



# Diversifying Access to Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge with Alternative Transportation

**Author:** Elisa Kropat, M.C.E, E.I.T.

**Position:** Public Lands Transportation Scholar

**Unit:** Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

**Location:** Titusville, FL

## What is the Transportation Scholars Program?

The Public Lands and National Park Foundations' Transportation Scholars programs provide parks and public lands with transportation professionals for six to 12 months who assist in transportation planning and implementation to help parks and public lands reduce traffic, congestion and pollution while improving visitor experiences. These programs are designed to place individuals with substantial knowledge and expertise in transportation planning and related areas. *See footer for a list of sponsors.*

## Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

### Mission

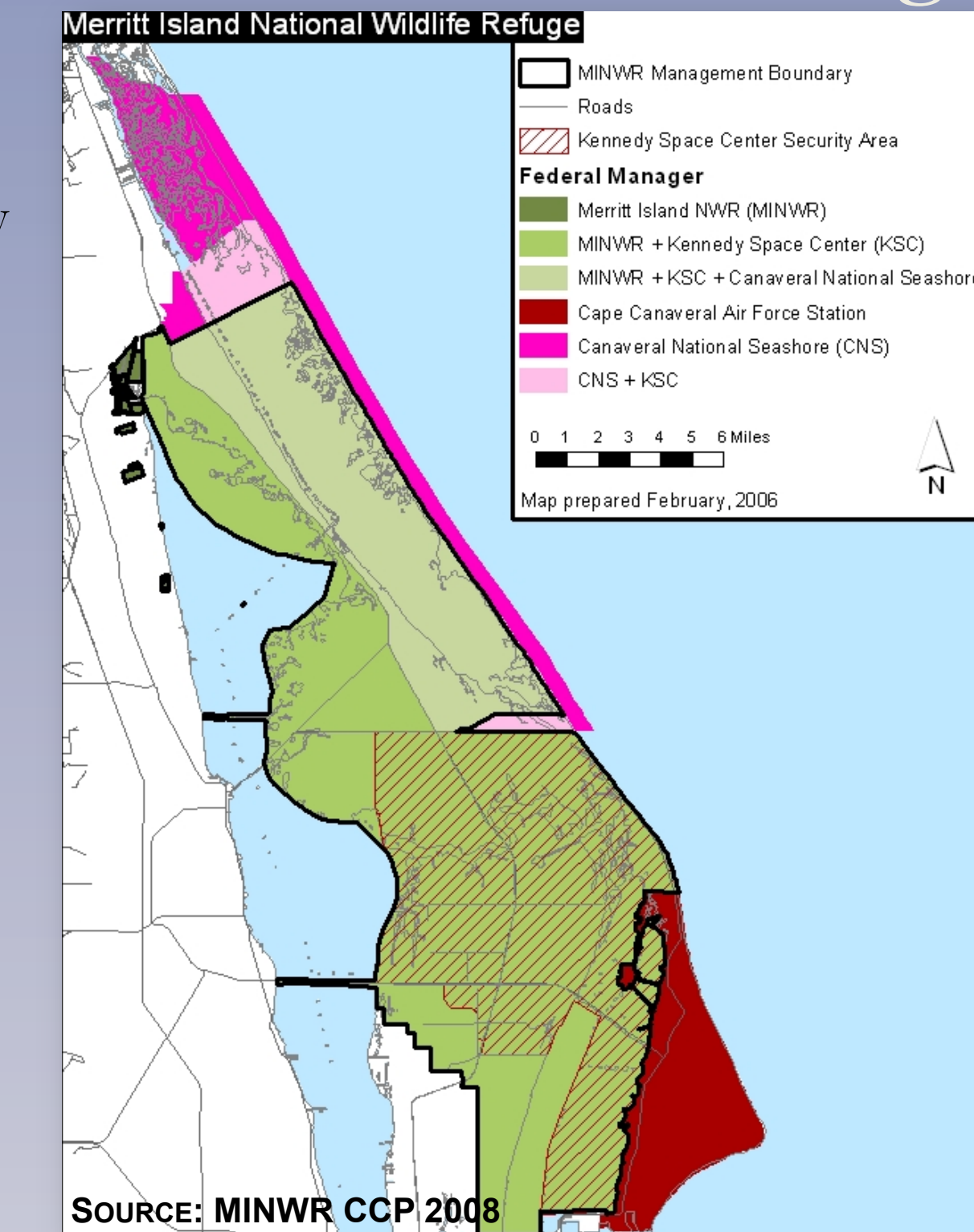
- Protects habitat for state & federal endangered species including Florida Scrub Jay
- Water impoundment management to create resting place for migratory birds
- Prescribed burns to manage habitat for sensitive species

