



NORTHEAST FLORIDA

Regional Economic Development Strategy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FEBRUARY 2023

INTRODUCTION

In spring 2022, JAXUSA Partnership launched its most ambitious regional economic development planning process to date. Leadership from across Northeast Florida's seven counties (Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns) recognized that for economic development to be successful, it needed to represent the region as a whole. Therefore, it is imperative that the organizations and partners who assisted in the development of this plan serve as thought leaders and contributors throughout plan implementation. The result of this planning effort is a regional, people-centric economic development strategy. This focus acknowledges that talent is, and will continue to be, the most important driver of economic success for the region.

PLAN FRAMEWORK

The Future Is Now—Northeast Florida economic development strategic plan is anchored by a strong, regionally focused vision statement. The vision statement and the guiding principles were crafted with input from a 30-member steering committee and regional leaders. They form the framework on which the strategic action plan goals were formulated. The plan goals, strategies, and actions emerged from an extensive planning process.

Although the strategic plan is designed to be implemented over a 5-year planning horizon, the vision statement sets the economic direction for the next 20 years. *The Future Is Now* plan speaks to the desire of regional leaders to prioritize economic opportunity and to align resources in support of economic mobility for all residents.

The plan's guiding principles are the unmeasured, qualitative roles and functions that intersect the primary areas of the strategic action plan. Each principle is forward looking and helps orient goals and strategies toward regional growth and improvement.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC VISION

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Northeast Florida invests in its diverse talent base and vibrant communities to create a thriving economy that embraces regionalism.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



GOALS



RESOURCE ALIGNMENT

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1 COMPETITIVENESS

Northeast Florida continues to maintain a high quality of life and favorable business environment that attracts and retains top-tier talent and businesses.

2 REGIONALISM

Northeast Florida communities work in coordination with all of their partners to leverage one another's strengths and capitalize on opportunities leading to greater economic prosperity for all.

3 ECONOMIC MOBILITY

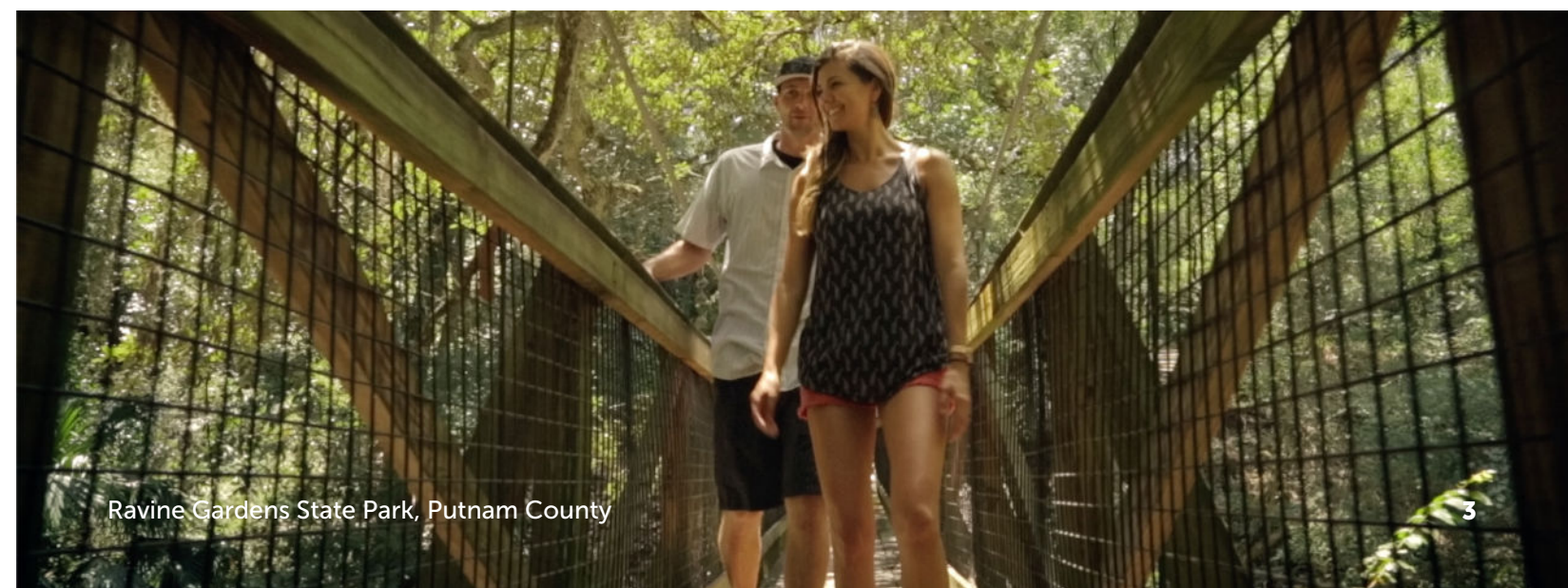
Northeast Florida recognizes the region's unemployed, underemployed, and underserved populations face barriers to fully participating in and recognizing the benefits of a robust economy and will intentionally address these systemic issues.

