community Release Center. Male and female participants can obtain

full Florida CDL-B licensure under strict supervision. With cohorts of roughly 16 graduates every three months and more than 200 completers to date, the program is one of the most direct pipelines into DOT-aligned roles like dump truck operators, ready-mix drivers and utility transport positions.

"The vast majority of CDL-B graduates have job offers within a couple of weeks of completing the program," Englert said. "Average wages range from \$18 to \$23 an hour, and anecdotally, employers tell us retention is very strong because these job seekers value the chance they've been given."

Credential verification is straightforward for employers. NCCER credentials can be checked through NCCER's online registry, and CDL-B licensure is validated through the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. FDC maintains a centralized database tracking the issuing organization, dates and credential status for each participant, and employers can request verification.

Getting Involved

FTBA members who want to be more engaged can work directly with FDC to deliver or supplement training inside facilities. This can be done in multiple ways and customized to the level of involvement a contractor wants to provide.

"There are several ways a contractor can become an industry training partner, and FDC is open to how creative a company wants to be," said Erica Averion, Executive Director of FFCE. "Some bring their own instructor, equipment, materials and criteria for ideal job seekers. Others supplement the existing program with equipment, classroom materials, curriculum or guest instruction. Some simply donate tools or serve on industry advisory committees."

Averion emphasizes that the process is collaborative and built around what a contractor can realistically provide.

"If a member wants to bring in their training team and their own curriculum, we'll help make it work," Averion said. "If their company wants to start smaller, they can visit existing classes, give feedback or speak to participants about real job expectations."

FFCE's new statewide Employment Partner Showcase has become one of the most effective on-ramp programs for employers. The events are set up like a com-



ing to the community. Their programs operate alongside FDC's technical education offerings, which span more than 100 different industry skills from HVAC to heavy equipment. The result is a broad spectrum of job seekers who are either completing industry-recognized certifications on the inside or bringing prior work experience back into the market.

"Our goal is to match individuals with employers pre-release," Englert said. "They may be earning credentials with us, or they may have years of prior experience in road and bridge construction. We identify who is releasing and where, and we work to match them to employers who need their skills."

The matching function is strengthened by a partnership with FDOT's statewide workforce development team. The team visits facilities, meets with training participants and helps validate them as candi-



bination of an open house and Chamber networking, except inside a prison.

Job seekers demonstrate their skills and walk employers through training labs. Facilities typically feature candidates who are 6-12 months out from release, giving contractors enough time to interview, verify credentials and onboard.

"We want employers to see prison as a place of transformation not limitation," Averion said. "When contractors see these classrooms, see the training and meet the people, something shifts. They start picturing these job seekers on their crews."

Two companies committed to the cause are FTBA members Ring Power and Preferred Materials. Ring Power is one of FDC's strongest training partners, bringing equipment, instructors, curriculum and forklift training into heavy equipment programs, and hiring candidates while they are in work release. Preferred Materials hires both work-release residents and post-release program graduates and provides feedback to refine training.

"The most impactful partnerships are those where employers are active participants in the process," Comerford said. "When industry partners provide equipment, curriculum input or onsite engagement, the programs stay aligned with real workforce needs, and candidates leave more job ready. Partnerships like Ring Power show how powerful it is when employers shape the training and remain engaged through hiring and retention."

Retention Efforts That Make a Difference

There are multiple resources from FDC and its partners to help employers find success within the first 90 days

of employment, which is when new hires are most vulnerable to transportation, housing and financial challenges. For individuals still in FDC custody through work release, many necessities are already covered. They have stable housing, daily supervision, transportation consistency and drug-free conditions.

Employers receive

ongoing communication from FDC and can flag issues early, allowing for fast intervention. Retention data for candidates living in FDC work release centers shows that participants arrive to work drug free, are supervised and are required to maintain employment as a condition of placement.

"For employers who are new to pre-release or fair-chance hiring, work release is a great place to start," Englert said. "These hires show up, and their retention and loyalty have been extraordinarily strong."

For those releasing directly to the community, Florida HIREs and CareerSource partners begin their support inside the facilities. CareerSource meets with cohorts before release, providing resume development, interview practice, job readiness training and community resources.

