

1                                   A bill to be entitled  
 2           An act relating to the Rural Economic Development  
 3           Initiative; amending s. 288.0656, F.S.; revising  
 4           legislative intent relating to the Rural Economic  
 5           Development Initiative; redefining the term "rural  
 6           area of opportunity"; revising the duties,  
 7           responsibilities, and membership of the Rural Economic  
 8           Development Initiative; deleting a provision limiting  
 9           the number of rural areas of opportunity that may be  
 10          designated; deleting a provision listing the economic  
 11          development incentives for which the Governor may  
 12          waive criteria requirements or similar provisions;  
 13          deleting a requirement that certain catalyst projects  
 14          be identified as such by Enterprise Florida, Inc.;  
 15          revising reporting requirements; amending ss.  
 16          163.3177, 163.3187, 257.193, 288.019, 288.06561,  
 17          290.0055, 290.06561, 337.403, 339.2818, 339.2819,  
 18          339.63, 479.16, and 627.6699, F.S.; conforming cross-  
 19          references; providing an effective date.

20  
 21   Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

22  
 23           Section 1.   Section 288.0656, Florida Statutes, is amended  
 24   to read:  
 25           288.0656   Rural Economic Development Initiative.—

26           (1)~~(a)~~ Recognizing that rural communities and regions  
 27 continue to face extraordinary challenges in their efforts to  
 28 significantly improve residents' quality of life and their local  
 29 economies, specifically in terms of personal income, education,  
 30 infrastructure, access to health care, and job creation.  
 31 ~~Therefore, average wages, and strong tax bases,~~ it is the intent  
 32 of the Legislature to encourage and facilitate their achievement  
 33 of the following goals:

34           (a) Job creation, through the location and expansion of  
 35 ~~major~~ economic development projects ~~of significant scale in such~~  
 36 ~~rural communities.~~

37           (b) Improved community infrastructure, including, but not  
 38 limited to, roads, utilities, water and sewer systems, and  
 39 communications.

40           (c) The development and growth of a skilled workforce.

41           (d) Improved access to health care.

42           (2)~~(b)~~ The Rural Economic Development Initiative, known as  
 43 "REDI," is created within the department, and the participation  
 44 of state and regional agencies in this initiative is authorized.

45           (3)~~(2)~~ As used in this section, the term:

46           (a) "Catalyst project" means a business locating or  
 47 expanding in a rural area of opportunity to serve as an economic  
 48 generator of regional significance for the growth of a regional  
 49 target industry cluster. The project must provide capital  
 50 investment on a scale significant enough to affect the entire

51 region and result in the development of high-wage and high-skill  
52 jobs.

53 (b) "Catalyst site" means a parcel or parcels of land  
54 within a rural area of opportunity that has been prioritized as  
55 a geographic site for economic development through partnerships  
56 with state, regional, and local organizations. The site must be  
57 reviewed by REDI and approved by the department for the purposes  
58 of locating a catalyst project.

59 (c) "Economic distress" means conditions affecting the  
60 fiscal and economic viability of a rural community, including  
61 such factors as low per capita income, low per capita taxable  
62 values, high unemployment, high underemployment, low weekly  
63 earned wages compared to the state average, low housing values  
64 compared to the state average, high percentages of the  
65 population receiving public assistance, high poverty levels  
66 compared to the state average, and a lack of year-round stable  
67 employment opportunities.

68 (d) "Rural area of opportunity" means a rural community,  
69 or a region composed of rural communities, designated by the  
70 Governor, which has been adversely affected by ~~an extraordinary~~  
71 ~~economic event,~~ severe or chronic economic distress, and faces  
72 competitive disadvantages, such as low labor force  
73 participation, low educational attainment levels, high  
74 unemployment, school district grades of "D" or "F" calculated  
75 pursuant to s. 1008.34, high infant mortality rates, and high

76 | diabetes and obesity rates, and which ~~or a natural disaster or~~  
 77 | ~~that~~ presents a unique economic development opportunity of  
 78 | regional impact.

