

Planes, Trains... and Buses

Many of the nation's transit systems hope to capture a prime-time viewing audience, as they begin work on a new \$30 million advertising campaign to promote the ease and comforts of utilizing public transportation—buses and trains. Many of the largest transit systems, such as Washington D.C.'s Metro System, as well as many private transportation corporations, are collaborating on the new campaign aimed at overcoming the negative image of transit travel. The campaign also aims to bolster support among political officials, as they consider funding options for the future.

Current national survey research indicates that 36% of American support taking public transit (31% expressed opposition), and systems across the nation are continuing to expand. Ninety four miles of light rail, 104 miles of commuter rail and 35 miles of heavy rail are now under construction, with national transit ridership at a 40-year high. More than 9 billion passenger trips are being made annually on buses, trains, trolleys and commuter ferries. Additionally, the Washington Post reports that federal spending on transit is at an all-time high of \$6.3 billion.

Despite these figures, there is still a perception among many Americans that transit travel is inconvenient, crowded, and a last resort for those who do not own or have access to an automobile. The industry hopes to combat this perception, with the message that transit is fast, comfortable and easy for all trips, not just the commute-to-work. The advertising campaign, which will be aired on cable television stations CNN, CNBC, and the History Channel, as well as in print ads in Time, Money Magazine, and Business Week, is designed to target the 15-20% of the general population who are active in their communities and who communicate their needs to local elected officials and decision-makers.

Amtrak's Bullet-Train Pulling into Florida?

Last November, Florida voters approved a ballot measure to amend the State Constitution to require the construction of a high-speed train to be underway by November 2003. The train would link Florida's five largest urban areas, at speeds up to 120 miles per hour. Amtrak is currently perceived by lawmakers and transportation experts alike, as the best equipped option to carry out the service. With the experience and expertise in the development and operation of high-speed transit corridors, Amtrak representatives have expressed interest in Florida's proposed system.

Florida's legislators are still uncertainty how to pay for the train system, estimates for which have ranged from \$6 billion to \$20 billion, excluding costs to maintain it. Some proponents have suggested developing a state authority to develop the system, financing the rail through revenue bonds, as is done with other major transportation investment projects.

State Road 56 to Spur Developments

State Road 56 is scheduled to open this fall, according to the state Department of Transportation. The \$29.7 million project will stretch 3 miles from SR 54 to Bruce B. Downs Boulevard; construction began in June 1999. The road is seen as a mechanism to alleviate much of the traffic congestion currently being experienced along State Road 54 in Pasco County. The new road will have an interchange to I-75, which is likely to encourage new commercial developments along the corridor. A proposed Development of Regional Impact (DRI) called Cypress Creek would bring 250 hotel rooms, 336,00 square feet of offices, 840 apartments, and 902,000 square feet of commercial office space. The proposal is being reviewed by the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council.

Growth Management Report

A study commission convened by Governor Jeb Bush last year, recently released its final report on the need for changes to the state's approach to planning for growth. Among the more than 80 recommendations in the final report was the proposal to institute "true-cost-accounting" when looking at the costs and revenues of development. This strategy received praise from the Governor, who indicated that balancing the cost of development to the developer, against the cost of development to the community, would be the single most important change to the state's growth management system.

The commission also recommended linking land-use decisions made by local governments, with the need for new schools. The proposal would insist that local governments ensure the availability of adequate public school facilities when considering the approval of plans or zoning decisions that increase residential densities. Learn more about the full report and findings by visiting the Growth Management website, at:
<http://www.floridagrowth.org>

New Solutions Needed for the Friendship Trail

In 1997, an active group of local residents urged the Department of Transportation not to demolish an old leg of the Gandy Bridge, when construction of the new span of the bridge was completed. The group instead wanted the FDOT to utilize the \$7 million originally slated for demolition, and convert the span into a recreational trail. The heavily utilized Friendship Trail now offers an auto-free travel option between Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties; it also provides 5-miles of round-trip exercise for runners, bicyclists, and roller-bladers alike. Uncertainty regarding the funds for continued operation of the trail, however, is prompting some Hillsborough County Commissioners to explore other funding options at their April meeting. Such options may include pursuit of state or federal dollars.



UNTI COMMUNITY NEWS

I-275 Construction Timeline

Reconstruction of the I-4/I-275 interchange commonly known among locals as “Malfunction Junction,” will begin next year.

The widening from 2-3 lanes in each direction along I-275 between Busch Boulevard and Fletcher Avenue is scheduled to be completed by the fall of 2002; the widening between Fletcher Avenue and U.S. 41 is expected to be completed by the end of 2002.

Right-of-Way Escalates Road Costs

The cost to acquire the land needed for road-widening improvements can range from 2% to 60% of a project’s costs, according to the Florida Department of Transportation.

Did you Know?

From the time first European settlement began in Florida in 1565, it took 410 years for the state’s population to reach 8 million people. The next 8 million arrived within 25 years. And, according to projections, the third 8 million will live here by 2030. *Source: Miami Herald.*

MPO to Seek Public Opinions on Transportation

The Hillsborough County Metropolitan Planning Organization plans to conduct a public opinion poll in early February. Approximately 1,000 households are expected to be contacted randomly by telephone, to solicit feedback on transportation. The survey data will be one mechanism for assessing the transportation needs facing the County, as the MPO begins to draft the 2025 Long Range Transportation Plan. The survey is part of Phase II of the planning process: Needs Assessment. The Phase I: Goals, was completed last month. Phase III: Prioritization, will commence at the end of the summer. Florida law requires the region to adopt a 20-year transportation plan, which is then updated every five years. Hillsborough’s plan update must be approved by December, 2001.

What is UNTI?

The University North Transportation seeks to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality through the promotion of alternative commute modes, such as carpooling, vanpooling, transit, bicycling or walking.



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