

Clearwater, Florida, July 19, 2010

The Pinellas County Transportation Task Force held a Public Workshop on July 19, 2010 at 5:58 P.M. at the Bayside High School, 14405 49th Street North, Clearwater, Florida.

Chairman Karen Williams Seel welcomed those in attendance and introduced task force members and elected officials; whereupon, she provided a brief overview of the task force membership and mission and invited comments and suggestions from the public.

The following individuals stated their opinions and concerns:

Wilfred Sergeant, Pinellas Citizen Advisory Committee
Paul Ziegler, Seminole Chamber of Commerce, Metropolitan
Planning Organization Citizen Advisory Committee
Curtis Holmes, Largo City Commission
Ron Weaver, Stearns Weaver Law Firm
Verrita Walters, CASA Domestic Violence Organization
Ed Stillo, HDR Engineering, Pinellas Park
Jeff Moakley
Linda McKenna, Largo
Norm Roche, Candidate/Citizen

At this time, 6:25 P.M., Chairman Seel thanked those present for their time and participation and invited them to remain in the room to view the story boards and speak with task force members on an individual basis.

Sign-in sheets and two written comment forms have been filed and made a part of the record.

Minutes prepared by Arlene Smitke, Deputy Clerk.

MEETING: Transportation Task Force Public Workshop – Bayside High School DATE: July 19, 2010 REPORTER: Arlene Smitke	
5:36	People coming in. No announcement yet. People are talking at the stations.
Seel 5:55 pm	Going to front. Good evening; welcome. So glad you're here. If I could ask you to take a seat, that would be very helpful.
Seel 5:58	<p>To start this off, I'd like to introduce the task force members that are here. If they would stand and wave their hand that would be wonderful.</p> <p>Neil Allen; Councilmember Jeff Danner; Ed Smolik; Mayor Frank Hibbard, Clw; Mayor RB Johnson, IRB; Robert Pergolizzi, Stan Vetteto.</p> <p>Other Elected Officials: Largo Gigi Arntzen and Curtis Holmes; City of St P, Leslie Curran and Steve (Kornell). I think that's it. Sorry, Councilmember Bill Jonson, Clw.</p>
Seel	<p>Sorry, Comm Ken Welch. Comm Welch is vice chair of TTF. We have 25 civic, business, and elected leaders that will be meeting over the next six months to have a full-blown discussion about what the transportation options are, what the funding sources are, and – but to kind of kick it off, we've only had two meetings thus far, which were all informational to give overviews of the TBARTA and the PSTA plans, the MPO's 2035 unfunded plan, etc. So we wanted to reach out. I did this years ago when we did the US19 Task Force, and some of the very best common-sense ideas came from the audience. And we really did use those ideas in the drafting of our recommendations for US19.</p> <p>So we thought this would be an awesome way to get started, and we have a microphone here. If you would like to come up and share your thoughts about any aspect of transit or transportation, please come up to the mic and share your thoughts for – hopefully, we'd ask you to keep it to 3 mins or less. You can identify yourself if you'd like to by name and city or part of the county. Also, for those who don't want to speak at the front desk, we do have sheets where you can share your thoughts. Don't be shy.</p>
Wilfred Sergeant	I've been following many of these developments that are taking place. I'm very interested in all the drawings we see over there, the plans for the routes and so on. One thing that worries me is I don't know how you can compete with the automobile if you don't offer an average speed better than the automobile. It's got to be competitive with that, and the only way I see of doing that is with exclusive rights of way. I keep looking to see on these plans how you're going to create the speeds that you need that I think will require exclusive rights of way. I'd like to see some indications along those lines. Thank you.
Paul Ziegler	Past President of Seminole Chamber. I was recently appointed to the Citizens Advisory Committee of the MPO. I don't have a lot of technical advice to give you, but I do have a book that I would recommend that you read. It will be probably the best argument you could find for a better transportation system. It's called Bond of Union, about the building of the Erie Canal, Published 2008. Gerald Kopco (?) is the author. I grew up in Palmira NY, better known as Canal Town on the Erie Canal. It profoundly changed not only NY state, but our entire country and may be the reason why we are the USA today, when you read the book.
Curtis Holmes	Largo City Commission. Karen, you and I had a conversation almost 15 years ago about transportation in Pinellas County, and I said for 20 yrs now we've paid to have the traffic lights timed. I'm still waiting for them. They're not there. I don't know why we can't get traffic lights timed. If we got the lights timed, you could handle the

