

Tampa Bay Partnership Call To Action:

Tampa Bay Regional Transportation Authority Is The Right Approach

Tampa Bay's transportation problems grow more critical every day. Since our dynamic, multi-county region is increasingly one interconnected market for commuters, businesses, freight-haulers, and tourists, a regional approach to transportation makes utmost sense. The need for mobility criss-crosses city and county boundaries.

The focus needs to be on taking action and implementing solutions when it comes to transportation - not simply another planning group as advocated in the Senate bill.

The Tampa Bay Partnership, a regional economic development group with more than 150 public and private sector members, supports the Tampa Bay Regional Transportation Authority that has been outlined in Florida House Bill 7077 CS.

We enthusiastically endorse creating an authority that will have the ability to execute on transportation projects.

It will be able to develop, build, and operate projects that will help develop a truly regional network – encompassing Hillsborough, Pinellas, Pasco, Hernando, Citrus, Polk, Manatee and Sarasota counties. We believe the makeup of an authority could benefit from representation from both elected officials from each county along with private appointees. Our region's citizens and businesses deserve an authority that will allow the region to rise above the obstacles, parochialism, and lack of big picture thinking and follow-up action that have continued to hamper real progress. "Do something" about transportation is the plea that we hear over and over from residents and business leaders alike. We are convinced they are not referring to more planning – they want to see action and results.

A Regional Authority Must Be For Transit, Not Just Roads

A Regional Transportation Authority will place strong emphasis on transit, despite misperceptions that such an authority would be for road-building only. Options such as bus rapid transit, commuter and light rail, and ferry service – which all must be done regionally to be effective – need to play a significant role in addressing our transportation needs.

This authority can actively pursue transit as part of an overall multi-modal approach that would include new highway corridors. The Tampa Bay Partnership is an economic development organization with members across a wide spectrum of business and industry – we are not a developer dominated group that is only looking to construct big road projects. Transit is actually one of the main motivations behind our strong desire to see a Regional Transportation Authority established.

The Tampa Bay Partnership sees a necessary link between transportation and good land use planning as illustrated by the affordable workforce housing issue. Transit can be a way to increase the supply of affordable housing and rental units, which is becoming a major challenge for this region's employees and businesses, as part of development opportunities around transit stations.

This Region Already Has Plans

The Tampa Bay Partnership certainly believes in the importance of planning but planning has been going on for quite some time. Without the ability to implement the plan, there is little to show. Many plans exist, including the 2025 Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan created by the West Central Florida Metropolitan Planning Organization Chair's Coordinating Committee (CCC). That same group finalized a Regional Transit Action Plan in June 2005. These recommendations have no way to be implemented without a regional structure in place.

The Florida Department of Transportation's District 7, in collaboration with District 1, will have a strategic regional transit needs assessment complete by late summer 2006. It will provide a "vision" of the region's future transit development with a high-level overview of potential projects and corridors. The FDOT has also done significant work on an intermodal centers study and is in the midst of doing what it is terming a "new corridors" study that could play a significant role in looking at how this region will properly plan and shape its projected growth. But none of this will become a reality without an implementing body that can start to make something happen.

Tampa Bay Can't Continue To Fall Behind Other Regions

We are already losing out to other parts of the state and the nation for state and federal funding. The ability to capture more funding is critical if we are to stay economically competitive with other metro areas in planning for growth. A Regional Transportation Authority would have bonding capability and the ability to receive state and federal funding. In the future, transportation projects will rely on many financing options to come to fruition, including tolling, fees, and fares, as well as the means to negotiate with private sector entities willing to embark on major new infrastructure projects and to leverage these public-private partnerships.

Transportation is the number one priority of the Tampa Bay Partnership and the business leadership we represent. A strong transportation network is vital to a robust economy and an attractive quality of life. It is also important for effective and safe emergency evacuation in the face of impending disaster.

Tampa Bay cannot afford to wait any longer to get serious about improving its transportation system. We need to move forward with an entity that will get the job done.

We strongly urge passage and approval of a Regional Transportation Authority that can positively change the future of our region.

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