4 INNOVATION

Northeast Florida engages entrepreneurs, business leaders, higher education, and economic development partners to create a dynamic environment that fuels cross-sector partnerships and leads to cutting-edge technology.

5 RESILIENCE

Northeast Florida is not only prepared to withstand economic shocks, but also to quickly recover from economic impacts through regional collaboration and coordination.





Spring Park, Clay County

PLANNING CONTEXT

To provide a common framework, TIP examined the policies, relationships, and priorities influencing economic development in Northeast Florida. This examination included a review of relevant background documents, like previous economic studies, county strategic plans, and regional resilience plans, in order to build on existing knowledge and align the new plan with current initiatives and programs. In addition to gaining an understanding of the regional economic development landscape, TIP conducted comprehensive quantitative analyses of economic and demographic factors, industry niches and global investment trends, and talent and workforce development data.

This data work was supplemented by a comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder engagement effort. The Future Is Now—Northeast Florida Steering Committee oversaw the planning process and coordinated the community engagement. Steering committee members represented a wide variety of organizations ranging from municipal governments and non-profits to private sector businesses. These individuals had a vital role in the plan’s development and will play a critical role in plan implementation. In addition to virtual interviews and roundtables, in-person focus groups were conducted in every county to ensure robust participation. In total, over 215 participants took part in 18 roundtable sessions.

Findings from the quantitative and qualitative research, a thorough engagement process, and TIP’s 28 years of experience, ultimately influenced the goals and strategies included in the strategic action plan.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

7 County Tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baker County• Clay County• Duval County• Flagler County	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nassau County• Putnam County• St. Johns County
17+ Individual Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business and Industry• Community Leaders• Non-profit Partners• Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public Sector• Hispanic/Latino Chamber
30 Steering Committee Members	4 Steering Committee Meetings	2 Planning Workshops

ROUNDTABLES

18 Roundtable Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Higher Education and Workforce• Nonprofits and Foundations• Industry and Large Employers• Entrepreneurs and Start-Ups• Students and Young Professionals• Real Estate and Development• Ministers and Community Leaders• Regional County Stakeholders• Marketing and Talent Recruitment• Civic Organizations
215+ Roundtable Participants	

CATALYTIC INITIATIVES



TALENT

Migration data demonstrates that the region is **connected by talent**, and talent remains one of the most **pressing concerns** for employers across Northeast Florida. **Workforce development investments** are needed to ensure economic prosperity for all as well as investments in **talent attraction and retention**.



EMPLOYMENT CENTERS

Northeast Florida has the opportunity to take a regional approach to planning for future employment centers to ensure **businesses are able to expand and relocate** in a timely manner as well as to ensure **transportation networks** align between residential and job centers.



INNOVATION NICHES

Innovation niches are the **targets of the future** and must be developed with a longer-term vision and a deeper investment commitment than traditional industry growth. **Significant regional investments** include physical infrastructure, educational programming, talent pipeline development, and cross-pollination of institutional relationships.



