

FINAL MEETING MINUTES

Monroe County Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Team Meeting

Date/Time:	November 13, 2024		10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Location:	Florida Department of Transportation – District Six Monroe County Sheriff’s Office 50 High Point (Roth Building), Tavernier, Florida 33070		
Host:	Florida Department of Transportation - District Six		
Attendees	Agency	Phone	Email
Don Avery	FDOT District Six TMC	305-640-7361	donald.avery@sunguide.info
Nikolas Muriel	FDOT District Six TMC	305-640-7353	nikolas.muriel@sunguide.info
Greg Kirkpatrick	FDOT District Six TMC	305-640-7304	greg.kirkpatrick@sunguide.info
Doralice Pupo	FDOT District Six TMC	305-640-7355	doralice.pupo@dot.state.fl.us
Carlos Dardes	FDOT District Six TMC	305-640-7331	carlos.dardes@dot.state.fl.us
Sabina Henriquez	FDOT District Six TMC	305-640-7346	sabina.henriquez@dot.state.fl.us
Richard Ugalde	Webber	305-796-8600	richard.ugalde@wwebber.com
Tony Sabbag	HDR FDOT	305.796.8600	asabbag@hdrinc.com
Terry Abel	Islamorada Fire Rescue	305-360-1917	terry.abel@islamorada.fl.us
Jon Rizzo	NOAA/NWS	305-240-0248	jonathan.rizzo@noaa.gov
Benjamin Elmore	MCSO	305-432-6363	belmore@keysso.net

1. Purpose of Meeting

Provide agency updates to the Monroe County TIM Team and disseminate incident management issues for the region. Updates were given by FDOT District Six Transportation Management Center, FDOT District Six Construction, and NOAA. This meeting also serves as an opportunity to network and share lessons learned to maximize interagency cooperation, coordination, and communication.

2. Introduction of Attendees

Nikolas welcomed everyone to the Monroe County TIM Team Meeting. Introductions were provided by all attendees. Nikolas also mentioned the purpose of the meeting. The meetings serve as a networking opportunity and learning experience for TIM Team stakeholders. Nikolas also noted that we are looking for feedback and ideas for topics that the Monroe TIM Team may want to discuss.

2.1 NOAA – National Weather Service Updates – Jonathan Rizzo

Jon provided an overview of the National Weather Service (NWS) and NOAA. He summarized this year’s storm activity including hurricanes Debby, Helene, Milton, and Rafael. He discussed different storm forecast models, their margin of error, and their reliability. Jon also mentioned a potential tropical storm in the Caribbean named Sara. He said it is too early to tell the exact path of the storm, but NOAA is currently monitoring the conditions. The waters in the Caribbean are warmer, which is increasing the strength of the storm.

Jon said they provide water levels to the District Six Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Jon discussed the new Monroe County EOC in Marathon.

Don Avery asked Jonathan if there had been anything particularly surprising or unusual about this hurricane season compared to previous years. Jon explained that the 2024 season has been marked by several late-forming systems and record-high sea surface temperatures, making the season unusually "back-loaded" with more intense activity toward the end of the season.

Don said besides the National Hurricane Center (NHC) website, he also uses Tropical Tidbits to see the spaghetti models. Don asked which websites does Jon use? Jon said he likes Weathernerds.org. Richard Ugalde asked when do water temperatures typically cool in the Gulf? Jon said that water temperatures start to cool in October but current water temperatures are about 80°.

Carlos Dardes highlighted the operational challenges faced by District Six in preparing for storms and emphasized that key decisions are often driven by sustained wind speeds before, during, and after the storms. He asked Jon for advice on how the Department could obtain reliable wind speed data and whether there were any recommended online resources for monitoring this information. Jon mentioned that he regularly provides daily briefings as storms approach and recommended using the HURRICANES.GOV website for the most current and accurate updates on wind speeds. Don followed up that sustained wind information is used to determine when FDOT's incident management resources leave the road. Current policy has vehicles stop patrolling when wind speeds reach 25 mph sustained and vehicles return to their yards when wind speeds reach 35 mph sustained. The difficulty is distinguishing from sustained winds and wind gusts.

Jon offered all meeting attendees to join the distribution list for the debriefings so that everyone can stay up to date with the latest information. Jon explained the difference between the two wind maps on the NHC website. The Earliest Reasonable Arrival Time of Tropical-Storm-Force Winds is the estimated time when winds are likely to reach an area based on the upper 10% of probability. The Most Likely Arrival Time of Tropical-Storm-Force Winds is based on the 50/50 probability.

