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Pinellas Transit Authority Seeks Grant for \$34M High-tech Clearwater Terminal

The Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority is moving full steam ahead on its plan to create a new downtown Clearwater terminal for its electric fleet. The organization has applied for a Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant. PSTA is asking for \$25 million through the RAISE grant, formerly known as BUILD and TIGER grants.

The new 75,000-square-foot, \$34 million transit hub would be on a city-owned site at Court Street and Myrtle Avenue. It would replace PSTA's current Clearwater facility, called the Park Street PSTA terminal, which serves 14 bus routes but is outdated and cannot accommodate electric buses.

PSTA has 88 hybrids buses and six fully electric buses. By the end of the calendar year, PSTA expects to have 90 hybrids and eight electric buses in its fleet. The new facility would also have a solar-paneled roof and charging stations through PSTA's partnership with Duke Energy. The site is also next to a CSX rail line, which was previously used to carry print products for the Tampa Bay Times and aggregate for a plant.

"We [the city] bought that property due to the CSX line ... The MPO [Metropolitan Planning Organization] looked at buying the CSX line as a potential location for light rail. It was low-hanging fruit, there were only two trains a week – one carried newsprint down to the Tampa Bay Times and another carried aggregate for a concrete plant," PSTA board member and Clearwater councilmember David Allbritton said during a city council work session on Monday. "The problem is CSX wanted to sell the entire Tampa Bay region line, which didn't just include Pinellas County, and there wasn't a desire



from the region to buy the entire line.”

A PSTA spokeswoman said the new facility would likely be able to accommodate future possible light rail if it ever came to fruition. Meanwhile, the city is interested in PSTA's current lot on Park Street to build a future home for City Hall. The land swap agreement is currently being finalized between PSTA and Clearwater, a PSTA spokeswoman said.

The photo was provided by PSTA. PSTA is working with Boston-based engineering and construction firm CDM

Smith Inc. on the design. The remaining \$9 million PSTA would need in addition to the \$25 million grant would be funded through municipalities.

PSTA expects to begin the final design in summer 2022, start construction in 2023 and start operations in fall 2024.

Source: Catalyst, September 14, 2021

JTA Selects Balfour Beatty V2R Team for Bay Street Innovation Corridor

Balfour Beatty Vision 2 Reality (V2R) team has been selected to deliver the Bay Street Innovation Corridor (BSIC) Project on behalf of the Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA). The JTA Board of Directors selected the Balfour Beatty V2R team during its August Meeting, following the conclusion of a two-step procurement process to launch what will be Phase I of the JTA's Ultimate Urban Circulator (U2C) autonomous vehicle service in Downtown Jacksonville.

The U2C is the JTA's vision for the conversion and expansion of the Skyway automated people mover (APM) system in Downtown Jacksonville and the surrounding neighborhoods. The three-phase U2C includes the Bay Street Innovation Corridor, the full conversion of the Skyway superstructure, and the expansion into nearby neighborhoods. When completed, the system will expand the current Skyway from a 2.5-mile system to the 10-mile U2C, leveraging the latest autonomous vehicle technologies.

“This award represents a major milestone for the U2C, the JTA and Downtown Jacksonville,” said JTA Chief Executive Officer Nathaniel P. Ford Sr. “We are confident the Balfour Beatty team and its partners will deliver a world-class project on behalf of the taxpayers of Jacksonville, placing our community at the forefront of innovation.”

Pending JTA Board approval of a final contract, this will be second major project Balfour Beatty will deliver for the JTA, following the completion of the iconic and award-winning Jacksonville Regional Transportation Center at LaVilla (JRTC) in May 2020. With the award approved by the JTA Board of Directors, the JTA and Balfour Beatty

will move to negotiating the terms of a final contract, which will also come before the Board later this year.

“We are honored to be selected by Jacksonville Transportation Authority to construct another successful project for the Jacksonville community,” said John Harris, senior vice president of Balfour Beatty's Buildings operations in Florida. “To be a part of the Ultimate Urban Circulator program is an opportunity of a lifetime, and we look forward to remaining a Relentless Ally to our client, our partners and the community as we work to provide and innovative and revolutionary transportation network for the future of Jacksonville.”

Balfour Beatty will leverage an integrated progressive design build (AV-DBOM) method and partner with Superior Construction Company Southeast, Beep, Inc., WGI, Inc., Stantec Consulting Services, Inc. and Miller Electric to deliver the project.

Through this consortium, Balfour Beatty at its partners will oversee 60% design of the BSIC, a three-mile, at-grade service along Bay Street that will run from Hogan Street to the Sports & Entertainment District, near TIAA Bank Field, 121 Financial Field and the VyStar Veterans Memorial Area. The approximately \$44 million project is fully funded and supported by local, in-kind, state and federal funds including the \$12.5 million BUILD grant awarded to the JTA in 2019.

