

Regional Transit Roundtable Recap  
Friday, October 6, 2006  
9:00 a.m. to 11:20 a.m.

Welcome

**Agenda Item #1 - Mr. Ken Hoyt - TBRPC Member**

Mr. Hoyt welcomed the participants to the roundtable and had the attendees introduce themselves to the group.

Mr. Hoyt explained that this may be his last transit roundtable as the meeting chair due to the end of his appointment with TBRPC. He thanked everyone in the group for their contributions to transit and emphasized the importance of this group in convening the region and sharing ideas on a quarterly basis. Mr. Hoyt also briefly mentioned the new BRT "Silverline" in Boston and referred the group to the MBTA website ([www.mbta.com](http://www.mbta.com)) for more information.

**Agenda Item #2 - "Focus on Success"**

Commissioner Bill Jonson shared information on the Denver RTD and the Seattle Sound Transit systems. Mr. Jonson visited these systems in June of this year.

Highlights of the Denver system include:

- 2400 square mile district
- 1972 - ½ cent sales tax
- RTD – Directly elected board
- Free shuttle on the Mall (16th St) downtown
  - solves a congestion issue
  - connects to transit stations at each end
- 18,000 passengers/day on the first rail line through downtown
- No pass swipe system – occasionally tickets are checked by staff
- Most stations include parking as well as contemporary art displays
- One line running along the interstate
- Have crossover bridges for interstate pedestrian crossings to transit stops
- Have connected land use and transit
  - servicing a growing technology park

Highlights of the Seattle system include:

- Umbrella group above the county transit agencies
- 0.2 sales tax and motor vehicle tax on license renewal
- Board has local government representatives
- 10-year referendum renewal of Sound Transit Agency
- Run electric trolleys
- 40% of buses are articulated
- Runs express bus and is developing light rail, already has commuter rail
- Have a short monorail
  - voted to cease construction, only part of original plan is operating

Following Mr. Jonson's presentation on Denver and Seattle transit a short discussion followed. Mr. Hoyt shared that Denver has a comprehensive plan to build their transit network by 2014 and that development is occurring throughout the whole region at once based on this transit plan. He also stated that the Denver Regional Council of Governments serves at the Denver Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and that the transit plan has both strong state and regional support. Mr. Jonson followed up with

the fact that light rail in the Denver region actually got higher voter approval than a highway on referendum.

### **Agenda Item #3 - Polk County Transit Regional Merger**

Mr. Michael Skipper with Polk County TPO presented on the merger of the three transit systems operating within Polk County.

According to Mr. Skipper, the prelude to the Polk County transit services merger was the Polk County Transportation System Analysis that was conducted between 2001 and 2003. This analysis examined what transit service to provide and how to provide the identified services. Since completion of this study the TPO has endorsed a strategy to establish a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) to consolidate providers and secure dedicated local funding.

As shared by Mr. Skipper the main reasons for talking about public transportation in Polk County include:

- 7.5 million people live within 100 miles of Polk County
- There is enormous stress on the existing transportation system
- The county population is projected to increase 300,000 in 25 years
- Many new residents will live and work in areas that do not currently have transit service

Mr. Skipper stated that currently Polk County provides 3 million one-way trips per year and operates 2 express bus routes (between Bartow, Winter Haven, and Lakeland).

The 25 year plan for countywide transit service includes:

- New circulator routes throughout the county
- New local and regional commuter services
- Expanded services hours on all routes
- Improved service frequency
- Expanded service in rural areas
- New park & ride lots/intermodal centers

With this 25 year plan in mind, Mr. Skipper displayed the current structure of the transit system and explained how fragmented it is between the 3 current transit agencies (LAMTD, WHAT, PCTSD). The next step in the merger process has been the creation of a Countywide Policy Board with representatives from the existing transit providers and other affected local governments to improve coordination and to develop a strategy for long-term funding and plan implementation. This policy board has endorsed a strategy to create a Polk Regional Transit Authority (RTA) and has developed draft legislation for the creation of this proposed RTA.

The draft RTA legislation as proposed includes the following highlights:

- 9-member board with countywide representation
- Right to own, operate, maintain, and manage a public transportation system
- Ability to accept funds from other governmental and private sources (Charter County Transit System Surtax)
- Ability to levy property tax, subject to voter referendum

Mr. Skipper next presented the anticipated timeline for the Polk RTA. They are hoping to have the RTA established by July 2007 and will be looking at a referendum in 2008. There is potential for an express bus serving the I-4 corridor within 5 years.

### **Agenda Item #4 - Sarasota (SCAT) and Manatee (MCAT) Cooperation**

Mr. Anthony Beckford with Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) presented information on recent events related to cooperative efforts between SCAT and Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT). He stated the current efforts are based on an MPO and Renaissance Planning transit system analysis that was done in 2002. One recommendation of this study was to consider merging the two transit systems.