79 | (e) "Rural community" means:

- 80 | 1. A county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
- 81 | 2. A county with a population of 125,000 or fewer which is
- 82 | contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
- 83 | 3. A municipality within a county described in
- 84 | subparagraph 1. or subparagraph 2.
- 85 | 4. An unincorporated federal enterprise community or an
- 86 | incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or fewer and
- 87 | an employment base focused on traditional agricultural or
- 88 | resource-based industries, located in a county not defined as
- 89 | rural, which has at least three or more of the economic distress
- 90 | factors identified in paragraph (c) and verified by the
- 91 | department.

92 |  
 93 | For purposes of this paragraph, population shall be determined  
 94 | in accordance with the most recent official estimate pursuant to  
 95 | s. 186.901.

96 | ~~(4)(3)~~ REDI is ~~shall be~~ responsible for coordinating and  
 97 | focusing the efforts and resources of state and regional  
 98 | agencies on the challenges of the state's rural areas of  
 99 | opportunity and economically distressed rural communities. REDI  
 100 | shall work ~~problems which affect the fiscal, economic, and~~

101 ~~community viability of Florida's economically distressed rural~~  
102 ~~communities, working with local governments, community-based~~  
103 ~~organizations, and private organizations that have an interest~~  
104 ~~in the renewed prosperity and competitiveness~~ growth and  
105 ~~development of these communities to find ways to balance~~  
106 ~~environmental and growth management issues with local needs.~~

107 (5) ~~(4)~~ REDI shall review and evaluate the impact of  
108 statutes and rules on rural communities and ~~shall~~ work to  
109 minimize any adverse impact and undertake outreach and capacity-  
110 building efforts to improve the ability of rural communities to  
111 compete in a global economy.

112 (6) ~~(5)~~ REDI shall facilitate better access to state  
113 resources by promoting direct access and referrals to  
114 appropriate state and regional agencies and statewide  
115 organizations. ~~REDI may undertake outreach, capacity building,~~  
116 ~~and other advocacy efforts to improve conditions in rural~~  
117 ~~communities. These activities may include sponsorship of~~  
118 ~~conferences and achievement awards.~~

119 (7) (a) REDI shall consist of the following members:

120 1. The executive director of the department or his or her  
121 designee, who shall serve as chair.

122 2. The Secretary of Transportation or his or her designee.

123 3. The Secretary of Environmental Protection or his or her  
124 designee.

125 4. The Commissioner of Agriculture or his or her designee.

126 5. The State Surgeon General or his or her designee.

127 6. The Commissioner of Education or his or her designee.

128 7. The President of Enterprise Florida, Inc., or his or  
129 her designee.

130 8. The chair of the board of directors of CareerSource  
131 Florida, Inc., or his or her designee.

132 9. The chair of the board of the regional economic  
133 development organization for each of the rural areas of  
134 opportunity or his or her designee.

135 10. Five members from the private sector, three of whom  
136 shall be appointed by the executive director of the department,  
137 one of whom shall be appointed by the President of the Senate,  
138 and one of whom shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House  
139 of Representatives.

140 (b) In making their appointments, the executive director,  
141 the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of  
142 Representatives shall ensure that the appointments reflect the  
143 diversity of Florida's business community and have the necessary  
144 skills to assist rural communities and regions in achieving the  
145 goals specified in subsection (1).

146 (c) The executive director, the President of the Senate,  
147 and the Speaker of the House of Representatives shall consider  
148 appointees who reflect the state's racial, ethnic, and gender  
149 diversity and who are from rural communities.

150 (d) Each appointed member shall be appointed to a 2-year

151 term.

152 (e) Initial appointments shall be made by July 1, 2018,  
153 with members' terms expiring on June 30 of their second year of  
154 service.

155 (f) A vacancy shall be filled for the remainder of the  
156 unexpired term in the same manner as the original appointment.

157 (g) An appointed member may be removed by the appointing  
158 officer for cause. Absence of a member from three consecutive  
159 meetings results in automatic removal.

160 (h) The chair may request the head of any state agency or  
161 organization to serve on an ad hoc committee as needed to  
162 address issues or projects relating to rural areas of  
163 opportunity and economically distressed rural communities. The  
164 chair shall consider requesting the following individuals to  
165 serve on an ad hoc committee:

166 1. The executive director of the Fish and Wildlife  
167 Conservation Commission or his or her designee.

168 2. The Secretary of State or his or her designee.

169 3. The Secretary of Children and Families or his or her  
170 designee.

171 4. The Secretary of Corrections or his or her designee.