	<p>traffic flow without getting into elaborate plans of mass transit that we're looking at. The problem we have with mass transit, every area of the country where mass transit works, it's because the cities are vertical. Here, we are all horizontal. I had a conversation with Chris Arbutine about this, and I said, Chris, the problem you have with mass transit is, you have to visualize a bicycle wheel. The bicycle wheel, at the rim, is your alpha, and at the rim is your omega. This is where you are, this is where you want to go. Mass transit is the axle of the bicycle wheel. I don't care if it is a high-speed train from Orlando to Tampa, Miami to Orlando. It doesn't matter if it's TBARTA from Tampa to St Pete; doesn't make any difference. That's the axle. Even an airplane, that's the axle.</p> <p>The problem in our area, we have no spokes. So you take a high-speed train from Orlando to Tampa and you want to go to downtown St. Pete, how are you going to get there? These are the issues we need to address. Or if you're going to go catch the light rail from downtown St Pete to Largo, for example, and you want to go two miles from there, how are you going to get there? Are you going to walk? We had this discussion in the City Commission chamber already, and I brought this up. I said well, let's say you wanted to go to the Goodyear dealer on Clw-Largo Rd and the light rail brings you to downtown Largo. How are you going to get there? No one had an answer to that. I said, you can't use the bicycles that Tampa tried. Remember when Tampa did that? They put the funny-colored bicycles downtown. And I was talking to the lawyer for the Tampa City Commission, and I said I'll give you a month and they'll all be gone. They didn't quite last a month.</p> <p>But that's the problem. Until you can address the spoke problem of once you get to where you wanted to go in a general sense, how are you going to get to your specific destination. We realistically, from what I have seen, we have no plans to address that whatsoever. That's really the problem here, unless you decide to redo your urban plan totally and go nothing but vertical. If you go all vertical, you don't have the problem at all; if you go horizontal, you have a great problem. Thank you.</p>
Ron Weaver	<p>Stearns Weaver law firm. I'm glad Curt went first, because the spokes are easier than we think if we ever get the spine. With a billion-and-a-quarter spine which can prompt another half a billion or billion for the rest of the spine, and a 52-minute trip from downtown Tampa to the Orlando airport with two or three or four other stops, including Lakeland – with a billion-and-a-quarter-head start, we can do what we're doing in a lot of jurisdictions in FL, which is, we can have the flex bus go to each subdivision. Pick them up at 8:00, bring them home at 5, 5:30 or 6. It is part of the system, part of the funding. It enables us to take those communities that think they're off of the main system and connect them, in a very efficient way, with that billion-and-a-quarter head start of the bullet train.</p> <p>The feds have another \$50 billion in the next total package. We can avoid having 3,000 miles of failed roads by 2060 between here and Orlando if we will but take what we would have spent by way of \$270 billion on roads and instead spending it on being in the same car together, using our Blackberry, relaxed, air conditioned with a cup of coffee – 52 minutes to the Orlando airport and 5 minutes or 18 minutes or 52 minutes to wherever it takes for us to distribute those bullet train billion and a quarter dollars worth of spine. The spokes will come. We have the axle, we have the spine. It's a billion and a quarter of our dollars. Why should we let Charlotte and Phoenix and everybody take those hard-won dollars that we've spent on federal taxes for the last 30 years and get those when we can get 50% federal matching for finally getting into the</p>

