



**REGIONAL RAPID TRANSIT**

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**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN**

December 2019

Prepared for



Prepared by





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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

In 2018, the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority (TBARTA) adopted the Regional Transit Feasibility Plan (RTFP). The RTFP built upon decades of planning to identify the vision for transit throughout the urbanized area of Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas Counties. An evaluation process using clearly defined criteria was used to identify the top transit corridors that could be most competitive for federal funding.

The RTFP identified a bus rapid transit (BRT) project as the “catalyst” based on its ability to serve the region and potentially be most competitive for federal funding. The project concept uses a rubber-tired BRT vehicle on a combination of dedicated lanes, hardened shoulders, express lanes, and mixed traffic along 41 miles of I-275 to connect Downtown St. Petersburg, the Gateway area, Westshore, Downtown Tampa, the USF area, and Wesley Chapel.

As the next step in the Project Development process, the Regional Rapid Transit (RRT) Project Development and Environment (PD&E) Study will advance this catalyst project from concept towards implementation. This three-year study will review the project concept to refine the alignment and how many and where the stations will be. This study will also determine approximately how much it will cost and how it will be paid for. To get to these answers, this study will identify potential impacts to the environment and community and how to address and potentially alleviate them. The details of the project will be continually refined to ultimately identify a locally preferred alternative (LPA) to submit and request construction funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) through its Capital Investment Grant (CIG) Program.

### 1.2 Public Involvement Plan Purpose

This Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is a strategic guide that outlines how the public will be informed and engaged while conducting the RRT PD&E Study. Involving and listening to the community throughout the study will ensure a plan that has community support and will effectively serve the residents and visitors of Tampa Bay and the rest of the region. The following describes the potentially affected communities, stakeholders, and audiences, the general goals and guiding principles, and the strategies that will be used to most effectively notify, engage, and ensure the public and stakeholders are involved throughout the plan’s development. This PIP will be modified and updated throughout the process in response to new audiences, issues, or public engagement opportunities as they emerge.

### 1.3 Project Partners

This study is funded through an agreement between the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District Seven and TBARTA. The study team is working under the direction of TBARTA’s Executive Director and Project Manager, as well as assigned staff and staff resources, as identified. The study team will coordinate work with TBARTA and stakeholders to include FDOT, Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HART), Pasco County Public Transit (PCPT), Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA).

Additional coordination will include the Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission, the Hillsborough Metropolitan Planning Organization (Hillsborough MPO), the Pasco Metropolitan Planning Organization (Pasco MPO), Pasco County Planning, the Pinellas Metropolitan Planning Organization (Forward Pinellas), and the appropriate jurisdictions.

### 1.4 Government-in-the-Sunshine

All activities listed here within this plan will be governed by the Florida Sunshine Law. Florida's Government-in-the-Sunshine Law was enacted in 1967. Today, the Sunshine Law regarding open government can be found in Chapter 286 of the Florida Statutes. These statutes establish a basic right of access to most meetings of boards, commissions and other governing bodies of state and local governmental agencies or authorities.



Public project meetings, such as workshops and charrettes, will abide by required notification procedures. Notice will be made using customary methods throughout the project development process and may include:

- Website
- Social media
- Newsletters
- News/press releases
- Public announcements
- Presentations to local officials
- Public notices/legal display ads (for public hearing only)
- Direct mail List (for public hearing only)

## 2.0 Team Organization and Study Direction

The study team structure, working group structure, process for coordination and outreach, and the relationships between each are described below. Public input gathered through a series of one-on-one meetings, presentations, workshops, and other means, will be documented and taken into consideration in the PD&E Study's decision-making process.

The study teams will provide direction and help move the project forward, ultimately selecting a LPA that will be submitted to FTA for consideration and approval of federal CIG dollars. The reporting structure for these teams begins with draft products created by the Consultant Team. Review and comment of the draft or interim products will be conducted by the Project Management Team, with the intention of submitting to the Executive Team for review. The Executive Team will meet monthly and the Project Management Team will meet twice a month.