"Returning citizens coming through FDC programs bring strong hands-on training, industry credentials and a high level of motivation," Comerford said. "Their success is highest when employers provide clear expectations and direct pathways for advancement. Contractors have the chance to offer stability, structure and a career path to individuals who are trained, capable and ready to work. That first opportunity can be the difference between recidivism and long-term success."

Programs like Operation New Hope offer up to three months of free housing, substance abuse treatment, mentoring and employment support. FFCE also invests in tools, PPE and technology infrastructure, including D10 video interview systems that allow contractors to conduct interviews before release and secure candidates early.

"The industry has real opportunity not only to fill positions, but to change someone's life trajectory," Averion said. "When employers lean in, the outcomes are extraordinary."

Plugging In

The engagement pathway for contractors is intentionally simple. Contractors who want to tour a facility, attend a showcase or explore partnerships can begin with FFCE. Those ready to interview job seekers or hire candidates can go through FDC's Bureau of Re-Entry and Transition.

Contractors who want to bring training, equipment, instructors or curriculum inside a facility can work with FDC's Bureau of Workforce Development. Any contractor interested in meeting training program graduates can contact Florida HIREs.

"We have many job seekers with the skills contractors need," Averion said. "Come visit a facility, meet the people and see the training. You'll realize the pipeline you've been looking for is already here."

Two companies committed to the cause are FTBA members Ring Power and Preferred Materials. Ring Power is one of FDC's strongest training partners, bringing equipment, instructors, curriculum and forklift training into heavy equipment programs, and hiring candidates while they are in work release. Preferred Materials hires both work-release residents and post-release program graduates and provides feedback to refine training.

Look for a follow-up story on their programs in a future issue of *Florida Transportation Builder*.

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When IIJA Runs Out

The Future of Federal Transportation Dollars

Congress must decide whether IIJA's record funding for roads, bridges and transit becomes the new normal or a short-lived peak.

By AGC of America Staff

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides funding for roads, bridges and transit through September 30, 2026. The IIJA provides the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) with expenditure authority, or the ability for state and local governments to get reimbursed for obligations for projects. This expenditure authority ends unless Congress passes an extension or a new reauthorization bill.

Payments on projects that were already obligated continue, but lettings, new grant agreements and many discretionary awards pause until Congress restores authority. DOT's own lapse plans underscore this: During an authorization lapse, Federal-aid Highway programs stop obligating new funds.

To understand what changes could happen on October 1, 2026, it helps to separate IIJA's two main money streams. The

first is the HTF, the traditional backbone that finances state formula programs like National Highway Performance Program (NHPP), Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG), Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) and others.

IIJA set five years of highway contract authority and propped up the HTF with a one-time \$118 billion transfer from the General Fund designed to carry the trust



fund through the life of the reauthorization as user fee revenues meant to fund the HTF were not sufficient enough.

The second stream is Division J "advance appropriations." Congress wrote five years of guaranteed general fund dollars directly into the statute, outside the annual congressional budget cycle. Across DOT these advances total \$184 billion over FY22-FY26. For highways specifically, the package delivers \$9.5 billion per year to FHWA while for the FTA this amounts to \$4.25 billion per year.

This is money that sits on top of the trust fund formulas and then stops after FY26 unless Congress chooses to continue them. That supplemental funding includes the Bridge Formula Program at \$5.5 billion per year, funded entirely from the general fund. You can find a full list of programs affected by Division J funding at www.fhwa.dot.gov.

Those two streams produce very different FY27 outlooks. On the HTF side, a short extension or a full reauthorization can keep formula programs flowing with an annual obligation limitation. The final-year marker in IJA is useful here: FHWA's FY26 obligation limitation sits at \$62.65 billion, which is generally a useful indicator for how much Congress carries forward in extensions in previous years while it negotiates a new bill.

On the Division J side, there is no built-in carryover. Those advances were time-limited by design, so the DOT supplemental, at a total \$36.81 billion per year, disappears on Day 1 unless lawmakers affirmatively recreate it. That is the single biggest change most contractors could feel in their FY27 pipelines depending on what Congress decides.