DOWNTOWNS

Vibrant and dynamic downtowns in every corner of Northeast Florida are essential to creating high quality of life that attracts business and talent. Investments are needed to invigorate central business districts and Main Street corridors, with a focus on **residential and commercial infill**.



OUTDOOR ECONOMY

Northeast Florida has incredible natural resources and outdoor assets that can be leveraged for **talent attraction and recruitment** and as a catalyst for **community development**.



The Ocean Course Island Hole, St. Johns County courtesy of Florida’s Historic Coast

GOALS

This strategic action plan represents the culmination of a robust planning process and reflects an analysis of Northeast Florida's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The region is fortunate to have a strong network of economic developers, city and county leaders, and workforce and education partners who are dedicated to advancing the regional economy in collaboration with the private sector. Through this plan, Northeast Florida will improve its competitive positioning against peer markets to better attract talent, business, and investments that will continue to grow and diversify the economy. Although there is work to be done to move the region to the next level, there must be an acknowledgment of the tremendous work that has already been accomplished. In recognition of this fact, the plan includes strategies and actions that have proven successful and must be continued across the region, as well as strategies and actions that exist in parts of Northeast Florida, but which should be scaled up to benefit the entire region. The action plan also includes new initiatives that will strengthen the regional economy and foster new partnerships.



Ocean Pond Park, Baker County

GOAL 1

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Promote the development of accessible career pathways that create a robust talent pipeline reflective of employer needs.

- 1.1. Grow career exploration and training programs that expose youth and adults to job opportunities across Northeast Florida.
- 1.2. Deepen partner engagement across workforce and talent development initiatives to ensure talent is retained in Northeast Florida.
- 1.3. Prioritize the workforce support ecosystem through collaborative partnerships.
- 1.4. Bolster talent attraction and marketing initiatives to grow a diverse pool of top-tier talent.

GOAL 2

BUSINESS GROWTH

Attract, retain, and grow businesses while cultivating an inclusive, supportive ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship.

- 2.1. Make critical investments to support startups and entrepreneurs, a segment which often represents the future of a regional economy.
- 2.2. Drive business growth, retention, and expansion efforts throughout Northeast Florida.
- 2.3. Implement a regionally collaborative and coordinated approach to target sector development to grow future niche industries in Northeast Florida.
- 2.4. Support the growth and vitality of small businesses across Northeast Florida.
- 2.5. Recruit new companies to Northeast Florida that offer high-quality jobs and are invested in the future of the region.

GOAL 3

QUALITY OF PLACE

Elevate quality of place projects that spur investment and create a desirable location for businesses and talent.

- 3.1. Invest in Northeast Florida's downtowns and central business districts to spur investment and development, including downtown Jacksonville.
- 3.2. Expand the number of housing units across Northeast Florida to meet the region's growth patterns.
- 3.3. Maintain an authentic sense of community identity as new development and investment occurs.
- 3.4. Invest in connectivity infrastructure and systems to support the regional economy and its residents.

GOAL 4

INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORKS

Prioritize place-based real estate development projects that spur investment and position the region as a preferred location for businesses and residents.

- 4.1. Identify and focus development on commercial and residential corridors that link communities across Northeast Florida.
- 4.2. Ensure a long-term supply of commercial and industrial employment ready sites across Northeast Florida.
- 4.3. Proactively address permitting processes across the region to ensure sites and projects can be moved forward at a competitive pace.
- 4.4. Approach connectivity from a holistic and regional perspective that includes the movement of information as well as the physical mobility of freight and commuters.

