

# Tampa Bay Regional Transportation Authority

## Key Findings and Guiding Principles

December 2006

*What must be our region's strongest link – transportation – is currently among the weakest. If things continue as they are, we are on the verge of a real mobility crisis.*

The continuation of Tampa Bay's enviable position in economic competitiveness and quality of life requires better transportation solutions. These solutions must be multi-modal in nature and, in particular, we need to get serious about transit if we want to attain true status as a world-class community.

**In order to see meaningful transit materialize, it must be done regionally and strong business leadership and support are vital.**

### **Background**

The Tampa Bay Partnership has steadily built momentum and consensus around its transportation initiative over the last several years. We are fueled by our own private sector members, who consistently rank transportation as the number one priority. Lately, we have been widely recognized for invigorating the issue and bringing it to the forefront by dramatically raising awareness around the need for bolder action.

*Building consensus requires a dedicated, sustained effort.*

As part of this campaign, the Partnership has reached out to hundreds and hundreds of business, civic, community, and political leaders. Since May 2006 we have held more than 100 individual or small group meetings to spark dialogue and relevant discussion. We convened, along with the Bay Area Legislative Delegation, a Regional Multi-Modal Transportation Forum in late summer that drew more than 200 participants from all sectors of the region. Just in the last six months we have engaged upwards of more than 2,000 individuals in this important conversation. We have witnessed increasing support for a regional solution. Action anticipated in the 2007 legislative session around regional transportation can have impact for generations to come.

We began the year by posing a series of questions that we think are important considerations:

- If the business community and residents at-large view congestion with growing concern and “want something to happen,” why isn't more being done?
- Are regional solutions the most feasible approach for better interconnectivity?
- Does the region currently have an organizational structure that will help implement a truly regional transportation system? What barriers exist? What needs to be overcome?
- What is the main action step that the business community can strongly advocate for?

## 10 Findings/Principles

1. **Our unwavering conclusion is that a regional authority needs to be created with real implementing capabilities. It must have the responsibility and the ability to plan, develop, finance, build, and operate regional transportation facilities. There is no existing organization in place that is capable of accomplishing this mission.**
2. There needs to be an entity that can achieve the implementation of an “interstate network of transit” for our region. While local transit service is essential and must continue to be improved and expanded, the focus needs to remain at the 30,000-foot level.
3. Identifying these regional transit connector corridors and preserving rights-of-way are crucial first steps that must be taken to ensure the ultimate build-out of a viable system.
4. The focus also needs to be on both passenger and freight – we are moving commerce as well as commuters. It must be interconnected – we see the critical nature of airports, seaports, and freight rail as well as roadways and transit to the overall transportation network.
5. Transportation planning must take a 40 to 50-year view in a region such as ours that could possibly double in population by 2050. We acknowledge the important role of the Florida Department of Transportation in completing a Strategic Regional Transit Needs Assessment that will create the first regional vision of potential corridors leading toward this interstate of transit.
6. This should not be characterized as a rail vs. road debate. We must address our transportation needs by addressing a balanced multi-modal approach that looks at corridors that can accommodate roadway, transit, and freight movement. Transit can play a significant role, but it will not meet all the needs – not only within our region, but as we grow and reach out to neighboring regions such as Orlando and the “mega-region” we undoubtedly one day will become. It is important that the Florida Transportation Commission, FDOT, and others look at and evaluate potential new corridors and the transformation of existing interstate highways for multiple uses.
7. As a regional convenor, facilitator, and honest broker, the Tampa Bay Partnership is committed to rising above the obstacles, parochialism, and lack of big picture thinking that have hampered real progress around improved regional mobility. We cannot succumb to the desire of any one jurisdiction or agency to look at it from a perspective other than regional.
8. We believe it is very important to research comparable regions and how they have and are addressing these same issues. Our findings show there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. However, there is one overriding recommendation from other communities that have had transit successes, such as Denver, Phoenix, and Seattle: **Begin with the larger, regional vision and don't do it piecemeal.**
9. Linking land use and transportation is one of the most highly significant “lessons learned” in our interviews with executive directors of regional authorities in other metro areas. This linkage is very important to long-range regional growth planning and to encouraging more transit-oriented development, including workforce housing and mixed-use projects near transit stations. Our interviews with other authorities also pointed out the desire for:

- Extraordinarily close relationships with the business community
- Strong working partnerships with the MPOs and other transportation stakeholders
- Success at achieving federal funding when a strong authority and local funding sources are in place

10. Two essential areas for careful study in creating an authority are governance and financing. The board composition of an authority must reflect a regional focus and ideally could consist of a combination of elected and non-elected officials serving a governing body that is compact in size. Financing options must be provided so that the new authority has the ability to derive a dedicated local funding stream, whether from tolls, fees, bonding, surtaxes, etc., or that it can enter into private-public partnerships. It bears repeating that communities that are taking a regional approach are much stronger contenders for available state and federal funding to support transit.

### **Conclusion**

**We intend to support passage of a legislative proposal in the 2007 session that will establish a regional transportation authority with a workable governing structure, the right mission, and provisions for successful financing strategies and initial financially feasible components of the system.**

At the same time, we will continue to seek to garner support from a wide cross-section of other business organizations and professional associations that are also interested in ensuring a multi-modal regional transportation network.

We remain committed to Tampa Bay having one of the leading regional transportation authority models in the nation – one that can play a major role in shaping our expected growth and positively impacting the future of the region.

### **Further Action**

The ongoing support and enthusiasm of the Tampa Bay Partnership's top leadership is necessary to ensuring the full commitment of this organization to creation of a regional authority.

Specific steps that will require the participation of business leaders will be outlined as the legislative process begins to unfold and there is actual legislation to consider. It is anticipated that companion bills will be introduced in the House and Senate that will call for the Partnership's thorough review and input; monitoring through committees and floor action; and advocacy with key legislators and other elected officials, particularly local electeds, to secure passage and initial implementation.

**For additional information about the Partnership's Regional Transportation Authority efforts, please contact Betty Carlin, Communications Manager (813) 872-2811; bcarlin@tampabay.org**