172 5. The Secretary of Juvenile Justice or his or her  
173 designee.

174 6. The Secretary of Health Care Administration or his or  
175 her designee.

176            7. A board member of the Florida Regional Councils  
 177 Association or his or her designee.

178            ~~(6) (a) By August 1 of each year, the head of each of the~~  
 179 ~~following agencies and organizations shall designate a deputy~~  
 180 ~~secretary or higher level staff person from within the agency or~~  
 181 ~~organization to serve as the REDI representative for the agency~~  
 182 ~~or organization:~~

- 183            1. ~~The Department of Transportation.~~
- 184            2. ~~The Department of Environmental Protection.~~
- 185            3. ~~The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.~~
- 186            4. ~~The Department of State.~~
- 187            5. ~~The Department of Health.~~
- 188            6. ~~The Department of Children and Families.~~
- 189            7. ~~The Department of Corrections.~~
- 190            8. ~~The Department of Education.~~
- 191            9. ~~The Department of Juvenile Justice.~~
- 192            10. ~~The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.~~
- 193            11. ~~Each water management district.~~
- 194            12. ~~Enterprise Florida, Inc.~~
- 195            13. ~~CareerSource Florida, Inc.~~
- 196            14. ~~VISIT Florida.~~
- 197            15. ~~The Florida Regional Planning Council Association.~~
- 198            16. ~~The Agency for Health Care Administration.~~
- 199            17. ~~The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences~~  
 200 ~~(IFAS).~~



201  
 202 ~~An alternate for each designee shall also be chosen, and the~~  
 203 ~~names of the designees and alternates shall be sent to the~~  
 204 ~~executive director of the department.~~

205 (i)(b) Each REDI member who is, or is designated by, a  
 206 state agency or organization head ~~representative must have~~  
 207 ~~comprehensive knowledge of his or her agency's functions, both~~  
 208 ~~regulatory and service in nature, and of the state's economic~~  
 209 ~~goals, policies, and programs. This person shall be the primary~~  
 210 ~~point of contact for his or her agency with REDI on issues and~~  
 211 ~~projects relating to rural areas of opportunity and economically~~  
 212 ~~distressed rural communities and with regard to expediting~~  
 213 ~~project review, shall ensure a prompt effective response to~~  
 214 ~~problems arising with regard to rural issues, and shall work~~  
 215 ~~closely with the other REDI members~~ representatives ~~in the~~  
 216 ~~identification of opportunities for preferential awards of~~  
 217 ~~program funds and allowances and waiver of program requirements~~  
 218 ~~when necessary to encourage and facilitate long-term private~~  
 219 ~~capital investment and job creation. Such members shall also~~  
 220 ensure that each district office or facility of his or her  
 221 agency or organization is informed about REDI and provide  
 222 assistance throughout the agency in the implementation of REDI  
 223 activities.

224 ~~(c) The REDI representatives shall work with REDI in the~~  
 225 ~~review and evaluation of statutes and rules for adverse impact~~

226 ~~on rural communities and the development of alternative~~  
227 ~~proposals to mitigate that impact.~~

228 ~~(d) Each REDI representative shall be responsible for~~  
229 ~~ensuring that each district office or facility of his or her~~  
230 ~~agency is informed about the Rural Economic Development~~  
231 ~~Initiative and for providing assistance throughout the agency in~~  
232 ~~the implementation of REDI activities.~~

233 ~~(8)(7)(a) REDI may recommend to the Governor up to three~~  
234 ~~rural areas of opportunity. The Governor, may by executive~~  
235 ~~order, may designate up to three rural areas of opportunity~~  
236 ~~which will establish these areas as priority assignments for~~  
237 ~~REDI, and, acting through REDI, may as well as to allow the~~  
238 ~~Governor, acting through REDI, to waive criteria, requirements,~~  
239 ~~or similar provisions of any economic development incentive.~~  
240 ~~Such incentives shall include, but are not limited to, the~~  
241 ~~Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund Program under s. 288.106,~~  
242 ~~the Quick Response Training Program under s. 288.047, the Quick~~  
243 ~~Response Training Program for participants in the welfare~~  
244 ~~transition program under s. 288.047(8), transportation projects~~  
245 ~~under s. 339.2821, the brownfield redevelopment bonus refund~~  
246 ~~under s. 288.107, and the rural job tax credit program under ss.~~  
247 ~~212.098 and 220.1895.~~

