

Regional Transit Roundtable Recap
Wednesday, December 20, 2006
9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Welcome

Agenda Item #1 – Ms. Deborah Hynes - TBRPC Vice-Chair, PSTA Chair

Ms. Hynes welcomed the participants to the roundtable and had the attendees introduce themselves to the group. After everyone had introduced themselves, Ms. Hynes informed the group that agenda item #3, Hillsborough County LRTP, would be the first presentation of the day.

Agenda Item #3 – Hillsborough MPO Long Range Transportation Plan Transit Component

Mr. Ramond Chiaramonte gave a PowerPoint presentation on multi-modal transit in Hillsborough County and the increased focus on the transit component of the long range plan. He provided a look at where the Tampa Bay area fits in with the rest of the country in terms of transit and rail.

A few highlights from Mr. Chiaramonte's presentation include:

- The closeness of our employment and activity centers to one another is an asset to our region.
- Tampa Bay ranks 13th for television markets nationwide
- Tampa Bay ranks 19th in population (by MSA)
- Tampa and Detroit are the only two regions in the top 25 in population without rail transit
- Tampa Bay's employment and population densities are very similar to that of other metropolitan areas that have some type of rail.
- 41 cities have, or have planned, rail transit throughout the country

Mr. Chiaramonte also discussed the resolution recently passed by the Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission that seeks to encourage all appropriate government agencies in Hillsborough County to pursue a comprehensive and coordinated vision of alternative forms of transportation. This includes consideration of the interaction between land use and transportation and the potential role of rail transit in supporting many community lifestyle choices.

Ms. Lucie Ayer, Executive Director of the Hillsborough County MPO, followed Mr. Chiaramonte's presentation with some additional comments related to the Regional Corridors and Hillsborough Connections initiative currently being undertaken by the Hillsborough County MPO to address long range transit planning. This undertaking is in response to guidance provided by the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to identify a new direction for the long-term vision of public transit in the county.

Ms. Ayer continued her presentation with a historical overview of the previous steps/events that have occurred in transit planning in the past decade or so. This included a Tampa to Lakeland feasibility study (1993), a Tampa to Lakeland mobility study (1998), the Tampa Rail Project Record of Decision (2003), the High Speed Rail Authority Record of Decision (2004), and the CCC Regional Long Range Transportation Plan (2004). More recently FDOT has completed a Tampa Bay Intermodal Centers Study (2005) and a Strategic Regional Transit Needs Assessment (2006).

Based on the MPO CAC recommendation from Spring 2006 and MPO Board action from May 2006 the Hillsborough County MPO has begun a study with four primary phases:

- Cultivate allies and champions
- Cooperative visioning and public discussion of scenarios
- Refine preferred scenario and funding strategy
- Implementation schedule

The study is anticipated to be complete by the end of 2007.

Agenda Item #2 – Regional Transportation Authority Legislation

Florida Representative Bill Galvano briefly presented talking points from his proposed Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) legislation.

Highlights of the current proposal as discussed by Rep. Galvano include:

- The bill is currently in the “drafting” stage and should be filed within 7-10 days
- Senator Mike Fasano has committed to filing the Senate version of the bill
- The focus is on multi-modal transportation (everything from roads to heavy rail)
- The RTA would be called the “Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority”
- 15-member board – Mayors of St Petersburg, Tampa, and Lakeland (3), county commissioners or their appointees from Citrus, Hernando, Pasco, Polk, Manatee, Sarasota, Pinellas, and Hillsborough counties (8), a representative from the West Central Florida Metropolitan Planning Organizations Chairs Coordinating Committee (CCC) (1), and three (3) citizens appointed by the governor.
- The RTA would be required to have a master plan by July 1, 2009
- The RTA would be able to collect fees, fares, and tolls and could potentially acquire other state and federal money, including the ability to request assistance and funding from FDOT
- The RTA would be able to own, purchase, and maintain projects.
- The RTA would work to create a seamless fare structure/system
- The RTA would be required to consult with local governments
- The RTA would be able to issue revenue bonds, as well as, establish and collect bonds
- The RTA will not use existing funding sources
- The RTA legislation is likely to be tweaked in the months and years to come

After his presentation Rep. Galvano answered a few questions for the group. Related to what this legislation is trying to accomplish for the citizens of Florida, Rep. Galvano stated that the RTA is seeking to create an inter-jurisdictional transportation entity and to create a first major regional project. When asked about how funding obstacles for transit can be addressed the representative stated that this can be accomplished through funding innovation, such as in public-private partnerships.

Agenda Item #4 – Pinellas Mobility Initiative

Pinellas County Commissioner Ronnie Duncan provided an update on the Pinellas Mobility Initiative (PMI) and some of their most recent projects.

Commissioner Duncan began with some background on the PMI and then shared information on their current efforts. These efforts include:

- A recently completed study of the McMullen-Booth corridor for a potential Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route
- A Countywide BRT study that is being completed in conjunction with Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA)

In addition to the two projects above, the PMI has also been involved with Central Avenue BRT route implementation and with the on-going efforts to evaluate a potential monorail segment from Downtown Clearwater to Clearwater Beach.

Commissioner Duncan gave some more detailed information regarding the Countywide BRT project scope, as well as, on the Downtown Clearwater to Beach Monorail Evaluation project. He explained the BRT project scope as containing the following tasks:

- Review and evaluate major arterial corridors to determine BRT potential
- Use screening criteria to narrow the list of corridors to eight
- Use additional screening criteria to prioritize the top eight corridors

- Develop implementation plans for the top two corridors
- Implement a public involvement plan

As for the Monorail Evaluation, Commissioner Duncan presented the tasks as follows:

- Reevaluate system configuration and station locations
- Ridership evaluation
- Cost evaluation
- Evaluation of segment as part of larger PMI system versus a stand-alone system

Agenda Item #5 - Once Around the Table/Additional Discussion

Following the formal presentations, Ms. Kynes requested that the region's transit agency representatives give a brief update to the group on recent successes and other news related to their agency.