Source: JTA, August 27, 2021



Sarasota County to Roll Out Ride-Hailing Public Transit in June

With a \$2.2 million contract with a New York-based ride-hailing company in hand, the Sarasota County Transit Agency is gearing up to transform the area's public transportation system. And it could come as early as June 5.

River North Transit LLC, a subsidiary of Via Transportation, will help SCAT implement its new vision for public transportation that will link county services with the ride-share company.

"This is a big win for the community," said Commissioner Christian Ziegler, who sits on the Sarasota County Transportation Authority. "It's innovative and it's a better service and experience for riders."

Unlike traditional fixed-route transit, the on-demand system will enable riders to request that a vehicle come to them and take them to a stop nearest to where they want to go. Think of it like an Uber or Lyft but with a few added restrictions.

Sarasota County decided in October that it would like to redesign its public transit system, citing a consultant's estimate that the county is losing an estimated \$4 million a year running certain routes with poor ridership.

Beginning in June, the county will cut all but two fixed routes in North Port, Venice and Englewood (route 9 and 17). Unproductive lines in the city of Sarasota and on the barrier islands also will be trimmed. Major routes, including the one along U.S. 41 that takes riders south from downtown Sarasota, will remain. Other major fixed-route commutes may get faster.

While the changes may cause temporary headaches, officials say the new system will be a much better fit for the county.

For now, service will be split into four zones: Siesta Key, Lido and Longboat Key, Venice and Englewood and North Port. The on-demand service will run 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday. The service also will operate 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Sundays.

Let's say you want to go to the grocery store. As long as you and the store are in the designated zone, you can be taken directly there and back. If you want to go within zones, you have the option of being taken to a bus stop that will take you the rest of the way.

The new system is designed to help solve what's known as the "first-mile, last-mile" problem – how to get riders



from the bus stop to their final destination, whether it's their home, workplace or grocery store. "The biggest complaint is not being on the bus, it's getting to the bus stop and waiting for the bus," Ziegler said.

Fares likely will remain at \$1.25 for anyone 6 to 79 years old. Children under 5 and passengers 80 and older might have an opportunity to ride for free. The new service will be operated by River North, the consultant, which will handle day-to-day functions such as procuring vehicles, hiring bus drivers and creating and managing an app for users. The county will also have the option in the future or retaining other ride-service companies.

Last year, the county's consultant, TransPro, said the new system likely would amount to a 10% increase in ridership.

TransPro estimated that in fiscal year 2019, the county spent about \$20.5 million on its fixed-route system. That equated to about an average cost of \$100 per service hour. In an effort to promote the service, SCAT plans to provide the service for free for the first two weeks.

Unlike on fixed-route systems, the county is not required to offer fare discounts for seniors and other residents. The fare likely will mirror the one you're used on the fixed-route service at \$1.25 for anyone 6 to 70 years old.

Riders can pay their fares while making the reservation online, in the app or by paying cash to the driver. The application and website will accept credit cards, debit cards and prepaid cards.

Riders can request a ride via a mobile application from your app store, at scgov.net/OnDemand, or by calling a dedicated call center at 941-300-1553. Customers may also email questions to support-sarasota@ridewithvia.com.

The ride will show up within 30 minutes of the ride request. The OnDemand vehicle, which looks like a minivan, will pick up customers and take them to their destinations within the same zone. Other customers traveling similar routes may ride along.

Source: Sarasota Herald-Tribune, May 24, 2021

Citrus Connection: The Squeeze

The innovative minds at Citrus Connection have come up with a plan to ease constraints on downtown parking in a new pilot program called “The Squeeze,” offering certainty and consistency.

Erin Killebrew, director of external affairs, said the program is a fresh alternative to public transportation. “It’s not a bus, so we don’t want people to necessarily feel like they are riding public transportation.” The two vehicles that will be used in the pilot program resemble large golf carts.

When the yearlong pilot program starts on July 1, “The Squeeze will provide Lakeland visitors with easy access to various downtown area spots they’ll enjoy,” said Mayor Bill Mutz. “From scenic gardens to breweries, restaurants and museums, The Squeeze will provide access to Lakeland’s awesome amenities. Furthermore, its accessibility using a simple QR code mobile app makes it a cinch to ride.”

The carts will operate in 15-minute increments on a loop in the downtown area from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and 5 to 10 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings, Killebrew said.

Julie Townsend, executive director of the Lakeland Downtown Development Authority, said there is a lot of parking available downtown. That includes three parking garages that the public may use and a fourth that’s open during special events.

“Though there is plenty of parking in downtown Lakeland, most people tend to experience downtown only at peak times, where parking has the most competition, giving the illusion of a lack of parking,” Townsend said. “All urban downtowns experience parking constraints at peak hours as visitors compete for the perceived best parking near their destinations. This means that often customers spend a portion of their time searching for parking. At lunch, this is particularly harmful for folks with a limited lunch period.”