Don asked if the Monroe County EOC is open to the public. They tried to schedule this TIM Meeting at the EOC but was told that the building is only available when there is an activation. Jon said to try the EOC again. They do have several training rooms and a large meeting room.

2.2 TIM Updates – Nikolas Muriel

Nikolas presented the Transportation Management Center (TMC) updates including Greg Kirkpatrick as the new TMC Manager. Leland DeBooy retired after 25 years as a Road Ranger Supervisor and was inducted into the ITS Florida Honor Roll. ITS Florida is the Florida branch of the Intelligent Transportation Society of America. Nikolas summarized the SunGuide traffic events for Monroe County from January through October 2024. SunGuide is the advanced traffic management system software used to control cameras and dynamic messages and to document various traffic events.

Nikolas provided an update on Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Nikolas mentioned that although District Six was not directly impacted by these two storms, it was prepared for any potential impacts. In preparation for these storms, District Six works alongside the Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Maintenance Contractor for support. They ensure backup generators are fueled up and verify 10% spare parts is available for repairs. Don added that TMC staff identified a few damaged ITS devices in Monroe County due to the significant rain. Some of the traffic signals use video detection. The camera lenses needed to be cleaned due to rain and evaporation residue.

District Six has three ITS mobile trailers equipped with cameras, traffic detectors, and wireless communication. These offer different power options including solar, generator, or connection to the power grid. Nikolas also included FDOT Central Office resources such as five ITS trailers and two mobile command trailers. Don mentioned that Central Office dispatched their trailers to support the response for Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

Nikolas moved into TIM Innovations. He advised that District Six had completed installing rear-facing red lights for its entire fleet. Feedback from the Road Rangers and Incident Response Vehicles (IRV) revealed that motorists are moving over a lane and noticing the red lights more. Chief Abel mentioned that the Islamorada Fire Department found that impaired motorists tend to be more drawn to red than yellow lights. Therefore they had the rear of their trucks outfitted with yellow lights. Nikolas said he has not heard of motorists attracted to red lights. FDOT did a study and found that a combination of red/white lights were effective.

Nikolas mentioned the Smart Sequential Flares. These flares provide greater visibility and have been equipped for all Road Rangers and IRVs. Each vehicle has a set of 20 sequential flares. They can be placed on the ground, inside a traffic cone, or on top of a traffic cone. The bottom of the flare has a powerful magnet which allows it to be placed on vehicles or other metal objects. As the flares are deployed, they turn on and start flashing in sequence with each other. Don provided a demonstration of the flares.

Nikolas shared a demonstration of the Guardian Angel wearable lights. These wearable lights can be attached anywhere and provide greater visibility to motorists for our IRV Operators. The wearable lights come in different configurations. District Six selected red and white LED lights which can flash in different configurations. There is also a work light that can be used as a flashlight.

Nikolas provided a reminder about the RISC Program available in Monroe County. The program exists but there currently is no vendor signed up. He asked if anyone knows any potential vendors that would like to participate in the RISC Program. FDOT would like to keep the RISC Program going as an option for Monroe County. He presented a recent incident with a semi-truck involved in a crash that resulted in a jack-knife with a fuel leak. Both directions of US 1 were closed at MM 9.5. This could have been a potential RISC event.

Nikolas summarized past and upcoming special events. He described what the TMC does during these special events, as they can have a significant impact on the roadway. He added the Homestead Speedway is a location where the TMC has on-site dedicated personnel to provide traffic management support. Nikolas gave an update on upcoming National TIM Responder Training Program and showed the benefits of the program and the upcoming training sessions. District Six conducts these trainings on a quarterly basis. Registration is online and it is a free training class.

Nikolas reminded everyone that next week is Crash Responder Safety Week. This year's theme is *Responders Ahead! Reduce Your Speed As You Proceed*. He described how FDOT Central Office is providing direction to the Districts. CRSW outreach can include social media messaging and topical public service announcements posted on dynamic message signs (DMS). This year, Central Office staff interviewed Road Rangers and participated in Road Ranger ride-alongs in each district.

Don provided an overview of the Monroe County Traffic Signal System (MCTSS). Don thought it would be a good opportunity to remind the group about what TMC staff does to support the MCTSS. The Keys COAST Project was completed in June 2024. Keys COAST is a connected vehicle (CV) pilot project which included the installation of roadside and in-vehicle equipment. The roadside units are called RSUs and the on-board units are called OBUs. Don discussed what the system does and showed the Kapsch Traffic Assist mobile application. Don mentioned some upcoming projects such as the Emergency Signals Upgrade, the mast arm swaying issues at Tarpon Basin Dr and Ocean Blvd, and the new signalized intersection at North College Road. Don provided an overview of the Transit Signal Priority (TSP) from the Keys COAST project. The TMC has also completed signal retiming along US 1 and working with schools to adjust the schedule for School Zone Beacons.