248 (b) Designation as a rural area of opportunity under this  
249 subsection is ~~shall be~~ contingent upon the execution of a  
250 memorandum of agreement among the department; the governing body

251 of the county; and the governing bodies of any municipalities to  
252 be included within a rural area of opportunity. Such agreement  
253 must ~~shall~~ specify the terms and conditions of the designation,  
254 including, but not limited to, the duties and responsibilities  
255 of the county and any participating municipalities to take  
256 actions designed to facilitate the retention and expansion of  
257 existing businesses in the area, as well as the recruitment of  
258 new businesses to the area.

259 (c) Each rural area of opportunity may designate catalyst  
260 projects, ~~provided that each catalyst project is~~ specifically  
261 recommended by REDI, ~~identified as a catalyst project by~~  
262 ~~Enterprise Florida, Inc.,~~ and approved ~~confirmed as a catalyst~~  
263 ~~project~~ by the department. All state agencies and departments  
264 shall use all available tools and resources to the extent  
265 permissible by law to promote the creation and development of  
266 each catalyst project and the development of catalyst sites.

267 (9)(8) Before September 1 of each year, REDI shall submit  
268 ~~a report~~ to the department, the Governor, the President of the  
269 Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives a  
270 complete and detailed report, including, but not limited to ~~on~~  
271 ~~all REDI activities for the previous fiscal year as a supplement~~  
272 ~~to the department's annual report required under s. 20.60. This~~  
273 ~~supplementary report must include:~~

274 (a) A description of the operations of ~~status report on~~  
275 all projects currently being coordinated through REDI, the

276 number of preferential awards and allowances made pursuant to  
277 this section, the dollar amount of such awards, ~~and~~ the names of  
278 the recipients, and an evaluation of progress toward achieving  
279 organizational goals and specific performance outcomes, as  
280 established by the department.

281 (b) A description of the accomplishments of REDI and  
282 identification of major trends, initiatives, or developments  
283 affecting the performance of a program or activity coordinated  
284 through REDI.

285 (c) A description of all waivers of program requirements  
286 granted.

287 ~~(d)(e)~~ Information as to the economic impact of the  
288 projects coordinated by REDI.

289 ~~(e)(d)~~ Recommendations based on the review and evaluation  
290 of statutes and rules having an adverse impact on rural  
291 communities and proposals to mitigate such adverse impacts.

292 Section 2. Paragraph (e) of subsection (7) of section  
293 163.3177, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

294 163.3177 Required and optional elements of comprehensive  
295 plan; studies and surveys.—

296 (7)

297 (e) This subsection does not confer the status of rural  
298 area of opportunity, or any of the rights or benefits derived  
299 from such status, on any land area not otherwise designated as  
300 such pursuant to s. 288.0656(8) ~~s. 288.0656(7)~~.

301 Section 3. Subsection (3) of section 163.3187, Florida  
 302 Statutes, is amended to read:

303 163.3187 Process for adoption of small-scale comprehensive  
 304 plan amendment.—

305 (3) If the small scale development amendment involves a  
 306 site within a rural area of opportunity as defined under s.  
 307 288.0656(3)(d) ~~s. 288.0656(2)(d)~~ for the duration of such  
 308 designation, the 10-acre limit listed in subsection (1) shall be  
 309 increased by 100 percent to 20 acres. The local government  
 310 approving the small scale plan amendment shall certify to the  
 311 state land planning agency that the plan amendment furthers the  
 312 economic objectives set forth in the executive order issued  
 313 under s. 288.0656(8) ~~s. 288.0656(7)~~, and the property subject to  
 314 the plan amendment shall undergo public review to ensure that  
 315 all concurrency requirements and federal, state, and local  
 316 environmental permit requirements are met.

317 Section 4. Subsection (2) of section 257.193, Florida  
 318 Statutes, is amended to read:

319 257.193 Community Libraries in Caring Program.—

320 (2) The purpose of the Community Libraries in Caring  
 321 Program is to assist libraries in rural communities, as defined  
 322 in s. 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~ and subject to the provisions  
 323 of s. 288.06561, to strengthen their collections and services,  
 324 improve literacy in their communities, and improve the economic  
 325 viability of their communities.