### Federal Agency Partners

- NASA: Established as overlay of JFK Space Center & manages habitat in secure area
- NPS: Shares land management with Canaveral National Seashore which falls along the coast line

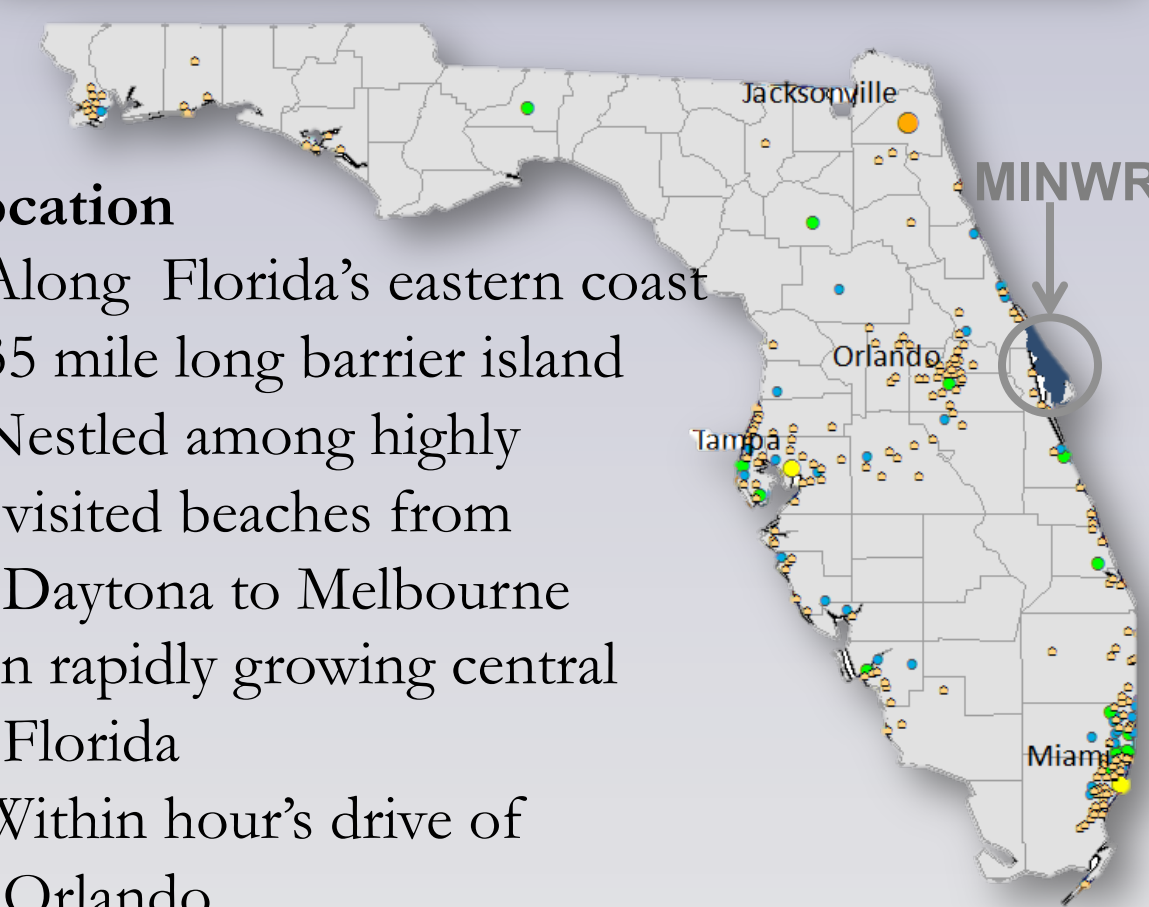
### Attraction

- Attracts 1 million visitors a year with a winter peak season
- Enjoy wildlife based recreation including hunting & fishing
- Renowned estuarine biodiversity
- World-class saltwater & freshwater fishing
- Designated as a globally important bird area



