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Worried About Gasoline Prices?

Rising gasoline prices have Pinellas County residents weighing their transportation alternatives - private car, bus, bike, walking or carpooling. Here's some information that will help you make a decision.

Begin by finding out what it costs to drive your car. The American Public Transportation Association web site will do the math for you. Go to www.apta.com and click on the "Savings Calculator." Insert your trip distance, your car's mileage-per-gallon, the current cost of gasoline, and your parking fees. The web site calculates your daily and yearly trip cost, and compares it to the cost of taking the bus.

Mass Transit - For many people, the PSTA bus system has become the travel mode of choice. Cash fare for a single ride is \$1.75 per bus. Passes for unlimited trips and transfers cost \$4 for one day, \$20 for 7-days, or \$55 for 31-days. Park your car at a free Park-N-Ride lot and take an express bus to Tampa for \$3 each way, or get a 20-ride Premium service pass for \$48. For unlimited trips on all PSTA and Hillsborough County HART routes, get a monthly Passport for \$85. Discounted fares are available for seniors, youth, students, and disabled citizens.

PSTA's online Trip Planner provides maps and information on routes, discounts, parking lots, fares and schedules, as well as basic

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Motorists must now come to a complete stop for pedestrians at crosswalks.

New Law Protects Pedestrians

Florida is ranked number two in the nation for pedestrian fatalities. The MPO's Pedestrian Transportation Advisory Committee (PTAC) and Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) believed stronger laws were needed to protect pedestrians and to improve this grim statistic. Committee members pointed specifically to the requirement that motorists "yield" to pedestrians, recommending that the law be changed to require motorists to come to a full stop for pedestrians.

The committee received support from the MPO and from Representative Rick Kriseman (District 53) and Senator Mike Fasano (District 11), who agreed to sponsor bills in Florida's House and Senate. The result was the passage of Pedestrian Safety Bill (SB 154) Section 1 (s. 316.075 & 316.130, F.D.).

The new law directs that when facing a steady, red signal, a motorist

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"Gas Prices..." (Continued from page 1.)

instructions on how to take the bus at www.psta.net or call (727)540-1900.

Carpooling - Cut your costs in half or more by carpooling with coworkers, or contact Bay Area Commuter Services (BACS). Their on-line, computerized Ez-Ride program will help you identify potential carpoolers and vanpoolers with whom you can share your commute. For details call BACS at 1-800-988-RIDE (7433) or go to www.tampabayrideshare.org on the web.

Walking or Bicycling - By now everyone knows the health and cost benefits of walking. If you prefer bicycling, this county has a well-developed trail and on-road bicycle lane system. It's also possible to combine bike and bus travel. Ride your bike to the bus stop. Mount it on the carrier at the front of the bus, or secure your bike at one of the numerous bike racks situated around the county.

If none of these travel alternatives work for you, check with your employer to see if working at home is an option. If driving remains as your only option, consider buying a fuel-efficient car and/or adopting strategies to conserve your fuel consumption. Drive at an even speed, preferably between 30-60 miles per hour. Avoid idling. Check your tire pressure regularly, and fix fuel leaks. Plan each trip to include multiple destinations such as work, grocery store, etc.

Even if pump prices dip to the unlikely price of \$2 per gallon, adopting the travel habits mentioned here will continue to contribute to cleaner air and reduced traffic congestion.



The cyclist on the left uses a "folding bike," which permits him to take it on the bus. The cyclist on the right chains his bike to a roadside rack prior to boarding the bus.

"Pedestrian Law..." (Continued from page 1.)