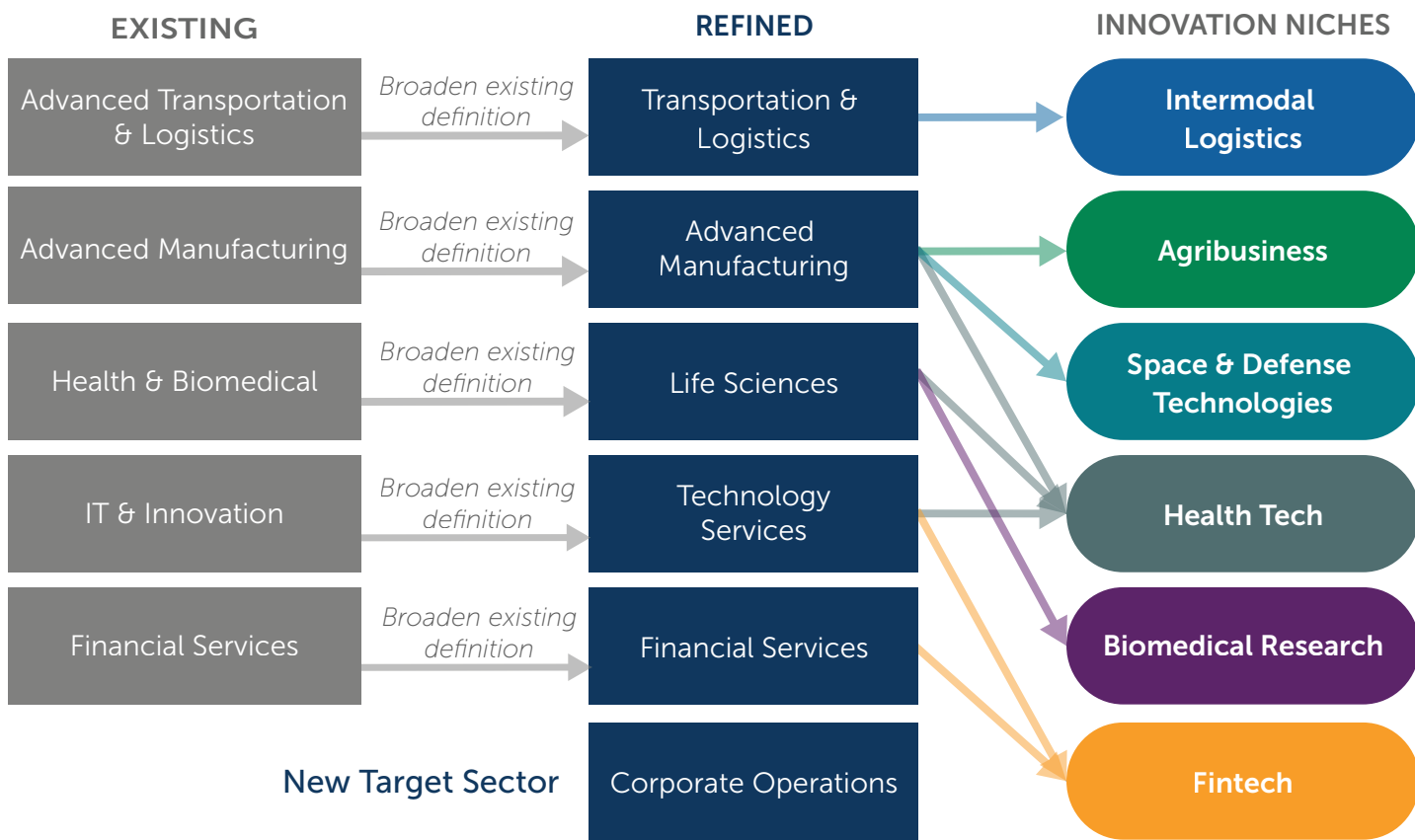
INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS

The target industry clusters laid out in the 2018 *Elevate Northeast Florida* strategic plan were updated and refined to tighten regional marketing efforts and prospect coverage. But the challenge ahead for Northeast Florida is nourishing the underlying ecosystems of innovative activity already at work on the ground.