### Location

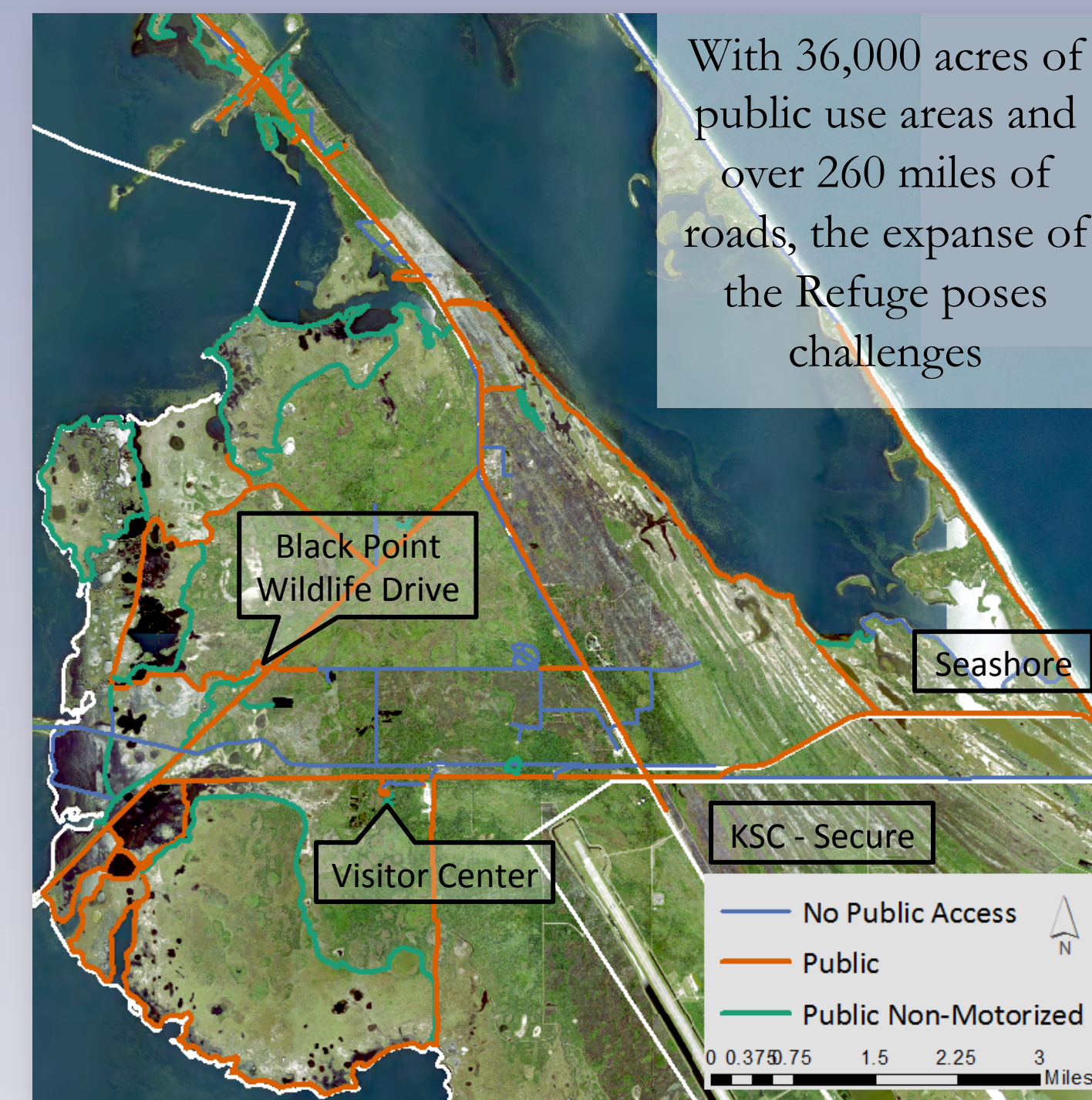
- Along Florida's eastern coast
- 35 mile long barrier island
- Nestled among highly visited beaches from Daytona to Melbourne
- In rapidly growing central Florida
- Within hour's drive of Orlando