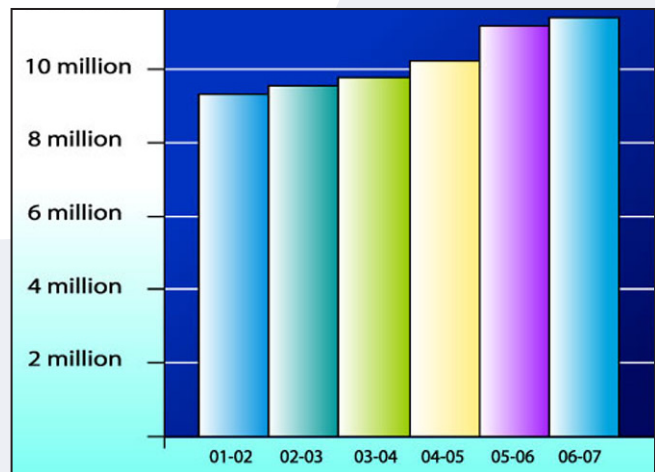
must come to a complete stop before entering the crosswalk. The motorist must also come to a complete stop at any crosswalk where a traffic signal or signage is in place. The motorist must remain stopped to allow a pedestrian with a permitted signal to cross. This law applies when:

- The pedestrian is already in the crosswalk or;
- The pedestrian steps into the crosswalk and is on the motorist's half of the road, or;
- The pedestrian is approaching so closely from the opposite half of the road as to be in danger.

Where traffic signals are not in place and there is no signage indicating otherwise, the motorist must yield the right-of-way, slowing down or stopping if need be, for pedestrians in the situations listed above.

For the complete text of this new law, go to <http://laws.flrules.org/> on the web. Click on "2008", and scroll to "Ch_2008-033.pdf."

Bus Ridership Increases



This graph shows the steady increase in PSTA riders since 2001. Accommodating more riders and dealing with issues such as higher gasoline prices and reduced funding following the passage of Amendment One are some of the challenges faced by the transit authority.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

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Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority
Mayor, City of Belleair Bluffs

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Cities of Safety Harbor, Tarpon
Springs, Oldsmar

Don Skelton
(Non-voting) Florida Department
of Transportation, District 7

Brian Smith
Executive Director, MPO

Sarah Ward
Transportation Planning
Administrator, MPO

Transit Shifts Into High Gear

The MPO's Pinellas Mobility Initiative (PMI) Steering Committee meets monthly, bringing together MPO members and other elected officials, representatives of the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA), the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), representatives of local governments and transportation agencies, and individual citizens. The PSTA and the PMI Steering Committee are currently working on several short and long-term transit initiatives:

- The Transit Development Plan (TDP) provides a vision for Pinellas County transit for the next 10 years. Early in the process, the agencies established a 10-year goal to double transit ridership, from a projected 11.7 million transit trips in FY2007/08 to 23.4 million transit trips in 2017/18. The TDP calls for PSTA to aggressively target new riders, provide frequent and rapid service (15 minutes or better) on the top 10 transit corridors, develop strategically located Park-and-Ride facilities, and implement new and expanded services around major transit centers. The TDP was approved at the July 9, 2008 MPO meeting.
- The MPO Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is scheduled for adoption in the fall of 2009. The LRTP will extend the transit vision to 2035 by identifying service enhancements and strategies needed for the next 20 years. To further the goal of doubling transit ridership within ten years, the committee is evaluating Bus Rapid Transit and fixed guideway transit as strategies for expanding service and attracting new riders.
- The Countywide Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Plan initiative resulted in the selection of ten corridors for implementation. Results were very similar to the top eight corridors identified in the TDP. PSTA and MPO staffs work together to make certain that the TDP and the BRT Plan are coordinated going forward.
- Clearwater to Beach Transit - The Downtown Clearwater to Clearwater Beach Transit project was conceived as the first segment of a future, premium transit system. The feasibility of operating different transit technologies on the Clearwater Memorial Bridge is currently being analyzed. Technologies to be studied include guideway and BRT.

On the Web - Go to www.pinellascounty.org/mpo to ask questions, make comments and to view plans for transportation improvements.



Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) uses signal priority, offboard fare systems, dedicated bus lanes and other innovations to improve travel time and passenger convenience.

