

Regional Transit Roundtable Recap
Friday, October 14, 2005
9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Welcome

Mr. Ken Hoyt - TBRPC and HARTline member

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

Regional Transit Study Update (FDOT Briefing)

Ms. Elba Lopez explained that FDOT is currently meeting with agencies in the region, including all MPOs and transit agencies to gather input. Some of the goals being addressed in this study include: mobility, accessibility, quality of life, and efficiency.

FDOT is also in the process of working with Cambridge Systematics on the modeling portion of the study. Ms. Lopez additionally stated that FDOT has established a internet-based site to accept comments on the study and that more information and further public involvement opportunities are forthcoming.

Senate Bill 360 (FDOT Briefing)

Ms. Lopez briefly presented information (handout distributed at the meeting) on the six major programs included in SB 360 that effect transit. The programs are: New Starts Transit Program, Strategic Intermodal System, Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP), State Infrastructure Bank, County Incentive Grant Program, and the Small County Outreach Program.

Ms. Lopez felt that the New Starts and TRIP programs will have the most influence on transit. Approximately \$20.7 million this fiscal year has been allocated to District 7 for the TRIP. DOT anticipates approximately \$15 million/year in the following fiscal years. For more information on TRIP Ms. Lopez referred the group to the website: <http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/trip>.

Intermodal Center Study (FDOT Briefing)

Ms. Rebecca Schwarz with PBS&J, representing FDOT, presented a brief overview on the current status of the Intermodal Center Study. The study, which began in January '05, has narrowed down the study sites to two (a location in Downtown Tampa and in the Gateway area of Pinellas). She stated that the main goal at the end of this project is to obtain federal approval for the centers. Sites not selected during this study will continue to receive future considerations.

Ms. Schwarz shared that based on the PD&E study of the two sites minimal environmental impacts are anticipated and that the Finding of No Significant Impact is expected by November 2005. After this finding the project will proceed into a preliminary design phase although no right-of-way or construction funding is currently available for the project. Ms. Schwarz stated that there is no expectation of build times and that flexibility will be key to implementing and building these facilities.

Mr. Ray Miller, HARTline, shared a concern for the challenge of the design stage considering the lack of future funding for the project. Ms. Schwarz explained that this initial design will only be preliminary/conceptual design (15-30%) and that it will be used to seek funding for remainder of the project.

Discussion Topics

SAFETEA-LU legislation impacts on transit

A summary of the transit-related impacts of SAFETEA-LU was distributed at the meeting.

Fiscal results for transit systems for FY05

HARTline - Mr. Miller, Executive Director, stated that during FY05 HARTline had the highest ridership since 1994, which was a 13% increase over last year. He also reported that wheelchair boardings were up 65% and Bikes on Buses were up 40%.

PSTA - Mr. Roger Sweeney, Executive Director, shared that PSTA had an 8% increase over the previous year and they had approximately 200,000 Bikes on Buses boardings. He attributed much of the increase to the rising costs of gasoline and to the enhancements such as added frequency and later night service that PSTA implemented this past year.

PCPT - Mr. Mike Carroll informed the group that Pasco County had a 35% increase in trips since last year with a total of just under 750,000. He continued by sharing that PCPT will be adding some weekend service and hope to soon hit 1 million riders per year.

Hernando - Mr. Steve Diez reported that they had an average of 600 riders/day this past year and are looking forward to working with PCPT on some inter-county service in the upcoming year.

Sarasota/Manatee - Mr. Bob Herrington reported that rideship figures are up and that local officials have added \$5 million for next year to add service and frequency. He stated that they are also looking at trolleys along the barrier islands and some sort of regional service between Manatee and Sarasota counties.

BACS - Ms. Sandi Moody, Executive Director, shared that they have had an increase in internet registrations and they currently have groups waiting for vans. BACS is also expanding the distribution of the Tampa Bay Commuter publication to all five counties in District 7. Ms. Moody additionally reported that they had the approximately 3,000 people participate in the various activities during this past Commuter Choices Week.

Regional service on Bruce B. Downs - HART and PCPT

Mr. Ray Miller explained that a new regional service beginning on January 16, 2006 will serve New Tampa and southern Pasco County by providing access to the USF area and Downtown Tampa. The initial service will consist of 2 morning and 2 evening round trips.

Ms. Denise Layne, Executive Director of Coalition 4 Responsible Growth, Inc., suggested that there is a possibility to qualify this service for funding available in SB 360 if a partnership was formed between HARTline and PCPT.