The discretionary landscape changes accordingly. Programs that were fed from both the HTF and Division J will likely shrink if only the HTF taps remain open. INFRA is an example of this. By statute it draws from multiple sources: trust-fund contract authority, Division J advances and authorizations subject to annual appropriation.

If the general fund advances sunset and appropriators are less generous, INFRA rounds will tighten. The same logic applies to other competitive programs that had a Division J boost. By contrast, the Bridge Formula Program has no HTF footing at all, so without a new law, it simply ends after FY26.

What will Congress do? History suggests we should be ready for a period of extensions before a deal lands. That pattern spanned the gaps from TEA-21 to SAFETEA-LU and from SAFETEA-LU to

MAP-21, and it's a familiar way for Congress to buy time while committees negotiate a long bill. Extensions keep formulas moving but inject planning uncertainty and can push lettings to the right if obligation limitation arrives late. Governors have already warned that any lapses could threaten state's abilities to maintain roads and bridges.

Discussions around the next full five-year reauthorization will focus on how to fund our nation's transportation infrastructure. Fuel taxes, the HTF's main revenue source, haven't been increased since

1993, and the Congressional Budget Office projects that under current policy, the highway account will run short of cash by FY2028, with annual gaps approaching \$40 billion.

Independent analyses drawing on CBO's baseline suggest that simply holding spending near IJA levels through FY27-FY31 would require on the order of \$150 billion in added resources through either more general fund transfers, new user revenues, or some mix. That reality makes a "same as IJA plus all the advances" outcome less likely.

In other words – the HTF formulas are the part Congress can most easily keep steady for FY27 under an extension or a modest "skinny" reauthorization, because the structure already exists and states rely on it. Recreating the Division J surge, particularly the extra billions for bridges and megaprojects, is the expensive choice because it requires fresh general fund commitments beyond the trust fund baseline. If lawmakers are searching for ways to pare back totals without cutting core formulas, dialing down or dropping the advances is the low friction lever.

So what does all this mean for what contractors can expect starting in 2027? The safest assumption is to expect formula-heavy letting calendars and a leaner discretionary grant environment. In addition, expect some possible timing friction. Even if Congress avoids a lapse, multiple short extensions are common and can shift bid dates and cash flows. DOT's lapse guidance also serves as a reminder that while reimbursements continue for previously obligated projects, new obligations can't proceed without authority in place.

Two numbers are worth keeping in mind while you watch Congress move: the FY26 obligation limitation, a workable proxy for a "flat" extension, and the Division J annual amount that falls off without a new vote. Together they explain why the pipeline in the years following IJA's expiration are likely to feel thinner even if headline formula numbers look flat in nominal terms. When you layer on the increased construction costs, flat nominal dollars will buy less work than they did when IJA launched.

Congress could still manage to avoid such situations. If a five-year bill emerges with new HTF revenue, whether from indexing or increasing fuel taxes, adding a user-fee – like an EV fee, or another large general-fund transfer, lawmakers could hold formulas steady in real terms and even revive a version of Division J for targeted priorities like bridges, freight or safety. But that takes money, and the CBO baselines point to a sizable hole that must be filled before those ambitions can be realized.

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FTBA Socials

Building Connections Across the State

By Jennifer Kling



Leigh Lilla and Sarah Boe



Michael Teston, Travis Church and Earnest Maiden



December Jacksonville Social



December Tampa Social

F TBA Socials are not simply casual gatherings – they are peer groups designed to strengthen relationships across the road-building industry. Contractors, designers, consultants and FDOT representatives come together in a relaxed setting to build trust, share ideas and keep the business of building roads both productive and fun.

FTBA's socials have grown steadily over the years, thanks to the dedication of volunteer social coordinators who take on the responsibility of organizing and hosting monthly events. Their efforts often come on top of day-to-day job responsibilities, and the association deeply appreciates their commitment to making these gatherings possible.

For decades, these events have provided a space where professionals can connect outside of job sites and boardrooms. In this issue, we're profiling the Tampa and Jacksonville socials – two of the longest-running in the state – to showcase how networking can evolve into lasting partnerships and opportunities.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LEIGH LILLA, MICHAEL TESTON AND TRAVIS CHURCH

Tampa: Creating Meaningful Connections

For Sarah Boe, Account Manager at Port Consolidated, the FTBA Socials have been part of her professional journey since 2013. She first became involved while working at Sims Crane when she was encouraged by her boss to understand the value of networking and the importance of giving back to the community.