Chief Abel said that his OBU overheated and was on longer functioning. Don said he could take a look at it with the Chief after the meeting.

2.3 District Six Construction – Tony Sabbag

Tony reviewed several ongoing and upcoming construction projects. The following ongoing projects were mentioned.

- Resurfacing project from MM 108 – MM 112 expected to be completed in November 2025.
- Bridge repair project in MM 79 is expected to be completed in December 2024.
- Resurfacing project in Cudjoe Key is expected to finish by February 2025.
- Landscaping project in Boca Chica Channel and south of Rockland Channel is expected to finish by January 2025.
- Bridge repair project for Channel 5 is expected to finish by August 2026.

The following future projects were mentioned.

- Pushbutton traffic signal project is expected to start February 2025 and expected completion by February 2027.
- Bridge repair project on MM 17.8, MM 33.0, and MM 36.0 are expected to start July 2025 with expected completion by June 2030.
- Project on Lower Matecumbe Key is expected to start September 2025 with completion by March 2028.
- Resurfacing project on Roosevelt Boulevard to Eisenhower Drive is expected to start September 2025 with completion by July 2026.
- Landscaping project from MM 108 to MM 112 is expected to start November 2025 and completion by May 2028.

3. Open Discussion

3.1 RISC Program in Monroe County

Carlos thanked Nikolas for mentioning the RISC Program in Monroe County. Carlos said the RISC Program is available in Monroe County and mentioned the program's benefits. Arnold's Towing was a vendor. The RISC Program has specific requirements and many vendors may be hesitant to sign up due to the requirements. A 'RISC LITE' concept could be an option. Perhaps vendors would be interested if the equipment requirements were relaxed. Richard said the Keys is a one-way road for southbound and northbound. Companies may be hesitant to participate in the RISC Program due to heavy congestion when trying to get to an event. Carlos said this is understandable and the Department is willing to work with potential companies. Don mentioned that the current Monroe County RISC program does have different zones with different time requirements. Tony mentioned that he would see if there is interest in the RISC Program. Carlos discussed the importance of stakeholder partnerships in the RISC Program's success. The success of any RISC initiative depends on the support and collaboration of key partners, such as the Monroe County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) and the Florida Highway Patrol (FHP), who are typically the first responders to such incidents.

Carlos solicited feedback from Chief Abel and MCSO regarding their thoughts on implementing a RISC LITE program and whether they knew of any wrecker companies that might be interested in participating. Chief Abel suggested that several local towing companies, including Arnold's Towing, Wheaton's, and All American Towing. Toppino might also be potentially interested in the program. Chief Abel cautioned that for the RISC LITE program to be viable, it would need to be a worthwhile investment for the wrecker companies as staging expensive equipment for potential calls may not be financially sustainable without a guaranteed return. MSCO Lieutenant Benjamin Elmore noted that many local towing companies do not maintain heavy-duty equipment such as 50-ton rotators or large wreckers, as these are rarely needed and often remain idle at their yards. This lack of specialized equipment further complicates the feasibility of implementing a RISC LITE program for Monroe County.

3.2 Hardware Issue with Equipment for the Florida Keys COAST Project

Carlos asked Don who could Chief Abel contact about his OBU. Don said there is a MCTSS phone number and is shown on the MCSO website. Don could not remember the number but will send it to Chief Abel. Chief Abel expressed concerns about having to take his trucks out of service to complete the installation of the devices. The Keys COAST project had different sites where participating agencies could take their vehicle for OBU installation. Chief Abel said the installers are welcome to install the equipment at his facility.

At the end of the meeting, Chief Abel invited everyone outside to see the Keys COAST equipment installed on his pickup truck. Don was able to see the damaged tablet and assured Chief Abel that he would remain in contact to see the issue resolved. The tablet is the user interface but the OBU may still be communicating with the RSU. The equipment may still be communicating but no way to access the tablet. Don said Sabina would coordinate on the feasibility of having the installers go to the fire station to complete the installation on pending fire rescue trucks.

4. Meeting Adjourned

The meeting presentations and meeting minutes are available on SunGuide.info (www.sunguide.info).