Status of Bus Rapid Transit Initiatives

PSTA - Started the PD&E process on the Central Avenue corridor in St. Petersburg from the downtown area to the Central Ave. terminal. This study may be expanded further to the west and should take approximately 10-12 months to complete. Based on funding availability, implementation could occur within 12-24 months. PSTA is also in the process of doing an alternatives/feasibility study on McMullen Booth Road.

HARTline - Florida Ave (Downtown Tampa to USF) and Hillsborough Ave (East-West) have been selected to move forward in the BRT process and will be examined during corridor assessments.

PCPT - There is an interest in Pasco County in looking at SR 54, I-75, and US 19 as potential BRT corridors.

Mr. Miller and Ms. Deborah Kynes informed the group that HART and PSTA are looking at a January/February time frame for the next BRT workshops. Currently they are considering having two workshops with one focused on policy issues and one more technical in nature.

Directions and Goals for the Roundtable

Many suggestions were shared as to the future direction and goals of the roundtable. Some participants felt that it may be time to zero in on one specific issue or on a few projects in particular. Mr. Miller thought that this group may be able to focus on one piece of the overall regional plan. It was also mentioned, by Mr. Karl Nurse, that the group could examine all upcoming projects with DOT to see where transit is and is not being considered.

Ms. Karen Raihill, Tampa Bay Partnership, stated that the business community would like to find a project that will get the ball rolling and that the group should focus on the backbone of the regional system. She as well as a few others, also raised the issue of whether or not a regional transit authority is needed. Ms. Beth Alden questioned who will implement the DOT Transit Needs Study once it is completed? Currently there is no structure for the region to do more than coordinate regional transit service.

Mr. Sweeney, shared a different perspective in that he felt that the process and the policy involved with these transit projects being implemented is what is slowing us down. He suggested that we focus on policies to make regional planning more effective rather than on one specific project.

Mr. Hoyt summarized the issues discussed and the ones for continued examination as a) policy and process issues that are hindering regional transit, b) authority structure for regional transit, and c) identification of specific corridors and projects that can be pushed forward in the process.

Additional Discussion

Ms. Denise Layne, Executive Director of the Coalition 4 Responsible Growth, Inc., stated that there is a need for community conversation on public transportation with a main purpose of engaging the public. Her organization is currently focused on Hillsborough County but their initial discussion to be held will include invitees from throughout the region. The community meeting will be excluding discussion of rail and will talk about the partnerships that can work now. More information is available at the Coalition's website: <http://www.c4rg.com>.

Ms. Elba Lopez and Ms. Jan Parcham discussed the current procedures followed by FDOT in assuring that the transit agencies are aware of projects that have a transit potential. It remains absolutely essential to address any potential for transit on DOT projects up-front. This is the reason that FDOT looks intensely at the various Transit Development Plans and contacts the agencies involved in the beginning stages of their projects.

Closing

A meeting date during the month of January or February is anticipated for the next Regional Transit Roundtable. Mr. Hoyt summarized the issues discussed and the ones for continued examination as a) policy and process issues that are hindering regional transit, b) authority structure for regional transit, and c) identification of specific corridors and projects that can be pushed forward in the process.

Topics suggested for further examination and discussion at the next meeting include:

- a. Identification of transit-friendly priority corridors in the region
- b. Policy and process issues that hinder regional transit projects
- c. Regional transit governance structure

List of Attendees

Beth Alden - Principal Planner, Hillsborough MPO
Bill Ball - TOA
Rick Butler - PSTA, City of Pinellas Park
Mike Carroll - PCPT
Steve Diez - Hernando County MPO
Clarence Eng - Renaissance Planning Group
Bob Herrington - Sarasota/Manatee MPO
Ken Hoyt - HARTline Board and TBRPC member
R.B. Johnson - PSTA, Indian Rocks Beach
Bill Jonson - PSTA, City of Clearwater
Deborah Kynes - Vice Mayor, City of Dunedin, PSTA
Bob Lasher - PSTA
Denise Layne - Coalition 4 Responsible Growth, Inc.
Elba Lopez - FDOT
Cristy Mayer - Gannett Fleming
Nina Mabileau - City of Tampa
Greg Miller - Planner, TBRPC
Ray Miller - Executive Director, HARTline
Sandi Moody - Executive Director, BACS
Karl Nurse - PSTA
Jan Parham - FDOT, District 1
Karen Raihill - Tampa Bay Partnership
Rebecca Spain Schwarz - PBS&J
Mary Shavalier - HARTline
Heather Sobush - Pinellas MPO
Myung Sung - Gannett Fleming
Roger Sweeney - Executive Director, PSTA
Thelma Williams - PCPT
Avera Wynne - Planning Director, TBRPC