"I've always enjoyed watching people connect and helping to bring them together,

whether professionally or socially," Boe said. "Strong relationships are the foundation of good business, and in-person communication plays a vital role in building and guiding those relationships."

Today, she hopes to see these socials continue to grow, with more members attending each month and new venues keeping the events fresh and engaging.

"Our goal is to strengthen connections within our community and create meaningful business opportunities through our FTBA membership," she said.

Her career path – from Sims Crane to Port Consolidated – has been shaped by these connections.

"Port Consolidated has given me the opportunity to grow professionally, meet incredible people across the state of Florida and help build future opportunities for those who will follow in this industry," she said.

Leigh Lilla, Senior Project Manager at Nelson Construction and co-coordinator with Boe, said the socials have been equally impactful. With more than 15 years at the company, she has seen how Tampa's events have become a model for other regions.

"I'm not sure of the exact start date, but I know the FTBA socials predate my time at the company," she said. "I believe the Tampa area is the originator of the FTBA socials."

Lilla began attending in 2010, shortly after joining Nelson.

"My first job out of college closed their Tampa office in 2008, and I did not have a lot of good leads for who to call for a new job opportunity. I vowed to never let that be my experience again, so the socials were a great way for me to network with this group," she said.

About five years ago, the responsibility for organizing Tampa's socials was passed down from Rusty Birchall, Scott Pittman and Jeff Nelson to Lilla and Boe.

"What I enjoy most is the opportunity to connect with peers across the industry in a relaxed, informal setting," Lilla said. "The socials help strengthen professional relationships, encourage open dialogue and foster a sense of camaraderie that carries over into our day-to-day work. It is so much easier to make an ask of a vendor or subcontractor when you have a face to go with the name, and the socials enable us to have that opportunity."

Looking ahead, Lilla hopes to see continued growth in attendance, especially from younger professionals. "Maintaining the casual nature of the events while expanding engagement will help ensure the socials remain relevant and beneficial to the industry," she said.

She also emphasized the collaborative spirit that makes these gatherings successful.

"The FTBA socials play an important role in building long-term relationships within the industry. Their success is a direct result of consistent participation and shared ownership," she said. For those interested



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In sponsoring or hosting, she offered a simple checklist: "Our baseline venue requirements are a full bar, ample parking and no contract requirements. We appreciate when sponsors have a location in mind, but we are always available to help scout and secure a venue as well."

Together, Boe and Lilla exemplify how Tampa's FTBA Socials continue to thrive: bringing people together, strengthening trust and ensuring the road-building community remains connected and collaborative.

Jacksonville: Reviving the Glory Days

In Jacksonville, FTBA Socials have long been a cornerstone of the road-building community. Travis Church, Project Manager with Miller Electric Company's Infrastructure Division, said the events have been part of his professional life since 2002. He first attended while interning at Superior Construction, where leaders emphasized the importance of showing up.

"I remember these events from the 2000s when we had over 100 people from all likes in the industry," Church said. "This is where I started to meet many people and build my empire of contacts that has molded me into the person I am today."

Over time, attendance dipped as professionals balanced family and work commitments. Once Church started with Miller Electric, he had the freedom to go to more events. Determined to help Jacksonville's socials regain momentum, Church began promoting events widely, sending flyers to more than 700 contacts.

His efforts were recognized, and he was invited to serve as co-coordinator alongside Michael Teston. Together, they modernized the socials by digitizing the sign-in process and building a database of attendees. Today, Jacksonville events average 50 to 70 participants, with some gatherings surpassing 100.

For Teston, a North Florida Sales Representative with Linder Industrial Machinery, the socials have been part of his career from the very beginning.

"These socials have been going on throughout my entire career in the North Florida area," he said. "I got involved through attendance and volunteering to help bring our infrastructure and construction people together. I very quickly saw the value in the networking and community

of bringing like-minded people together to build relationships. I am a firm believer that the industry we are in is heavily reliant on the relationships that are built."