Merging of the two systems is still being discussed while ongoing cooperation and coordination have increased transit services. Cross-county connections have increased including service between Palmetto and downtown Sarasota. There is also the potential for FDOT to provide some funding that will allow for reduction of headways. Mr. Beckford also shared that they may have additional routes coming online in the near future.

Mr. Bob Herrington, with the Sarasota/Manatee MPO, stated that their success thus far has been in cooperation and in eliminating unnecessary transfers for trips that cross between the two transit systems. He explained that as transfers increase ridership will decrease. Mr. Herrington also shared that by interlining their Bradenton to downtown Sarasota route they have removed 1,000 cars per day from the road. Additionally Mr. Herrington explained that they are currently coordinating to improve service along University Avenue.

## **Agenda Item #5 - Central Florida Rail Corridor Acquisition**

Mr. Fred Wise, with the FDOT Rail Office, discussed the status of the Central Florida commuter rail project and the CSX Agreement for corridor acquisition.

The CSX Agreement in Principle was announced as a \$491 million agreement with CSX Transportation offering numerous benefits for Central Florida and the entire state. This benefits include:

- Commuter rail in Central Florida
- More reliable and expanded Tri-Rail service in South Florida
- New grade-separated crossings in North Central Florida
- Improved rail-freight handling capacity for the delivery of goods throughout Florida

As an overview, the agreement includes State purchase of 61.5 miles of CSXT track to establish a commuter rail system (in Volusia, Seminole, Orange, and Osceola), operations windows established for exclusive passenger use, mixed freight and passenger use, and exclusive freight use, and State control of maintenance and dispatch for the Central Florida track. Additionally, this agreement relocates 6 daily "through trains", 3 daily trains, and most transfer operations from the Taft Yards to the Integrated Logistics Center (ILC) in Winter Haven.

An overview of the South Florida portion of agreement includes the potential expansion of Tri-Rail operations south to Homestead, FDOT/SFRTA control of maintenance and dispatch along Tri-Rail corridor, and new capacity on CSXT rail lines for movement of freight.

A few outstanding issues remain on the agreement including resolution of environmental contamination issues with CSXT, construction of the new ILC in Winter Haven before freight relocation, and federal and local funding commitments for the Central Florida Commuter Rail project. Mr. Wise displayed the anticipated timeline for the agreement which shows construction of the A-Line, S-Line, and the ILC occurring in the 2008-2009 timeframe.

After presentation of the CSX agreement, Mr. Wise shared some additional information on the Central Florida Commuter Rail project. The project will run commuter trains from DeBary in Volusia County to Poinciana in Osceola County. Phase 1 of the project, which is planned to be operational by December 2009, will run from DeBary/Saxon Blvd to Orlando Amtrak/Orlando Regional Medical Center and will run for 31 miles with 10 stations. The commuter rail operation plan includes 30-minute peak service in each direction along with 2-hour off-peak service. It is anticipated that each train will have a capacity of approximately 500 passengers. The trains will include such amenities as restroom facilities, power outlets at all seats, wireless internet connectivity, and luggage and bike racks.

Following Mr. Wise's presentation a short discussion ensued that expressed the group's general view that similar agreements should be pursued for the Tampa Bay Region in consideration of the available rail lines.

Mr. Wise shared that the \$491 million of this agreement is just for the CSX portion and that approximately \$500 million more are needed for commuter rail improvements. Mr. Avera Wynne asked if there was any

limitation on who would be able to complete the necessary improvements and was told that the improvements will go through the normal bid process but that they would expect CSX would be one of the companies that would bid on the work.

In response to a question regarding Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding Mr. Wise explained that he is optimistic on successfully becoming eligible and receiving these funds but that they are currently working on modeling with some of the folks in D.C. Mr. Wise also stated that he could help in identifying additional speakers that could provide more detail on other aspects of the commuter rail plan.

## **Agenda Item #6 - Once Around the Table/Additional Discussion**

Mr. Hoyt extended his and the group's thanks to PSTA for hosting the last regional transit roundtable meeting.

Mr. Byers, with PSTA, recapped many new successes and increases in ridership. He stated that the Central Avenue BRT project is still on schedule and looking at a summer 2007 final design. Also PSTA and Pasco are working with Walmart regarding the proposed Tarpon Springs Supercenter. Walmart has proposed to pay \$300,000 towards a regional bus transfer facility. In other news, PSTA has begun using a new design provided by FDOT for rural cross section ADA landing pads.

Mr. Mike Carroll, with PCPT, shared that they will have vehicle location systems in all of their buses by the end of next year. He also announced east side expansion and Saturday service beginning next year. Finally Mr. Carroll reported they now have all electronic fare boxes in place and have recorded increased on-time performance.