Transportation Is a Regional Topic

In 2007 the Florida Legislature established the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority (TBARTA), tasked with identifying needs and formulating a transportation system for seven counties in the region. Involved counties include Citrus, Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas and Sarasota.

This year TBARTA presented community workshops, informational briefings and workshop-style presentations throughout the region. MPOs play a role in the TBARTA planning process, which will produce a transportation master plan in 2009.

The TBARTA plan will be coordinated with the Regional Long Range Transportation Plan that is being developed by West Central Florida Metropolitan Planning Organizations Chairs Coordinating Committee (CCC). The CCC is a regional transportation planning agency composed of MPOs and involving the Florida Department of Transportation, the Regional Planning Councils, and Florida's Turnpike Enterprise. Originally established through interlocal agreement in 1993, the CCC has a long-term commitment to promoting regional transit.



Artist Mark Fuller designed and crafted PSTA's new bus shelter for the City of Seminole. It was supported by Pinellas County's Public Art and Design Program.

Grants Support Transportation for Residents With Special Needs



A Neighborhood Care EZride driver prepares to pick up his passenger.

In January 2007, the Pinellas County MPO was designated by Governor Crist as the recipient for two grants: Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom. This funding will help support transportation services for low income and disabled people in the Tampa Bay metropolitan area, including Pinellas, Hillsborough and Pasco counties.

In previous years, JARC funds have been applied to bus routes that transport low income workers to late shift jobs. Such routes serve approximately 60,000 riders a year.

The New Freedom grant will be used in Pinellas County to expand Neighborhood Care Network's EZride program.* The program serves elderly and disabled residents who lack transportation for tasks such as grocery shopping and healthcare appointments, or for traveling to the mall or to social events.

The grant requires agencies to provide matching funds. Neighborhood Care achieves this goal through financial assistance from corporations including Hannaford Foods, Raymond James, Target, Ceridian, and CVS. Staff and volunteer drivers operate the vehicles, and clients pay a nominal membership fee. To apply for EZride, call Neighborhood Care Network at 1-888-RIDES09 (743-3709). Agencies interested in applying for a grant may call the MPO at 727-464-8200 for information.

** Neighborhood Care Network's EZride program and Bay Area Commuter Services' EZ-ride program are unrelated services.*

Trail Loop Program Is Planned

Pinellas County is recognized nationwide for its outstanding trail system. A new MPO Trailways Plan envisions expansion of this system to form a 74.9-mile continuous loop that connects the county on all sides - north, south, east and west.

The existing 33.5-mile Fred Marquis Pinellas Trail will form the west side of the loop. At its southern terminus, the trail links with the new 3-mile St. Petersburg Downtown Connection Trail, which travels along an abandoned railroad corridor. The eastern side of the planned loop will include the Progress Energy Trail. The northern end of the loop, already partially in place, will travel from the East Lake area to Tarpon Springs.

The loop project will be implemented in segments. A 2-mile segment of the Progress Energy Trail from Bright House Field in Clearwater to Belleair Road opened in 2008. The next phase of trail construction, scheduled for fall of 2008, will connect Bright House Field and Countryside Mall. A bicycle/pedestrian overpass will be built over U.S. 19 at Enterprise Road.

Funding to complete the \$80.3 million Trail Loop Program will come from a variety of resources including the Penny for Pinellas, MPO Federal Enhancement Funds, municipal participation, impact fees, and private sector contributions.

What Should Be Done to Improve Transportation in Pinellas County?

If you've got ideas about how to improve transportation in this county, the MPO wants to hear from you. An update of the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is currently being prepared. This document represents the official plan for improving highways, public transportation, bikeways and pedestrian facilities in Pinellas County through the year 2035.

Go to www.pinellascounty.org/mpo on the web to complete the survey or to comment, or call the MPO to request a mail copy. Contact information is listed below.

For More Information Contact:

The Pinellas County Metropolitan Planning Organization
600 Cleveland St., Suite 750, Clearwater, FL 33755



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