Teston emphasized that the diversity of attendees is what makes the events special.

"What I enjoy most about the FTBA socials are the relationships and how the diversity of the members can come together for a shared purpose. A lot of the members that I have met over the years have become like family," he said.

Looking ahead, both Church and Teston hope to see the Jacksonville socials continue to grow. Church envisions more variety in organizations attending and a stronger presence from younger professionals who will one day lead the industry.

Teston echoed that sentiment, adding: "I would love to see our socials grow and continue to be very inviting to new people in our industry. I hope we are able to continue to have enthusiasm from our sponsors to be involved."

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Where can I find an FTBA Social?

FTBA socials are typically held in Jacksonville, Southeast Florida, Tampa, Orlando, Ft. Myers, Daytona, Gainesville and Tallahassee.

Who can I talk to about hosting FTBA Socials?

FTBA Socials are planned locally. For questions regarding social sponsorships, please contact the social coordinator(s) in your area.

Please note that only FTBA members can sponsor a social.

To see a list of the social coordinators, please visit ftba.com/ftba-socials

He also underscored the broader importance of FTBA membership. "It is important for contractors to be involved in the FTBA and to understand the benefits that membership has to offer," Teston said.

Together, Church and Teston are ensuring that Jacksonville's FTBA Socials remain vibrant, welcoming and impactful while building a foundation for the next generation of industry leaders.



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Avoiding the Dangers

of Unlicensed Contracting in Florida



By Smith Currie Oles

In June 2025, a Florida appellate court clarified that even if a licensed contractor is supervising a project, the contractor can still be found liable for unlicensed contracting if the entity on the contract with the project's owner does not have its own certificate or registration (*CAM Bradford Homes, LLC v. Arrants*, No. 5D2024-0849, 2025 WL 1715893 [Fla. 5th DCA June 20, 2025]).

Generally, all Florida contractors must be certified or registered with the Department of Business and Professional Regulation (§ 489.115[1], Fla. Stat). This is important because, under most circumstances, only licensed contractors can enforce their contracts (§ 489.128[1], Fla. Stat).

For a business organization contractor to be considered licensed, it must have a qualifying agent that is licensed to per-

form the contracted work (§ 489.128[1][a], Fla. Stat). A person individually licensed as a general contractor cannot become a business organization's qualifying agent until they apply with the Construction Industry Licensing Board and are issued a certificate or registration from the Department. See § 489.105(19), Fla. Stat.

In *CAM Bradford*, the owner of the entity that contracted to build a single-family home was certified and licensed individually as a general contractor but failed to apply with the Department on behalf of his business organization to obtain a license as its qualifying agent.

The Fifth District Court of Appeals concluded that even though the entity's owner was a contractor himself, supervised the work and could have qualified his business, because a qualifying agent never applied to the Department on be-

half of the entity, the business was unlicensed and therefore could not enforce its contract with the project's owner.

The Fifth District's decision should give pause to any Florida builder considering partnering with or lending their license to another entity that has a contract with a property owner to perform construction work but lacks its own certificate and licensure. Even where a licensed contractor supervises the work, such an arrangement would likely prevent the contract from being enforceable where only the unlicensed entity had an agreement with the owner.

Florida builders should tread carefully because a contractor found to have engaged in unlicensed contracting exposes itself to potential treble damages in a lawsuit brought by a property owner for the contractor's negligence or wrongdo-

ing (5 768.042[2], Fla. Stat). Treble damages mean that an owner may recover three times their actual damages in a claim against an unlicensed contractor, in addition to their attorneys' fees and costs.

However, not all construction work in Florida requires a contracting license. For example, section 489.103, Florida Statutes, sets forth certain exemptions to the requirement, such as "contractors in work on bridges, roads, streets, highways, or railroads, and services incidental

thereto." The exemption does not mean that a contractor cannot still be subject to claims for breach of contract if the Department of Transportation or other contracting entity requires the contractor to be licensed for a particular project.

Overall, where even technical failures to obtain a certificate can amount to unlicensed contracting and prevent a contractor from enforcing their contract with an owner, Florida builders should ensure compliance with licensing regulations to avoid potentially exposing themselves or

their businesses to treble damages and liability for the owner's fees and costs.