### 2.1 Project Management Team

The Project Management Team will provide guidance and direction related to the effort and progress made for each of the five Project Milestones and provide key updates regarding the completion of major milestones. The project management team will include the executive director, project manager, and key staff of TBARTA, as well as the consultant project manager, key staff, and others as needed. The team includes:

- David Green, TBARTA Executive Director
- Brian Pessaro, TBARTA Project Manager
- Chris Jadick, TBARTA Director of Communications

### 2.2 Executive Team

To ensure that the project proceeds in adherence with regional objectives and needs, the Executive Team will review the technical work used in developing the plan and provide comments on all major deliverables. Meetings are held monthly throughout development of the plan. The team includes:

- David Green, TBARTA Executive Director
- Ming Gao, FDOT
- Brian Hunter, FDOT
- Brad Miller, PSTA
- Cassandra Borchers, PSTA
- Ben Limmer, HART
- Chris Cochran, HART
- Kurt Scheible, PCPT



### 2.3 Consultant Team

The consultant team will lead the public involvement efforts, coordinate closely with all other teams on public involvement activities, and maintain proper documentation and records. Project management includes:

- Scott Pringle, WSP Project Manager
- Jack Gonsalves, WSP Deputy Project Manager
- Jennifer Straw, WSP Task Lead
- Eric Heinz, WSP Task Lead

### 2.4 Board Briefings

The consultant team will facilitate one-on-one briefings with TBARTA Board members at key project milestones. The intent of these meetings is to collect Board input in an informal small group setting. Each briefing will comply with the Florida Sunshine Law.

## 3.0 Stakeholders, Partners, and Audience

Stakeholder and community participation is a major part of this study. TBARTA staff will initiate and lead discussions with affected stakeholders, partner agencies, and the community to share progress and address issues as they arise. Working with not only the public but also agency partners, stakeholders, and regional committees and boards to provide input is essential to ensuring this project is successful.

There are many stakeholders within Tampa Bay, each playing a major role in the development of this plan. To achieve public trust and understanding, the study teams will communicate with a wide variety of stakeholders and citizens.

The community and agency participation process has two primary objectives:

- To ensure that information is transparent, current, and readily available to agencies and the public throughout duration of the study, and that such information is as timely, clear, accurate, and comprehensive as possible
- To ensure that interested parties – including local governments and metropolitan, regional, state, and federal agencies, as well as the public – have ample opportunities to participate in an open exchange of views through the RRT PD&E Study process

### 3.1 Stakeholder Groups

Two stakeholder groups were assembled to provide valuable input for the PD&E Study, the Station Areas Working Group and the Business Partners Working Group, both described below. Additional working groups may be identified as needed. The full list of participants in these working groups at the time of publication of the PIP is included in **Appendix A**.

#### Station Areas Working Group

This working group will assist with the station area analysis. Initially, this includes the number and location of the stations areas. However, as the station areas are narrowed down in the Milestone 2 effort, this will include station charrettes and more detailed station area concepts. This working group will assist in identifying preferred station locations and community impacts, and in coordinating with existing and future land use polices and plans. The Intermodal Centers teams will be included in this working group to ensure coordination between the two efforts.

This working group is made up of land use planning staff from the following public sector agencies:

- Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission
- Forward Pinellas
- Pasco County Planning Department



- Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council
- City of Pinellas Park Planning
- City of St. Petersburg Planning
- City of Tampa Planning
- *Additional stakeholders will be added as necessary*

### Business Partners Working Group

This working group will assist by providing input from the perspective of our regional business and community leaders on all key project milestones. The RTFP Business Partners Working Group was used as the basis for this working group. Additional members were identified at the onset of the study. This working group is made up of the following entities:

- Chambers of Commerce
- Economic Development Corporations
- Regional Business Partnerships and Organizations
- Tourist and Visitor Organizations
- *Additional stakeholders will be added as necessary*

### 3.2 Additional Stakeholders

The following stakeholders will be engaged throughout the study, but at the time of publication of the PIP, a separate working group has not been identified. As additional stakeholders are identified, this list will be modified and/or amended in response to new audiences and issues as they emerge and may result in targeted outreach as needed.