326 Section 5. Section 288.019, Florida Statutes, is amended  
327 to read:

328 288.019 Rural considerations in grant review and  
329 evaluation processes.—Notwithstanding any other law, and to the  
330 fullest extent possible, the member agencies and organizations  
331 of the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) as defined  
332 in s. 288.0656(7)(a) ~~s. 288.0656(6)(a)~~ shall review all grant  
333 and loan application evaluation criteria to ensure the fullest  
334 access for rural counties as defined in s. 288.0656(3) ~~s.~~  
335 ~~288.0656(2)~~ to resources available throughout the state.

336 (1) Each REDI agency and organization shall review all  
337 evaluation and scoring procedures and develop modifications to  
338 those procedures which minimize the impact of a project within a  
339 rural area.

340 (2) Evaluation criteria and scoring procedures must  
341 provide for an appropriate ranking based on the proportionate  
342 impact that projects have on a rural area when compared with  
343 similar project impacts on an urban area.

344 (3) Evaluation criteria and scoring procedures must  
345 recognize the disparity of available fiscal resources for an  
346 equal level of financial support from an urban county and a  
347 rural county.

348 (a) The evaluation criteria should weight contribution in  
349 proportion to the amount of funding available at the local  
350 level.

351 (b) In-kind match should be allowed and applied as  
 352 financial match when a county is experiencing financial distress  
 353 through elevated unemployment at a rate in excess of the state's  
 354 average by 5 percentage points or because of the loss of its ad  
 355 valorem base.

356 (4) For existing programs, the modified evaluation  
 357 criteria and scoring procedure must be delivered to the  
 358 department for distribution to the REDI agencies and  
 359 organizations. The REDI agencies and organizations shall review  
 360 and make comments. Future rules, programs, evaluation criteria,  
 361 and scoring processes must be brought before a REDI meeting for  
 362 review, discussion, and recommendation to allow rural counties  
 363 fuller access to the state's resources.

364 Section 6. Section 288.06561, Florida Statutes, is amended  
 365 to read:

366 288.06561 Reduction or waiver of financial match  
 367 requirements.—Notwithstanding any other law, the member agencies  
 368 and organizations of the Rural Economic Development Initiative  
 369 (REDI), as defined in s. 288.0656(7)(a) ~~s. 288.0656(6)(a)~~, shall  
 370 review the financial match requirements for projects in rural  
 371 areas as defined in s. 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~.

372 (1) Each agency and organization shall develop a proposal  
 373 to waive or reduce the match requirement for rural areas.

374 (2) Agencies and organizations shall ensure that all  
 375 proposals are submitted to the department for review by the REDI

376 agencies.

377 (3) These proposals shall be delivered to the department  
378 for distribution to the REDI agencies and organizations. A  
379 meeting of REDI agencies and organizations must be called within  
380 30 days after receipt of such proposals for REDI comment and  
381 recommendations on each proposal.

382 (4) Waivers and reductions must be requested by the county  
383 or community, and such county or community must have three or  
384 more of the factors identified in s. 288.0656(3)(c) ~~s.~~  
385 ~~288.0656(2)(c)~~.

386 (5) Any other funds available to the project may be used  
387 for financial match of federal programs when there is fiscal  
388 hardship, and the match requirements may not be waived or  
389 reduced.

390 (6) When match requirements are not reduced or eliminated,  
391 donations of land, though usually not recognized as an in-kind  
392 match, may be permitted.

393 (7) To the fullest extent possible, agencies and  
394 organizations shall expedite the rule adoption and amendment  
395 process if necessary to incorporate the reduction in match by  
396 rural areas in fiscal distress.

397 (8) REDI shall include in its annual report an evaluation  
398 on the status of changes to rules, number of awards made with  
399 waivers, and recommendations for future changes.

400 Section 7. Paragraph (d) of subsection (6) of section



401 290.0055, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

402 290.0055 Local nominating procedure.—

403 (6)

404 (d)1. The governing body of a jurisdiction which has  
405 nominated an application for an enterprise zone that is at least  
406 15 square miles and less than 20 square miles and includes a  
407 portion of the state designated as a rural area of opportunity  
408 under s. 288.0656(8) ~~s. 288.0656(7)~~ may apply to the department  
409 to expand the boundary of the existing enterprise zone by not  
410 more than 3 square miles.