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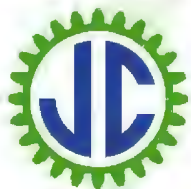
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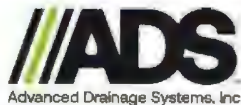
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Breaking the Silence

Discussing Mental Health on the Job Site

By Ken Garcia

Loud and dangerous machines. Long days. Hot temperatures. These are just some of the physical hazards construction workers deal with on the job site. However, some workers are not only facing these physical hazards but also invisible ones, such as mental health struggles like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that can be just as dangerous and far easier to overlook.

According to national data, roughly 8% of the general population experiences PTSD. Among trauma-exposed workers, including construction, rates can climb as high as 20%. Symptoms like flashbacks, intrusive thoughts and hypervigilance aren't just personal issues. They impact concentration, productivity and relationships on the job site.

"We all lose around 1,000 people a year to job site accidents resulting in injuries and deaths," said Shiloh Rowe, a military veteran and a leader in AGC of America's national Construction Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Task Force. "But we're losing 6,000 or more to suicide. We lose more to suicide than we do to job site accidents."

PTSD symptom triggers can take many forms on the job site. Left unrecognized, these struggles can damage workplace relationships, increase absenteeism and even push skilled workers to leave the industry. Or tragically, result in lives lost.

Rowe sees this firsthand. He encourages people to talk.

"If you've been in the field, you're more likely to talk to somebody that's in the field rather than sitting in an HR office," Rowe said. "You're probably not going to have that natural feel the way you would with the guy you've been working beside for 10 years."

The industry has long carried a reputation for toughness. Discussing feelings was viewed as a weakness. Rowe insists that it has to change. He says if you're willing to ask someone how they are doing and wait for a real answer beyond "I'm fine," you're already taking that first step.

"Talk to them. Listen to them. You don't have to be a psychiatrist, a doctor or a

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE RESOURCES



The Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention

The Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention (CIASP) provides resources and tools to create a zero-suicide industry. preventconstruction suicide.com



988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

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Construction Veterans Reducing Suicide (CVRS)

A Peer-to-Peer Mental Health Program for Military Veterans in Construction. cvrs-us.org/resources

counselor," he said. "Be willing to hear them out and offer to take them to someone who can provide help."

What FTBA Members Can Do

Employers can do their part to help keep workers and job sites safe. Some mental health safety steps include:

- Training managers and supervisors to recognize warning signs and handle conversations with empathy.
- Providing access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and promoting the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline are resources that are already available but often underutilized.
- Creating quiet zones or accommodations for workers dealing with PTSD triggers. Rowe mentions an example of a worker who experienced a trigger when hearing the air brake on a truck. He was in a car crash in which his wife died and the last thing he heard that day was the brake release. So, he requested his employer ask trucks not to release the brakes on the job site.

- Normalizing mental safety as part of job safety and making it a regular part of toolbox talks, not just a once-a-year discussion.

The construction industry is making strides, but progress depends on continuing the conversation. Rowe likens it to his

military career, which can also be applied to the job site.

"Nobody goes on a mission alone," he said. "Why would you think you'd have to do it alone now? You have to find your team."

Working together, the industry can protect its most important asset: its people.

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We are thankful for our members and the value they bring to the association and industry. We welcomed the following new members between October and December 2025.

