



ACCELERATING LIFE'S POSSIBILITIESSM

Transportation Initiative

March 2010

Tampa Bay must move forward. Our community faces a defining moment. Reeling from an economic downturn unprecedented in our time, we have within our grasp an historic opportunity to invest in our community by funding and developing a state-of-the art transit system in Hillsborough County – a system connecting our citizens to friends, family, jobs, education, healthcare, cultural resources, retail, restaurants, and entertainment not only in Hillsborough County but throughout the region.

Taking on this initiative will not be a cure-all. But it will be a step in the right direction: A step that tells our young people they do not need to relocate to more progressive communities to find work and build a future; a step that tells businesses that we are building infrastructure to connect people and places and that we are going to fight to keep and multiply jobs in our community; a step that tells the rest of the state and the world that we aim to lead our way out of these economic doldrums, rather than wait for others to do the work for us.

The Hillsborough County Commission has brought us to a point where, for the first time, we have built sufficient momentum to get this job done. Our community has walked right up to this threshold many times in the past, only to turn back from the challenge. Now is not the time for a lack of resolve. We have seen that there are no get-rich quick schemes, but only hard work and investment in sustainable resources. The decision by Hillsborough County to move ahead and be the first to implement a local plan is a courageous one but a decision that must be made.

This will not be cheap, but one thing is clear. We can no longer afford the cost of doing nothing. *Forbes* magazine recently ranked Tampa Bay the nation's worst city for commuters among the top 60 major metro areas. Tampa Bay is losing out economically to competitor regions such as Charlotte, Dallas, and Phoenix who have invested in their transportation systems and are now not only combating sprawl but boosting economic development.

On January 28, 2010, the federal government pledged \$1.25 billion to Florida to build the nation's first bullet train. Major advances in state and local policy helped to secure this grant, including the creation of the Florida Rail Enterprise during a Special Session, the completion of the Tampa Bay Area Transportation Authority's (TBARTA) Master Plan, and the work of the Hillsborough County Commission to consider asking the voters to invest in transportation. This is our opportunity to capitalize upon these historic steps, and we must seize it.

As we move forward into the referendum process, we believe Hillsborough County should take the following measures to give our community the assurances we need so that we can be satisfied this transit initiative will deliver all that it offers:

- **Outline a transparent process** including a list of clearly identified projects and an independent nonpartisan oversight board to ensure projects will be delivered on time and on budget.
- **Develop a comprehensive transportation plan** that includes bus improvements and road and intersection improvements in addition to the creation of a light rail system.
- **Ensure connectivity of the people of Hillsborough County** with people and places throughout the region, by making regional connections a priority in the final plan the Board approves.
- **Ensure an inclusive and collaborative dialogue** with the various communities and stakeholders in Hillsborough County.

The Tampa Bay Partnership supports these efforts and understands that the courageous actions our elected leaders have taken to get us to this point are not the end but the beginning. We are at a critical juncture to move these plans forward. The Tampa Bay Partnership is committed to continue serving as a regional facilitator and convener on these issues and will continue to support stakeholders to ensure that efforts by Hillsborough County, and each community that seeks to implement the TBARTA Master Plan, are successful.