Transit agencies

HARTline (Hillsborough) – they have three new members to the HARTline Board; have extended 9 routes to midnight; have added some additional south county and express service; and will be adding some flex routing in the near future.

MCAT (Manatee) – they have increased frequencies on some routes, including half hour service on the US 41 corridor; will be going to half hour service on SR 64 in the near future; and are looking at express route and intra-county light rail possibilities.

SCAT (Sarasota) – they have also increased frequency on the US 41 corridor; added a connection on the Longboat Key corridor; have continued with their enhancement program; and are exploring BRT possibilities from the airport south to Clark Road (potentially in a rail corridor).

THE Bus (Hernando) – they have just entered their fifth year of service; looking at a connection on US 19 with Pasco County; and are planning a major transfer center around Spring Hill (2009-2010).

WHAT (Winter Haven – Polk) – they have entered their 7th year of operation; and are implementing their first ever fare price increase (from 75 cents to 1 dollar).

PCPT (Pasco) – they have experienced a significant increase in ridership over the past year; and there is increasing discussion with Hernando County for some added transit connectivity.

PSTA (Pinellas) – they have also experienced continued ridership increases; their five commuter routes have seen a 65 percent rise in ridership; last year they acquired 48 new buses; and this year they will be acquiring 21 new buses (11 for upcoming expansion).

After the briefs, provided by the region's transit agencies, Ms. Kynes asked for any additional questions or comments from the group.

Mr. Wilfred Sergeant shared a concern with the “defense of territory” issue as related to transit operators. He wanted to know how to balance this issue when you could have numerous competing transit operators within the region.

Mr. Bill Jonson briefly shared some information from a recent trip he took to Minneapolis and Salt Lake City. He stated that both cities have passed tax referendums for transit support and that he feels that the public will support these transit efforts if we can show them what it will do for them.

Mr. Ray Miller added that it often takes more than one try to implement these transit initiatives.

Mr. Steve Spratt commented that he would like to see more analysis on locally dedicated funding sources and a comparison of the Tampa Bay region's local subsidy to that of other regions. This would give us a good measure of the level of public investment into transit that is currently occurring within our region.

Mr. Ken Hoyt stated that it is his understanding that we are under-investing comparatively and that securing local money for transit is a prerequisite for receiving other funding.

Ms. Sandi Moody, with Bay Area Commuter Services (BACS), shared that often new residents to the region are asking her agency about alternatives to the automobile and why these alternatives seem to be lacking in this region. She said the current need is to acquire the local buy-in.

Mr. Dave Eggers agreed with Ms. Moody that the public buy-in is the key component and that the public need to feel that they are a part of the project.

Mr. R.B. Johnson shared that he feels that there has not been enough discussion on the public benefits of transit. Events such as festivals, sports, concerts, etc. can grab the public's attention and are prime uses for transit.

Mr. Sergeant added that we need to think of transit as part of the overall county infrastructure and that transit deserves the same support as roads.

Following the questions and comments, Ms. Kynes informed the group that the next roundtable will likely be held in February.

List of Attendees

Beth Alden – Hillsborough MPO
Lucie Ayer – Hillsborough MPO
Ned Baier – Hillsborough County Growth Management
Anthony Beckford – SCAT
Whit Blanton – Renaissance Planning
Jim Byers – PSTA
Michele Cavallo – TBRPC
Ramond Chiaramonte – Hillsborough MPO
Karen Cuning – Pinellas MPO
Kasey Cursey – Gannett Fleming
Cori Cuttler – Rep Glorioso’s Office
Marilynn deChant – City of New Port Richey
Ronnie Duncan – Pinellas County Commission
Dave Eggers – City of Dunedin
Kathy Galee – Rep Galvano’s Office
Bill Galvano – Florida House of Representatives
Bob Herrington – Sarasota/Manatee MPO
Ralf Heseler – MCAT
Ken Hoyt – Citizen
R.B. Johnson – PSTA, Indian Rocks Beach
Bill Jonson – PSTA, City of Clearwater
Bob Kersteen – TBRPC Chair
Deborah Kynes – City of Dunedin, PSTA, TBRPC Vice-Chair
Denise Layne – Coalition 4 Responsible Growth
Irvin Lee – City of Tampa Public Works
Elba Lopez – FDOT
Jack Mariano – Pasco County
Sheila Martin – BACS
Greg Miller – Planner, TBRPC
Ray Miller – Executive Director, HARTline
Sandi Moody – BACS
Andy Nunez – CH2M Hill
Karl Nurse – PSTA
Hugh Pascoe – Hernando County MPO
Scott Pringle – Carter & Burgess
Karen Raihill – Tampa Bay Partnership
Joel Rey – Tindale-Oliver & Associates
Lee Royal – FDOT
Wilfred Sergeant – Transit Consultant
Mark Sharpe – Hillsborough County Commission
Michael Skipper – Polk TPO
Heather Sobush – Pinellas MPO
Steve Spratt – Pinellas County
Rich Tillery – Gannett Fleming
Doug Uden – Pasco County MPO
Jim Van Pelt – Sarasota/Manatee MPO
Sarah Ward – Pinellas MPO
Chris Weber – Westshore Alliance
Tom Whalen – City of St Petersburg
Keith Wicks – Pinellas County Admin Office
Avera Wynne – Planning Director, TBRPC
Pete Yauch – Pinellas County Public Works
Allison Yeh – Hillsborough MPO
Janet Zink – St Pete Times