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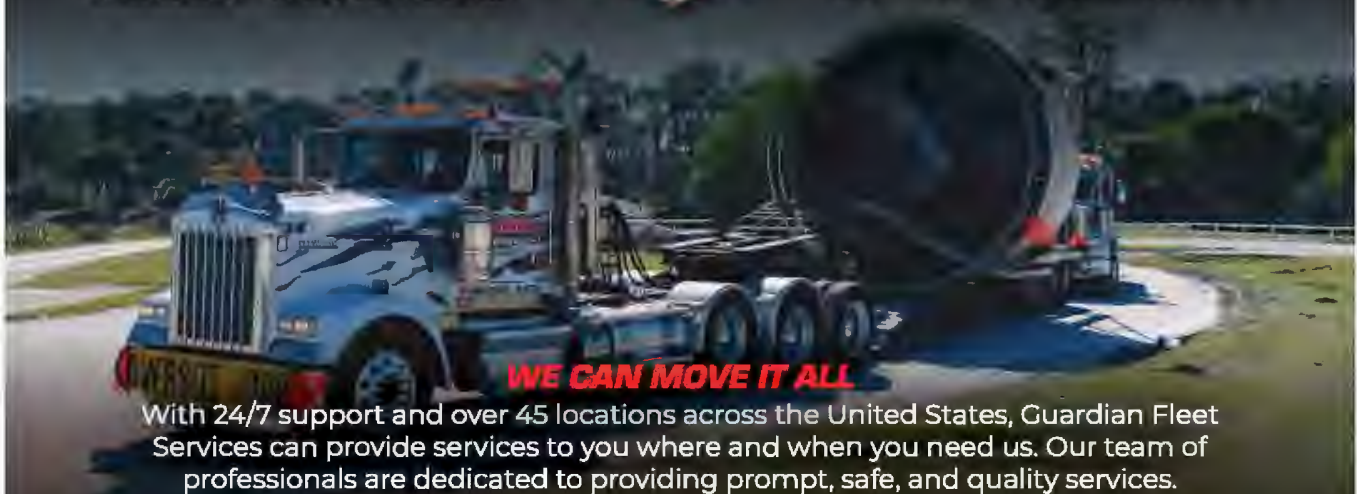
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What's on your mind?
 What should we be
 covering in these pages?
 How can this magazine
 better serve you and the
 work you do?

A Turning Point and An Invitation

When The Wyman Company first partnered with FTBA back in 2019, I'll be honest – we were learning. While we had a general understanding of transportation and logistics, roadbuilding was new territory. What we did know was sales and content: how to build a magazine, how to sell advertising, and how to create something valuable for an association and its members.

What we have learned since has been far more meaningful.

FTBA members don't just build roads, they build Florida. I see it everytime I drive through other states. Our roads are just better. Safer. More sophisticated. That's a testament to this association and FDOT, and it makes me genuinely proud to serve FTBA.

I've also learned that while FTBA contractors compete, they care deeply about the industry and about our state. This is a membership that is welcoming, generous with its knowledge, and committed to something bigger than any single project or company. From day one, I've felt comfortable asking questions and learning from this group, and that is exactly what a strong association community should feel like.

Now, I believe we're at a turning point.

As a partner to FTBA, Wyman's responsibility is to ensure *Florida Transportation Builder* continues to serve the association's mission and deliver real value to you. We want this magazine to be something truly special – a resource that reflects the importance of this industry and the people who make it work.

So I'll ask directly: Please tell us what you want. You'll see me at the Construction Symposium. Please pull me aside. What's on your mind? What should we be covering in these pages? How can this magazine better serve you and the work you do? We want to support you and FTBA in the best way possible.

I also want to sincerely thank the advertisers who make this publication possible. This magazine is funded entirely through advertising support and distributed to every FTBA member, FDOT leadership, and county and city commissioners across the state. Think about that for a second. When your local commissioners are pondering budget decisions – from bridge rehabilitation to a city paving project – they may have seen the impact of your work through the stories in these pages. That reach is intentional, and it exists because of the companies who utilize their marketing dollars to purchase advertising in this magazine. Please support them when you can.

More than anything, we want this magazine to feel like FTBA – approachable, honest and focused on serving the industry well.