#### Community Organizations

The following lists the community organizations and members of the public to be engaged during development of the plan. This is not an inclusive list. This list will be modified and/or amended to allow for flexibility in the PIP in response to new audiences and issues as they emerge.

- All for Transportation
- Neighborhood associations
- Service and community organizations/associations
- Disadvantaged population organizations (e.g., seniors, persons with disabilities, minorities, low income, etc.)

#### Professional Organizations

As necessary, professional organizations may also be engaged during development of the plan, including

- Urban Land Institute, Tampa Bay Chapter
- American Planning Association, Florida Suncoast Section
- American Institute of Architects, Tampa Bay Chapter
- Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS), Tampa Bay Chapter
- Tampa Bay Institute of Transportation Engineers (TBITE)
- Tampa Bay Transportation Applications Group (TB-TAG)
- *Additional organizations will be added as necessary*

### 3.3 Key Stakeholder Briefings

The study team will facilitate one-on-one briefings with key stakeholders and policy-makers at key milestones. These stakeholder briefings may include meetings with state, county, and city elected officials. The intent of these meetings is to collect input in an informal small group setting. Briefings will comply with the Florida Sunshine Law.



### 3.4 Affected Public

If a public hearing is required, newsletters and/or notification letters will be sent to all property owners as required by Section 339.155 Florida Statutes, and to local elected and appointed government officials notifying them of the upcoming public hearing. The notification will also be emailed to elected officials inviting them to the public hearing and posted to the project website ([rrt.tbarta.com](http://rrt.tbarta.com)).

## 4.0 Public Involvement Plan Activities and Tools

Community participation is a major part of this Project. TBARTA staff will initiate and lead discussions with affected stakeholders, partner agencies, and the community to share Project progress and address issues as they arise. We are prepared to conduct all types of public outreach; we will use an array of strategies to target a large demographic of people, from online methods to small meetings which provides opportunities for more in-depth conversations about the project progression.

### 4.1 Leveraging Existing Opportunities

Due to the size of the study area, the study team will leverage existing relationships with partner agencies and coordinate outreach efforts whenever possible. Information that has already been collected in other studies (e.g. TDPs, LRTP updates, other PD&E studies) will be used to augment the information gathered during the PD&E Study.

### 4.2 Anticipated Outreach Activities

The following outlines the anticipated outreach activities during the RRT PD&E Study. If additional activities are considered or facilitated, this PIP will be updated to reflect any changes.

#### Project Branding

Project branding will be used on all project-related materials so that the public and stakeholders can instantly recognize the materials related to this study. Branding includes a project-specific logo, colors, and aesthetic features. This branding effort is separate from future branding of the operational BRT service (vehicles, stations, etc.).

#### Social Media

Social media will be used to communicate project status, announce public involvement opportunities, and share other relevant project information. Social media can be an effective and useful tool to encourage participation in online surveys while also providing updates on the process through a large platform.

#### Website

A project website ([rrt.tbarta.com](http://rrt.tbarta.com)) was created as a public interface for the project. Project information will be posted on the RRT website so the public and agency staff can retrieve, review, and comment on plan information and materials. The website will be continually updated and will house information about the study, all study documents, study schedule, list of public involvement opportunities, and ability to submit comments to the project team.

The project website is designed to replicate the main TBARTA website and provide a consistent user experience between the project website and main TBARTA site. Throughout the study, a crowdsourcing application will be available on the website, allowing users to view the project and place “pins” at specific locations on the map and make comments.