411 2. The governing body of a jurisdiction which has  
412 nominated an application for an enterprise zone that is at least  
413 20 square miles and includes a portion of the state designated  
414 as a rural area of opportunity under s. 288.0656(8) ~~s.~~  
415 ~~288.0656(7)~~ may apply to the department to expand the boundary  
416 of the existing enterprise zone by not more than 5 square miles.

417 3. An application to expand the boundary of an enterprise  
418 zone under this paragraph must be submitted by December 31,  
419 2013.

420 4. Notwithstanding the area limitations specified in  
421 subsection (4), the department may approve the request for a  
422 boundary amendment if the area continues to satisfy the  
423 remaining requirements of this section.

424 5. The department shall establish the initial effective  
425 date of an enterprise zone designated under this paragraph.

426 Section 8. Section 290.06561, Florida Statutes, is amended  
427 to read:

428 290.06561 Designation of rural enterprise zone as catalyst  
429 site.—Notwithstanding s. 290.0065(1), the Department of Economic  
430 Opportunity, upon request of the host county, shall designate as  
431 a rural enterprise zone any catalyst site as defined in s.  
432 288.0656(3)(b) ~~s. 288.0656(2)(b)~~ that was approved before  
433 January 1, 2010, and that is not located in an existing rural  
434 enterprise zone. The request from the host county must include  
435 the legal description of the catalyst site and the name and  
436 contact information for the county development authority  
437 responsible for managing the catalyst site. The designation  
438 shall provide businesses locating within the catalyst site the  
439 same eligibility for economic incentives and other benefits of a  
440 rural enterprise zone designated under s. 290.0065. The  
441 reporting criteria for a catalyst site designated as a rural  
442 enterprise zone under this section are the same as for other  
443 rural enterprise zones. Host county development authorities may  
444 enter into memoranda of agreement, as necessary, to coordinate  
445 their efforts to implement this section.

446 Section 9. Paragraph (h) of subsection (1) of section  
447 337.403, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

448 337.403 Interference caused by utility; expenses.—

449 (1) If a utility that is placed upon, under, over, or  
450 within the right-of-way limits of any public road or publicly

451 owned rail corridor is found by the authority to be unreasonably  
452 interfering in any way with the convenient, safe, or continuous  
453 use, or the maintenance, improvement, extension, or expansion,  
454 of such public road or publicly owned rail corridor, the utility  
455 owner shall, upon 30 days' written notice to the utility or its  
456 agent by the authority, initiate the work necessary to alleviate  
457 the interference at its own expense except as provided in  
458 paragraphs (a)-(j). The work must be completed within such  
459 reasonable time as stated in the notice or such time as agreed  
460 to by the authority and the utility owner.

461 (h) If a municipally owned utility or county-owned utility  
462 is located in a rural area of opportunity, as defined in s.  
463 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~, and the department determines that  
464 the utility is unable, and will not be able within the next 10  
465 years, to pay for the cost of utility work necessitated by a  
466 department project on the State Highway System, the department  
467 may pay, in whole or in part, the cost of such utility work  
468 performed by the department or its contractor.

469 Section 10. Subsection (7) of section 339.2818, Florida  
470 Statutes, is amended to read:

471 339.2818 Small County Outreach Program.—

472 (7) Subject to a specific appropriation in addition to  
473 funds annually appropriated for projects under this section, a  
474 municipality within a rural area of opportunity or a rural area  
475 of opportunity community designated under s. 288.0656(8)(a) ~~s.~~

476 ~~288.0656(7)(a)~~ may compete for the additional project funding  
477 using the criteria listed in subsection (4) at up to 100 percent  
478 of project costs, excluding capacity improvement projects.

479 Section 11. Paragraph (c) of subsection (4) of section  
480 339.2819, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

481 339.2819 Transportation Regional Incentive Program.—

482 (4)

483 (c) The department shall give priority to projects that:

484 1. Provide connectivity to the Strategic Intermodal System  
485 developed under s. 339.64.

486 2. Support economic development and the movement of goods  
487 in rural areas of opportunity designated under s. 288.0656(8) ~~§~~  
488 ~~288.0656(7)~~.