Ms. Shavaliere, with HARTline, reported a 2006 ridership of just under 10.7 million and announced a 5% service expansion beginning on November 19<sup>th</sup>. The expansion includes late evening service on nine routes and enhanced express service. Additionally, HARTline is putting out an RFP in hopes of providing some new flex service in low-density areas. Ms. Shavaliere also stated that HARTline is continuing to look at their transit emphasis corridors and are seeking consulting assistance for the PE phase.

Mr. Hoyt shared his viewpoint that there has been an increase in revenue to many transit agencies due to the increase in property values and that these funds should be used to expand service.

Mr. Jonson requested an update on the Galvano bill (HB 7077). Mr. Hoyt asked if the Tampa Bay Partnership would like to comment on this issue and also requested an update on the status of the FDOT transit study.

Ms. Elba Lopez, with DOT, stated that between now and January 2007 FDOT will be taking the study to the various boards within the region and plan on having the study finalized between April and June 2007.

Ms. Deborah Kynes, PSTA Chair, stated that they discussed the Galvano/RTA bill at their board meeting and encourages all of the other transit agencies to have these board level discussions as well. She explained that the board's main concern was with transit not being at the table during the compilation of the bill.

Mr. Jonson complemented these comments with expressly the obvious interest of PSTA in regional transit and that this group (the RTR) should be a principal advocate for this type of effort/bill.

Mr. Hoyt went on to explain that this is an issue TBRPC is looking at as well and has many details that still need to be discussed more thoroughly. Land use modifications, governance, and funding need to be carefully considered. It is also important to keep in mind what will make this effort legitimate with the public.

Ms. Kynes raised the idea of having a uniform message from all the transit agencies to relay to the legislative delegation. It may be helpful to acquire a lobbyist specifically for transit.

Mr. Skipper, with the Polk TPO, expressed their eager support for legislation that will bring more transit funding to the region but stated that they are unsure of the details surrounding the proposed regional transit legislation. He shared some concern over who will determine the make-up of a Tampa Bay RTA and what roll Polk County will play being caught between Orlando and Tampa Bay.

Ms. Raihill, with the Tampa Bay Partnership, explained that legislative committee appointments probably won't occur until mid-November and that the RTA bill will likely appear as companion bills in the House (Galvano) and Senate (Fasano). She anticipated that a draft will not be available for another month or so and that many changes have probably been made since last sessions HB 7077. Ms. Raihill also stated that we can provide input to Representative Galvano through his Manatee office staff.

Mr. Hoyt shared the idea of having the regional transit roundtable host each county along with Rep. Galvano at one of our meetings to discuss this topic. Mr. Herrington concurred that HB 7077 should be added to the roundtable's agenda as it is being redrafted and that it would be advantageous to have Rep. Galvano address this group. Mr. Jonson suggested that Senator Mike Fasano be included in the invitation to the next roundtable.

In sharing victories for regional transit, Ms. Beth Alden shared that the Chairs Coordinating Committee included transit projects in this year's project prioritization. She also gave an update on the Hillsborough County MPO, who is working on a significant transit corridors study along with the proportionate fair share transportation ordinance, and at district level of service (LOS) standards.

## Closing

Mr. Wynne stated that a morning meeting on Friday, December 8<sup>th</sup> may work best since the CCC meeting is that afternoon. He said he will make contact with Rep. Galvano and Sen. Fasano's offices to request their attendance at the next meeting.

Potential agenda items for the next Regional Transit Roundtable include:

- a. Central Florida Commuter Rail Operations Plan
- b. Central Avenue Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)
- c. Legislative Update
- d. Tampa Light Rail Plan

## List of Attendees

Beth Alden - Hillsborough MPO  
Bill Ball - TOA  
Anthony Beckford - SCAT  
Jim Byers - PSTA  
Mike Carroll - PCPT  
Becky Hayes - MCAT  
Bob Herrington - Sarasota/Manatee MPO  
Ken Hoyt - TBRPC member  
R.B. Johnson - PSTA, Indian Rocks Beach  
Bill Jonson - PSTA, City of Clearwater  
Bob Kersteen - TBRPC Chair  
Deborah Kynes - City of Dunedin, PSTA  
Roy LaMotte - City of Tampa  
Elba Lopez - FDOT  
Nina Mabileau - City of Tampa  
Greg Miller - Planner, TBRPC  
Ray Miller - Executive Director, HARTline  
Karen Raihill - Tampa Bay Partnership  
Mary Shavalier - HARTline  
Michael Skipper - Polk TPO  
Heather Sobush - Pinellas MPO  
Jim Van Pelt - Sarasota/Manatee MPO  
Thelma Williams - PCPT  
Fred Wise - FDOT Rail Office  
Avera Wynne - Planning Director, TBRPC  
Allison Yeh - Hillsborough MPO