	game. We're 60th as a region as far as the commuters' choices. We've got to go from 60th to 50th to 40th, 30th, 20th, and then 18th in 5 or 10 or 8 years, and we've got a speed-up by the federal govt, and I think that we can put the wheels on this axle, Curt.
Verrita Walters	<p>I work for CASA Domestic Violence Org. I'm here representing the women and children that have to catch the transit system in St Petersburg, FL. I understand what the gentleman back here is saying about the mass transit system, but we also have to think about the little people who can't get on the high-speed trains with the Blackberries and the cup of coffee. We have to think about the women that have been struggling to get away from their abusers, to try to get their children to day care, try to get to work, to get to school.</p> <p>Where I am employed, I run the transitional housing program. And the women that come to us, they have to either be employed or they have to go to school. And they have children, because we take women with children. Those women, sometimes, don't have a car. Sometimes they don't even have the money to buy bus passes. We provide the bus passes for them, so we need to think about the little people that need the system also, the people who need to get from Point A to Point B or who need to get from their homes to the day care center, then catch the bus from the day care center to their job or school. So we should not – think about the little people that need to have your system also, so while planning anything for the better community, we need to also think about the little people; don't forget them.</p>
Ed Stillo	<p>Pinellas Park. I'd like to follow up on some of the earlier comments. As a user of transit in many other places across the country and overseas, I've witnessed first hand the development that transit does bring, and I think it takes care of both problems. Your point is well taken, Ma'am, about the bus service needs to be expanded. And if we look across the bridge in Hillsborough County and what their transit plan looks like, most of that money, if their referendum passes, will be spent on expanding the bus service – circulators in the neighborhoods, things like you're talking about for better access. And I'm sure, with Karen and Tim Garling and people like that involved in this process, we'll see that same kind of approach to the Pinellas plan. It can't just be roads by itself; it can't just be transit by itself. And that includes buses and light rail and all of those components. They all feed in, like Ron said, to the spine. So you need a healthy circulatory system to support that spine. A healthier bus service is better for the transit system as well. I'm just encouraged to see that we are taking the initiative here in Pinellas County, and I think it's very important, as we move forward, to involve both the residents of Pinellas County, but the businesses also. I'm real encouraged by things like the Rays talking about the stadium being a stop on the line. That kind of thinking is the type of thinking we need to make this successful. Thank you.</p>
Jeff Moakley	<p>Call it Reality Check 101. The plan is good, but the reality is, it's not here. We've got some developers or political organizations that are taking models from other communities across the US and trying to apply it to Pinellas County, which is so spread out and so built up that we aren't going to have the opportunity to go ahead and do this. The best case I've heard for light rail in Pinellas County is from an elected official. His answer was We're one of the top 25 regional areas, or maybe counties, in the nation that do not have a light rail system. Because 24 other counties nationwide – or heavily trafficked urban areas have light rail; therefore, Pinellas County should have light rail. That just doesn't fly. Americans, we are on our own schedule. We don't want to be on a bus schedule. If we want to go someplace, we want to go there direct; we're going to go by bus, go by rail, we're going to be on somebody else's schedule.</p>

	<p>Hillsborough County may or may not approve their one percent sales tax. I-4 corridor – maybe you need light rail there – maybe. We just spent \$100 million on US 19 on overpasses. Perhaps we’re going to spend \$50 million on Ulmerton Rd. It’s been said Americans are in love with their cars. The federal govt -- \$13, 14 billion in debt – trillion dollars. And you want two or three more billion out of them to go build this system. Property taxes, maybe I pay \$45-60 for PSTA – something I don’t use. I’ve used it a couple times. Once I wanted to go to the airport --- took 4 hrs to get to the airport by bus, and that was only because the fed govt had given PSTA a subsidy so they could go across from Pinellas to Hillsborough.</p> <p>Reality is, we use the airport shuttle if we want to get to the airport. I don’t want to have to get on a bus, go downtown to Tampa, get on another bus and have to go out to the airport. We don’t have a ridership and buses to support the system you want. Maybe in 2050 we will have it. Govt stimulus – billions to construct it. What’s that mean? Just you and I paying more taxes to the fed govt that the govt can say, well we gave it back to you. We’re laundering it through Washington at 10 or 15%. We’re going to be paying off the construction debt for centuries. You think \$45 or \$60 a yr in property taxes to fund PSTA is a lot; once you get this system in, the operating costs are going to cost you double, triple, quadruple. \$200 a yr just to support this thing operating-wise.</p> <p>Currently PSTA is looking at raising fares and reducing service. It doesn’t have the money. We’re doing more bicycle riding than riding the bus because they can’t afford the bus fares. If I want to go shopping, I’ve got to have a car. Go shopping once a week, I’ve got a half dozen grocery bags. I’m not going to put those on a bus or on rapid rail and haul them home, then have to walk 300-400 yards from the drop-off point. If I’m in a retirement home, I’ve generally got buses to transport me to the local shopping centers. I’m not going to use PSTA, light rail. If I’m in a wheel chair, we’ve got the wheel chair transport system going on. But the buses aren’t going to help me get from where I live to where the bus stop itself is, and then you’ve got the inconvenience of interconnections and all this type of thing. It took me three buses, really four, to get from Pinellas County over to Tampa Int’l Airport. I just wanted to see if it could be done. Yeah, it can be done, but it took me three or four hours to do it. And we’re just not going to spend the time to do it. Energy – in the future, we may use natural gas or some other kind of gas like we like have some of our buses in right now, but that’s in the future.</p> <p>Reality is, it’s just not here. Seattle, WA – My recollection is they spent about \$500 million to build a system for a mile and a half or two miles. It may or may not have been underground. But Pinellas County is not like the other 24 top urban areas in the country that may have light rail. Just because 24 other counties, major metro areas have light rail or some kind of a rail transportation system doesn’t mean that it’s a system that we need here for Pinellas County. You get bus ridership up to where it’s breaking even, then maybe we’ll come back and talk about it. Thank you, folks.</p>
Linda McKenna	<p>Largo. Most of my adult life has been spent intertwined with transportation systems. I grew up in New England, Fairfield, CT, and my first summer job was riding the New Haven railroad into NY City. It was quite easy to do. It was very common for people to do that in that area. I have to admit, the NE is a smaller area and it has been set up for transportation usage, but it works very well. There are many different trains coming in from various areas into the city. I also lived in the city, used the subway and walked getting back and forth to work. It worked well, even though the subways are</p>