489 3. Are subject to a local ordinance that establishes  
490 corridor management techniques, including access management  
491 strategies, right-of-way acquisition and protection measures,  
492 appropriate land use strategies, zoning, and setback  
493 requirements for adjacent land uses.

494 4. Improve connectivity between military installations and  
495 the Strategic Highway Network or the Strategic Rail Corridor  
496 Network.

497

498 The department shall also consider the extent to which local  
499 matching funds are available to be committed to the project.

500 Section 12. Paragraph (b) of subsection (5) of section

501 339.63, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

502 339.63 System facilities designated; additions and  
503 deletions.—

504 (5)

505 (b) A facility designated part of the Strategic Intermodal  
506 System pursuant to paragraph (a) that is within the jurisdiction  
507 of a local government that maintains a transportation  
508 concurrency system shall receive a waiver of transportation  
509 concurrency requirements applicable to Strategic Intermodal  
510 System facilities in order to accommodate any development at the  
511 facility which occurs pursuant to a building permit issued on or  
512 before December 31, 2017, but only if such facility is located:

513 1. Within an area designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(8) ~~s.~~  
514 ~~288.0656(7)~~ as a rural area of opportunity;

515 2. Within a rural enterprise zone as defined in s.  
516 290.004(5); or

517 3. Within 15 miles of the boundary of a rural area of  
518 opportunity or a rural enterprise zone.

519 Section 13. Subsection (16) of section 479.16, Florida  
520 Statutes, is amended to read:

521 479.16 Signs for which permits are not required.—The  
522 following signs are exempt from the requirement that a permit  
523 for a sign be obtained under this chapter but are required to  
524 comply with s. 479.11(4)-(8), and subsections (15)-(20) may not  
525 be implemented or continued if the Federal Government notifies

526 the department that implementation or continuation will  
527 adversely affect the allocation of federal funds to the  
528 department:

529 (16) Signs placed by a local tourist-oriented business  
530 located within a rural area of opportunity as defined in s.  
531 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~ which are:

532 (a) Not more than 8 square feet in size or more than 4  
533 feet in height;

534 (b) Located only in rural areas on a facility that does  
535 not meet the definition of a limited access facility, as defined  
536 in s. 334.03;

537 (c) Located within 2 miles of the business location and at  
538 least 500 feet apart;

539 (d) Located only in two directions leading to the  
540 business; and

541 (e) Not located within the road right-of-way.

542  
543 A business placing such signs must be at least 4 miles from any  
544 other business using this exemption and may not participate in  
545 any other directional signage program by the department.

546  
547 If the exemptions in subsections (15)-(20) are not implemented  
548 or continued due to notification from the Federal Government  
549 that the allocation of federal funds to the department will be  
550 adversely impacted, the department shall provide notice to the

551 sign owner that the sign must be removed within 30 days after  
552 receipt of the notice. If the sign is not removed within 30 days  
553 after receipt of the notice by the sign owner, the department  
554 may remove the sign, and the costs incurred in connection with  
555 the sign removal shall be assessed against and collected from  
556 the sign owner.

557 Section 14. Paragraph (d) of subsection (14) of section  
558 627.6699, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

559 627.6699 Employee Health Care Access Act.—

560 (14) SMALL EMPLOYERS ACCESS PROGRAM.—

561 (d) *Eligibility*.—

562 1. Any small employer that is actively engaged in  
563 business, has its principal place of business in this state,  
564 employs up to 25 eligible employees on business days during the  
565 preceding calendar year, employs at least 2 employees on the  
566 first day of the plan year, and has had no prior coverage for  
567 the last 6 months may participate.

568 2. Any municipality, county, school district, or hospital  
569 employer located in a rural community as defined in s.  
570 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~ may participate.

571 3. Nursing home employers may participate.

572 4. Each dependent of a person eligible for coverage is  
573 also eligible to participate.

574

575 Any employer participating in the program must do so until the

576 | end of the term for which the carrier providing the coverage is  
577 | obligated to provide such coverage to the program. Coverage for  
578 | a small employer group that ceases to meet the eligibility  
579 | requirements of this section may be terminated at the end of the  
580 | policy period for which the necessary premiums have been paid.

581 |         Section 15. This act shall take effect upon becoming a  
582 | law.