Six innovation ecosystems emerged from the current planning process. Initially, fintech, biomedical research, space and defense technologies, and intermodal logistics were identified. These four niches were later expanded to include health tech and agribusiness. If these nascent ecosystems are ever to become more than a sum of their parts, they will require an outspoken, high-visibility regional champion. Rather than focusing on business recruitment, this champion will be needed to address fundamental questions, including the following.

- ◆ Are anchor institutions providing a stable platform for economic development needs?
- ◆ Is startup activity occurring and do emerging companies have the resources they need to get off the ground, such as networking events, competitions, ample capital sources?
- ◆ And, crucially, is there public awareness of these activities? Without established and emerging media outlets spotlighting innovative companies and activities, an important opportunity to build momentum and community support for these ecosystems is lost.

The innovation areas highlighted will require significant investments—in physical infrastructure, in educational programming, in talent pipelines, and in the nurturing and cross-pollination of institutional relationships. These investments can occur alongside existing targets, but they must be developed with a different programmatic vision. Target recruiting serves a complementary purpose but represents a different point on the spectrum of industry lifecycles.



IMPACT

Measuring the impact of the strategic plan is a vital component of assessing the region’s economic health. Metrics can be divided in three areas: baseline community indicators, economic development indicators, and strategic action indicators. Baseline community indicators include social and demographic metrics that can be benchmarked against other communities, such as population growth and educational attainment. Economic development indicators are tied to the actions of economic development organizations and would include metrics such as media impressions and the number of new businesses recruited to the region. The third area, strategic action indicators, can be found on the plan’s implementation matrix (published separately). These measures track actions, such as forming a committee. In addition to tracking performance metrics, implementation partners will convene to ensure the plan is moving forward.

BASELINE COMMUNITY INDICATORS (Benchmarked to peer communities)	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Population change◆ Educational attainment◆ Housing starts◆ Air travel trends◆ Job growth◆ Average annual wage◆ Gross regional product (GRP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ New businesses recruited◆ Businesses retained or expanded◆ Capital investment◆ Startup growth and investments◆ Payroll impact◆ Tax base change◆ Media impressions

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PROJECT PARTNERS

The *Future is Now-Northeast Florida* strategy is made possible through the funding of JAXUSA Partnership, CareerSource Northeast Florida, Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC), Jacksonville Civic Council (JCC), JEA, and Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA).

Equally important are the partners of Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns Counties who served as steering committee members, subject matter experts, and county liaisons during the planning process.

Without the support of JAXUSA Partnership investors, this work would not be possible. Many investors were active participants in the planning process and will be instrumental in plan implementation going forward.

STEERING COMMITTEE

- ◆ Greg Anderson, JAXUSA Partnership
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- ◆ Aaron Bowman, JAXUSA Partnership
- ◆ Jim Bush, Florida Power & Light Company
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- ◆ Paul Crawford, City of Jacksonville, Office of Economic Dev.
- ◆ Jay Cunio, Jacksonville Aviation Authority
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- ◆ Shamika Wright, JAX Chamber Foundation
- ◆ Jennifer Zuberer, St. Johns County Government



PROJECT FUNDERS



JAXUSA Partnership is a private, nonprofit division of the JAX Chamber and is Northeast Florida's regional economic development initiative. Its mission is to be a catalyst for economic growth and maximize the region's unique resources to aggressively recruit jobs and private capital investment to the region. JAXUSA Partnership coordinates economic development efforts across a seven-county region that includes Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns.



CareerSource Northeast Florida is a publicly funded agency that provides extensive workforce-related services to six counties on Florida's First Coast: Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns. Connecting workers to jobs and businesses to the talent they need to thrive, CareerSource Northeast Florida provides innovative services that build a talent pipeline for the jobs of today and the future.



The Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) is the regional planning organization (1 of 10 in the state of Florida) for Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, Nassau, and St. Johns Counties and their 25 municipalities. The mission of the NEFRC is to celebrate the unique assets of Northeast Florida and to engage its people, businesses, governments, and organizations.