	<p>not the highest quality. I then moved to the Northern VA area out of Washington DC when I was married. And we were there and watched the subway system grow – the Metro system. We lived in Arlington County, and our experience was watching the development of the Metro system along the corridor in Arlington, and it made quite a difference. That whole corridor had been run down and was not utilized, and as the Metro moved out, a wonderful change took place. Each of the metro areas became developed. They developed into multi-use centers. It became very active for living, working, and shopping. People could use the Metro, take a bus to the Metro. It worked out very well. We moved further out to Centerville, and we took the Metro bus to the rail, then took the Metro into the city, where I walked a few blocks to my office. The system was not initially set up for this, but it grew to be very easy to use. There were many buses; they left very frequently; it was not a problem to get the bus to the Metro. They had ride and park locations, or you could drive and park at the Metro, take the Metro in. You could buy tickets that were monthly ridership that would provide a discount. The Metro was efficient and fast, and frankly most people didn't want to drive in. It was too long, took too much time. It was too time consuming; whereas, they could sit on the Metro and read the paper or do other work. And it's great for tourists and for other people in the area to use.</p> <p>So it's been quite a change for me living in this area where there is no transportation, and I find it very odd because I'm so used to that. So I know there are concerns about whether there is the ridership, but once you start building it, it will be there. Maybe now it takes three hours to get to the airport, but it won't once you put the system in place, because there will be many choices and opportunities.</p> <p>I should also add, Pinellas County is almost built to capacity, it is very congested. And multimodal types of transportation are really the only option now. You can't deny it; it's there. And I would hesitate to claim it is too expensive, because I think, in the long run, you will find that your revenue, in terms of the development that comes about, will more than pay for it. I am very much aware that in the past – I think it was Hillsborough, had the opportunity for funds to have a transit system and they turned it down, and the funds went to Charlotte NC and they developed a wonderful rail system. So I don't think we should turn away from it this time. I should also point out that there's a very good article in Time magazine that discusses the proposed Orlando to Tampa rail project and all the benefits it can offer. Thank you very much.</p>
Norm Roche	<p>What I'm hoping to see as a citizen out of the task force and actions is real, substantive, unquestionable data that supports these efforts. I have been attending a lot of the meetings – I was in Tampa this morning at the high speed rail meeting. Wonderful fluff, great photos, great excitement, lots of pie-in-the-sky stuff, but desperately void of data. Terms like hundreds of thousands of job, economic growth and development. But where's the beef? I've talked about mass transit for years. I'm along with Curtis in that we should actually demonstrate that we can operate, manage, and fund a usable, functionable mass transit busing system first. Then where the data supports it, put in the rail where needed. That's along the lines I'm talking about. But real substantive data on ridership and costs. It's not just the cost of building the rail, and when we talk about federal, state dollars and things of that nature, they are nifty euphemisms to get away from the reality. They're tax dollars. So we're not just talking about the cost construction of the rail, but the acquisition of the property and the land through raw buying or eminent domain. Then we're talking about in perpetuity. Tax dollar subsidizing of these systems. Not one of them is self supporting in the country. Down</p>

	in south FL, the tri-rail, which is heralded as a success, it really isn't. I've studied quite a few of them and gone around to study them. We're subsidizing that to the tune of 70 cents on the dollar. So again, if the taxpayers say let's spend our money that way, problem solved. But what I'm hoping to see from the task force is not just pie-in-the-sky great grass (?) but real, substantive data in terms of what it will return to the taxpayer on that investment and what it will bring and ultimately cost us in the long run, not just in the short term. So thank you for your efforts.
Seel	Anyone else?
Wilfred Sergeant – from audience	May I speak again?
Seel	I'd be happy to talk with you, Wilfred. We will still have the story boards up for a while longer. I will be around, and I'm sure members of the task force will be as well, if you want to talk with each of us individually. But I certainly want to thank you all for coming out and spending your time with us this evening. Again, we're willing to walk through any of the information here and to talk with you personally. One more chance for the microphone. Thank you.
6:25	Walks off.