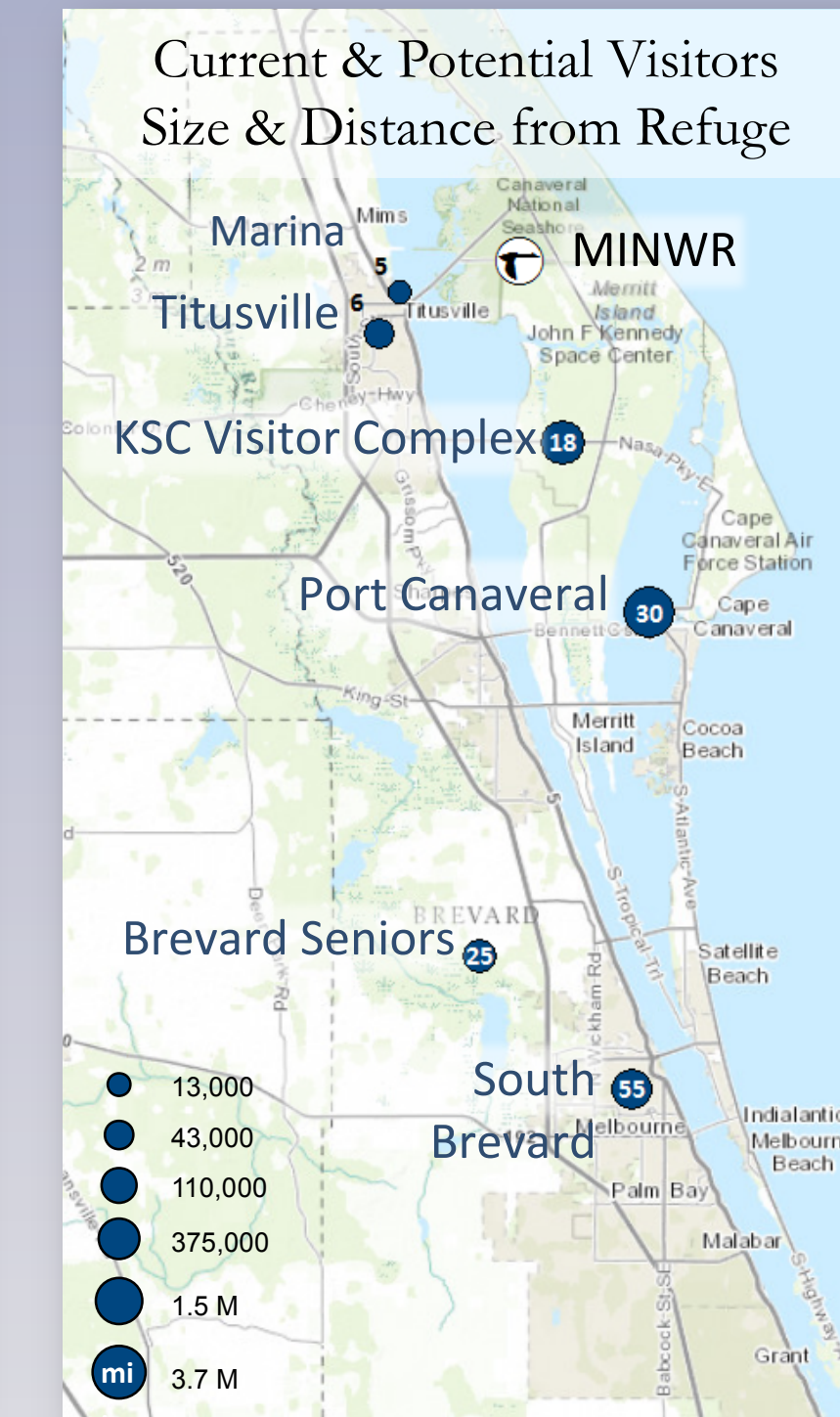
## Assessing the Refuge's Potential for Transit

*How can a transit system reach a more diverse group of users while improving visitor experience?*

Develop a transportation system that supports Refuge's sustainable management practices, including reducing congestion.