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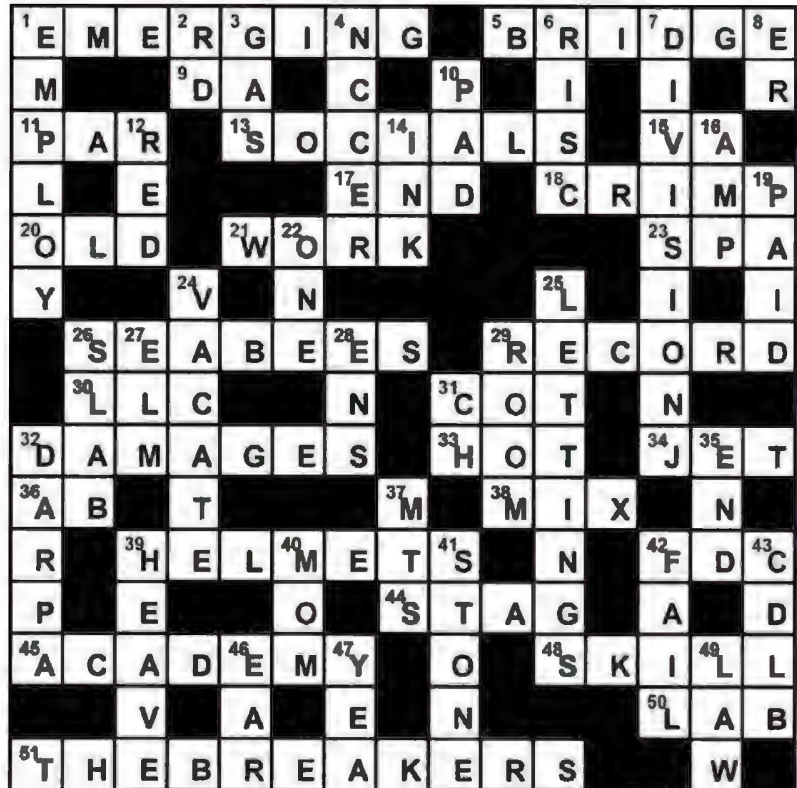
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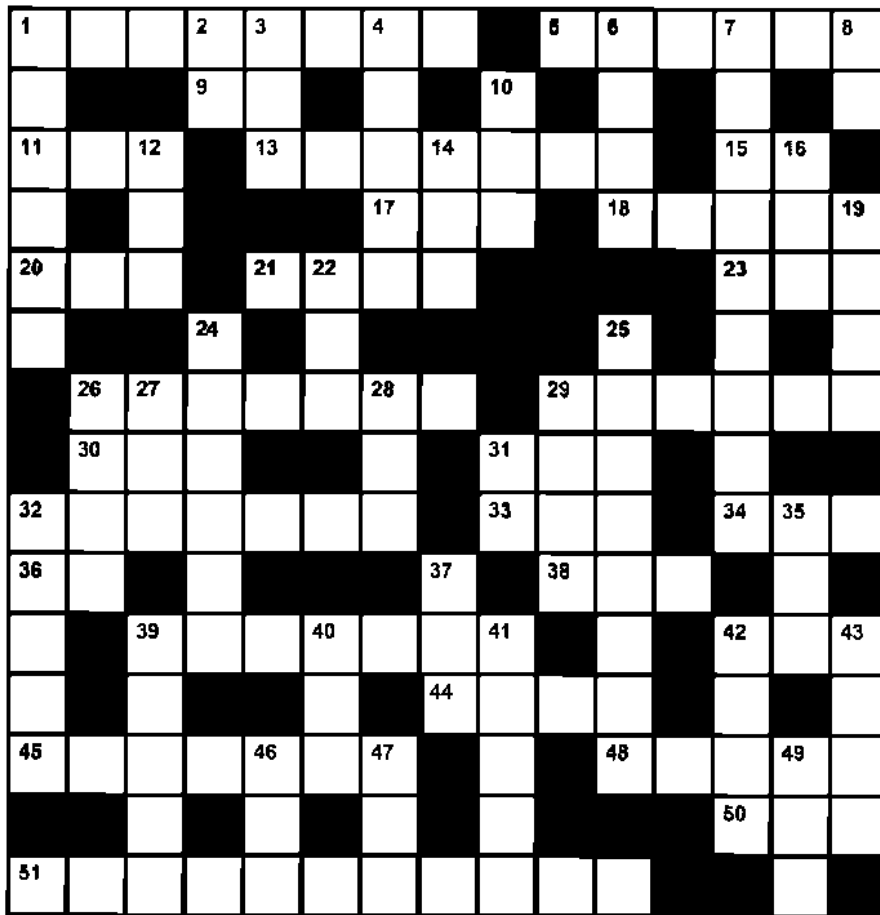


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