

Title: The Pinellas County Monorail
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When the Walt Disney World resort opened in 1971, one of the images that became symbolic with this futuristic wonderland was the sleek, silver monorail. It seemed to embody adventure and efficiency as park patrons filled each car, then whooshed off down a single, concrete beam with very little noise and no pollution.

What a world it would be, some mused, if cities in Florida could have their own monorail systems to take us to work, school, shopping or play.

As Pinellas County roadways reach their capacity, and little right of way is left for additional thoroughfares, County planners have sent their thoughts skyward, to the level of that sleek, silver monorail that enchanted many of us the first time we rode it.

A plan to construct a monorail system in Pinellas County from St. Petersburg to Countryside, with spurs to the beaches and the Tyrone Boulevard corridor is being proposed in public meetings. Along this 30+-mile route, 25 stations would serve monorail patrons. Neighborhood, community and regional stops would serve as commuter hubs, with parking areas, and improved bus and trolley service to take monorail riders to nearby destinations.

At any of these stations, after just a short wait, commuters would climb aboard the monorail train. They would settle back in comfort as the train glides above stoplights and congestion. Instead of fuming in traffic jams, people can settle into a comfortable seat and relax, do paperwork, read, or close your eyes for a catnap. You could survey the scenery through large, glass windows, knowing you're riding in a vehicle that does not pollute the air and does not rely on fossil fuels for propulsion. When you reach your destination, it's just a short walk to where you want to go, or improved ground transportation will take you there in moments. Certainly, destination choices would abound as a monorail circuit would stimulate extensive redevelopment along its route.

Experts predict that a countywide monorail system will transport an average of 45,000 commuters a day. Trips by tourists could increase that figure by 20-30%.

The cost for such a monorail system could reach as high as \$1.6 billion. Federal funds are expected to pay for half the project. The remaining costs could come from taxpayer dollars, users fees, and/or public/private partnerships. Right now, the Pinellas County Metropolitan Planning Organization is conducting a public information campaign to acquaint residents with the monorail plan. At public events, 85-90% of the people who have seen the plans think a monorail circuit is a good idea. With enough public support, planners can present their proposals to the federal government in hopes of securing them as a funding source.

In the most densely populated county in Florida, an elevated monorail system makes sense. Right now the idea is just a vision, but given enough support, it could become a reality. You can get more details by going to www.pinellasmobility.com. A monorail could well be the transportation system of the future, come to our corner of the world here in Pinellas County.