### Videos

Informational videos will be developed to educate the public about the RRT Project and to generate excitement. The videos will be posted on the study website, provided to the press for news stories, and shown in various public venues (e.g., Tampa International Airport). Videos will be released with new details as the PD&E Study advances.

### Online Surveys and Interactive Activities

Surveys will be administered throughout the process to better understand community preferences, changes in travel behavior, and opinions of the public. The online surveys will range from simple designs to interactive surveys or crowdsourcing applications. Paper copies will be available at outreach events, but online surveys will provide a larger platform and further reach to individuals who can't attend meetings or events. Results from the surveys conducted as part of this effort will be augmented with the results of recent onboard passenger surveys and other surveys in the region.

### Email List

Anyone who wishes to receive information, updates, and special announcements regarding the plan will be added to an email list. Those wishing to be added to the list may do so on the website or at public engagement events or meetings. Email blasts may be produced periodically to keep the public and stakeholders informed and interested in the process and to encourage participation in any opportunities.

### Informational Materials

Project fact sheets will be developed periodically for distribution to the public. It will include basic information about the project, study schedule, and contact information for the main project contact. The primary format for distribution will be electronic, through the website, email blasts, and social media. Informational materials will also be provided as hard copies at relevant meetings and presentations.

### Presentations to Agency Boards and Committees

Presentations to agencies and regional organizations may be made to agency committees and at regularly scheduled regional organization meetings as needed. These meetings are expected to include entity staff directors and policy makers from relevant regional, county, and city agencies and organizations that fall under TBARTA's legislative boundaries.

### Public Meetings

During each milestone of the plan's development, one round of workshops or public meetings will be held in each county in the participating region. These workshops and meetings give the public an opportunity to learn about the project and be a part of the planning process from the beginning and to have vital input throughout. These meetings also allow the public to have an open dialogue for questions, comments, and concerns directed towards project and agency staff.

### Public Hearing

The Class of Action for the NEPA document will be determined by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) once the project reaches Milestone 2. If the Class of Action requires a public hearing, this PIP will be updated to include additional information regarding public hearing notification and procedures.

## 5.0 Public Involvement Performance Measures

For measuring the effectiveness of the public engagement efforts, TBARTA will refer to the *Regional Public Participation Plan (RPPP) for the Tampa Bay Area*, developed jointly by the West Central Florida Metropolitan Planning Organization's Chairs Coordinating Committee (CCC) and TBARTA. As outlined in the RPPP, this public involvement plan has the following goals and their respective objectives:

- **Effective Communication** • Focus on proactive, effective, timely, and continuous communication, both within and outside of the CCC/TBARTA



- **Trust and Understanding** • Build public trust and understanding by producing accurate, clear information to encourage public participation
- **Collaboration** • Collaborate and build partnerships with government agencies, civic organizations, and other interested parties
- **Inclusive Engagement** • Provide access, be inclusive, and strive to engage all affected populations
- **Resourcefulness** • Be cost-conscious, economical, and resourceful
- **Meaningful Input** • Obtain meaningful public input to inform the decision-making process

## 6.0 Summary of Public Involvement Activities and Comments

Activities and comments will be tracked using two databases.

### 6.1 Activity Tracking Tool

An activity tracking tool will be used to track all stakeholder and public involvement activities. The database will include presentations, meetings, briefings, events, workshops, charrettes, and the public hearing (if conducted). To the extent feasible, the database will include the location, time, presenter, number of attendees, and other pertinent information.

### 6.2 Comment Database

A comment database will be used to maintain and track all comments that are received during the public involvement effort. The information collected will include comments, date received, format/source (e.g., email, at meeting, from website, etc.), responses given (if applicable), and follow-up conducted (if applicable). Commenters will be asked to provide their zip code. Following entry of the comment, staff will review the comments for favorable, unfavorable, or neutral, and categorize the comments.