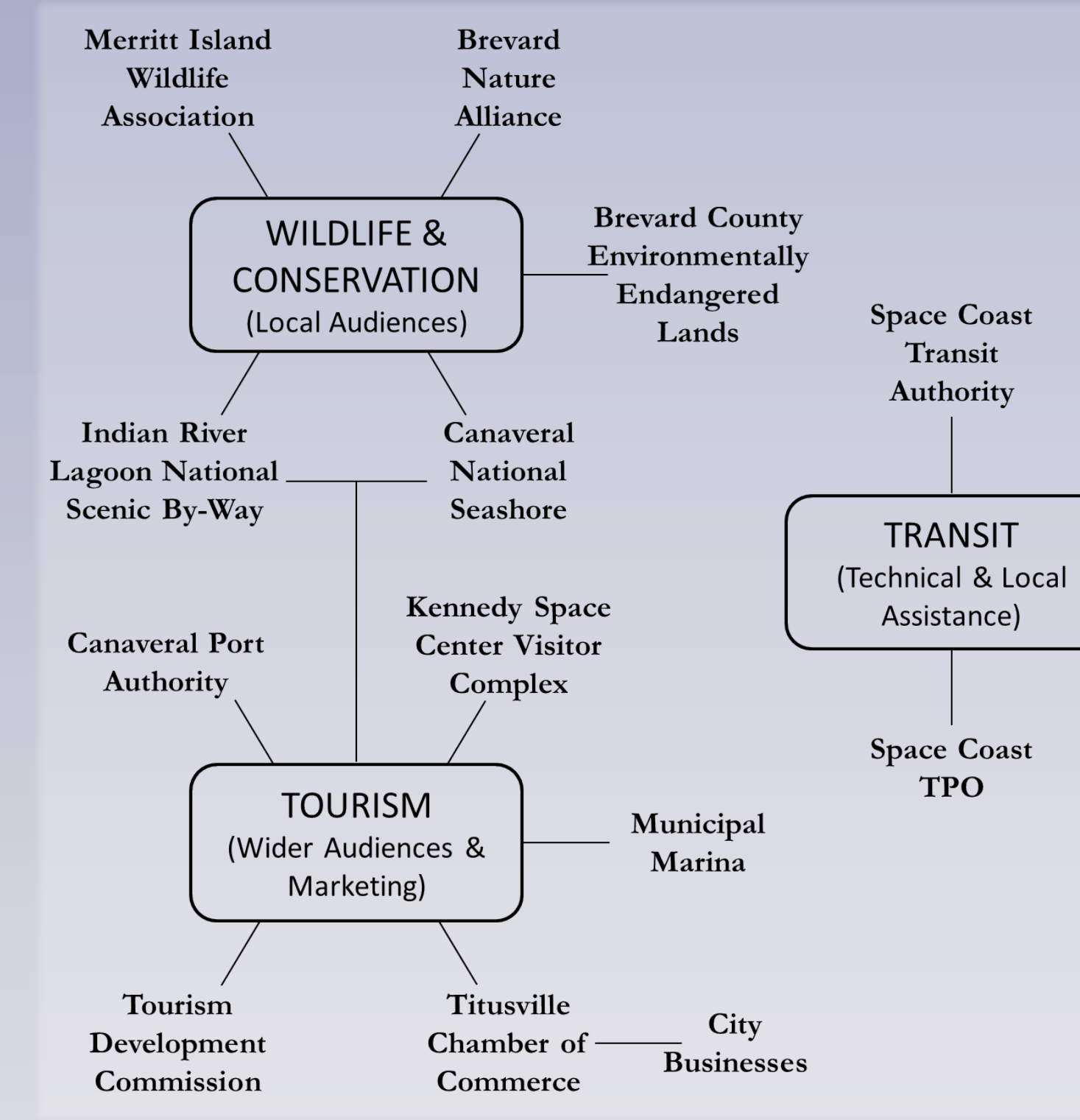
Expand access opportunities to the Refuge through multimodal transportation options for a diverse group of current and potential visitors.



I'm conducting a transit planning study in conjunction with the Volpe Center for the Refuge. The study is ongoing, however, the goals and associated progress are highlighted below.

Improve connectivity between the Refuge & the surrounding region.

Diagram below shows local partners incorporated in study.



63% of current visitors are non-locals traveling an average distance of 472 miles

94% of current visitors access the Refuge using a private vehicle

*A transit system must effectively balance enthusiastic regional partners, who view the Refuge as a critical resource in regional economic growth, with the Refuge management that aims to manage high visitation while upholding conservation principles.*

## Bringing Bicycling to the Refuge

### Bicycling Within the Refuge

MINWR – Visitor Services Plan 2008 - Bicycling Objective:  
“...develop three bicycle trails and make other facility improvements to move bicycle riders into appropriate areas where wildlife disturbances and visitor impacts would be reduced.”

Research shows that bicycling can disturb wildlife however bicycling can connect Refuges regionally and enhance visitor experience. To provide for safe bicycling, I'm working on a *road safety audit* focusing on the following areas:

- Vehicle – bicycle conflicts on Black Point Wildlife Drive
- Developing bicycle access and infrastructure to the Visitor Center
- Turning existing gravel/native roads into bicycle paths
- Alignment of proposed Titusville to Edgewater Trail (see map below)

### Connection to State and Regional Bicycle Paths