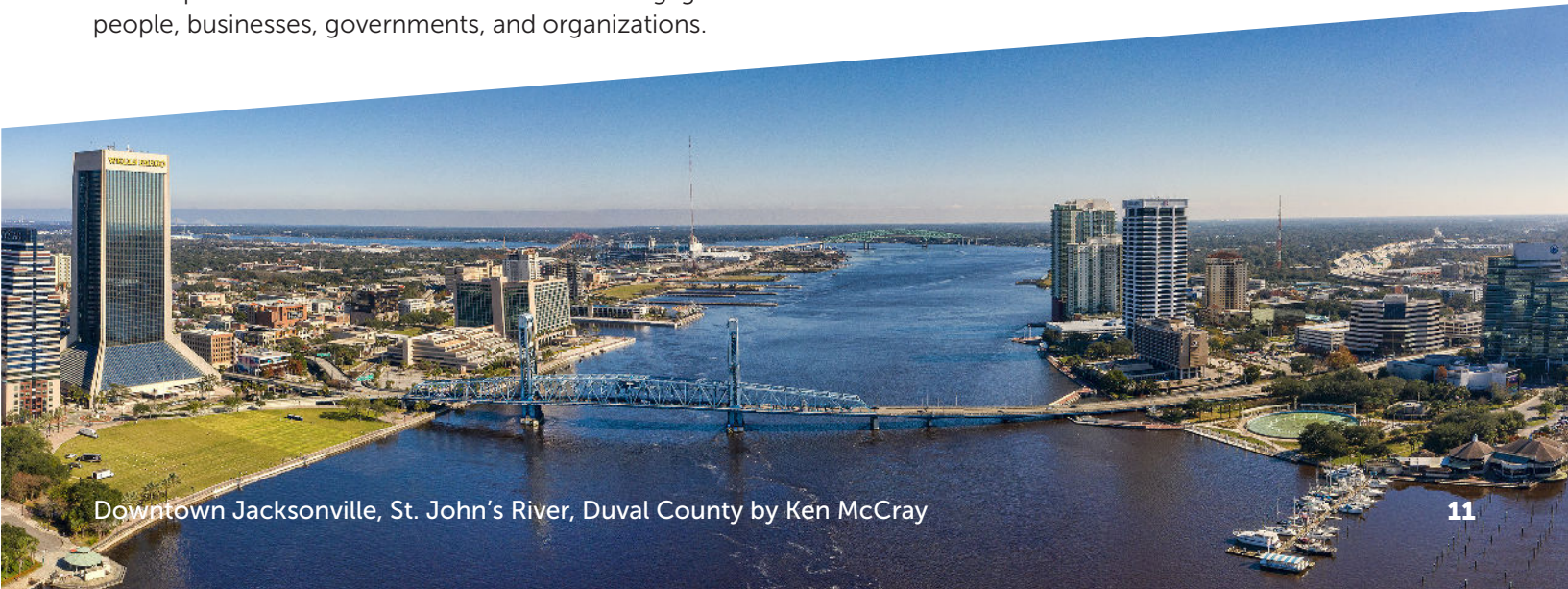
JEA is a not-for-profit, community-owned utility located in Jacksonville, Florida, dedicated to improving lives and building community. Created as the Jacksonville Electric Authority by the City of Jacksonville in 1967, JEA provides services including electric, water, and sewer to more than one million Northeast Florida residents.



The Jacksonville Civic Council (JCC) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization established in 2010 by a diverse group of business and civic leaders seeking to shape and define Jacksonville's future. JCC members deploy collective resources to achieve the goal of creating a vibrant and sustainable future for Jacksonville and its people.



The Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA) is an independent state agency serving Duval County by providing safe, reliable, innovative, sustainable, and dignified mobility solutions and facilities. JTA has responsibilities across multiple transportation modes, including designing and constructing bridges and highways and providing a variety of mass transit services.



Unless otherwise noted, images featured in this document were provided by JAXUSA Partnership and include some taken by Ketterman Photography.



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