Searching for a spot, plus the distance from a spot, can create challenges for customers and keep them away from downtown, she said.

Enter The Squeeze. Customers will pay about 25 cents a ride, and Citrus Connection will offer weekly and monthly passes through the app for a nominal fee — far more economical than calling for a Lyft or Uber, Townsend said.

“The Squeeze will provide more certainty of parking and reduce the time it takes to get to a customer’s final



destination,” she said. “If we can offer certainty and consistency, the customers will have more confidence in coming downtown, parking and getting to their destination in a timely manner.”

Killebrew said The Squeeze isn’t meant to replace big buses, Uber or Lyft. “That isn’t the purpose. It’s mainly to cover the person who has to park by City Hall to go to lunch at Harry’s.”

Parking in a spot downtown is free for the first two hours, Townsend said. “With The Squeeze, folks can still drive their own cars, park in the service area of The Squeeze, and pay pennies per ride.”

“Success will be having more demand than we have space for riders and having to expand the program,” Townsend said. “Through surveying the users, we hope to confirm that folks feel more confident coming to downtown knowing The Squeeze will be available to them. I think we will also learn that some folks who come because of The Squeeze will figure out it’s really not that hard to park downtown after all.”

The app will let users see in real-time where the vehicles are and how many seats are available, she said.

She said success will be based on ridership and demand. “If at the end of the year pilot we had people riding every day and demand was there for more service (carts) or a broader coverage area, we would have been successful. And we certainly anticipate it being a HUGE success.”



Elon Musk Risks Repeating History's Mistakes as He Tries to Reinvent Transit

Through Tesla, Elon Musk has tried to transform individual vehicle ownership, while The Boring Company, his tunneling venture, is now taking aim at public transit. The company and Fort Lauderdale, Florida are close to agreeing to the first public Loop system, which will give people rides in Teslas through a new tunnel between downtown and the beach.

Musk's promise is straightforward and, at its core, hardly revolutionary: to lessen traffic congestion above ground through the creation of roads in underground tunnels. The project will be dubbed "The Las Olas Loop," a reference to a 2.5-mile long local road that connects to the beach. Greater Fort Lauderdale has some of the worst traffic congestion in Florida.

But initial plans have a parallel with a surprising source: Robert Moses, the controversial mid-century "master builder" of New York. And critics say it would potentially entrench inefficiency and structures of inequality into the physical infrastructure, even if Musk doesn't intend for that to happen.

Almost a century ago, Moses also connected a city to a beach. Long Island's Southern State Parkway was extended from New York City to Jones Beach in 1929 with the opening of the Wantagh Causeway, making the beach far more accessible. Moses, who built 416 miles of New York parkways — including a route from Queens to Jones Beach — designed all of them to exclude buses. The overpasses he designed were intentionally built to be too low for buses to drive under, as author Robert Caro highlighted in his Pulitzer Prize winning biography of Moses, "The Power Broker."

Individual car ownership was the hot trend of Moses's time, and, like many Americans, he believed in car supremacy. He scorned other transportation modes like buses and trains, even though they use space more efficiently. And after making sure buses couldn't make their way to Jones Beach via the Southern State Parkway, Moses vetoed the Long Island Rail Road's plan to build to the beach, Caro wrote.

Moses's approach to planning has been criticized as both racist and classist. Most New York City families didn't have cars at the time Moses was building. Those who did tended to be white and relatively wealthy, so building low-clearance overpasses disproportionately impacted lower income bus-riders, many of whom were people of color.



Moses is also considered to have entrenched car-focused transportation in New York, baking in the supremacy of inefficient individual vehicles. (Leaders' views shifted after Moses lost power. Bus service runs today from a Long Island Railroad station to Jones Beach.) There's a clear parallel between the approaches of Musk and Moses to what transportation modes our public infrastructure should support.

In Fort Lauderdale, the Loop system's structure will also exclude buses. Tickets will be \$5-8, more expensive than traditional transit, which may exclude riders as transit customers are more likely to be low-income, and people of color. The city's buses won't be able to fit in Musk's tunnels, according to Chris Walton, director of Broward County Transportation, which operates Fort Lauderdale's buses, though Walton said he supports Musk's project given its potential to remove cars from surface streets.

According to the Boring Company's website, the tunnels bored by Musk's company for public transportation are 12-feet in diameter. Greyhound, the largest intercity bus company in the United States, told CNN Business that its buses need at least 14 feet of diameter to fit in a tunnel. The Boring Company has said that building smaller tunnels is more affordable. Some tunneling projects have cost as much as \$1 billion a mile in recent years. (The Boring Company did not respond to requests for comment.)

Musk is trying to reinvent public transportation and is winning supporters like Walton. Fort Lauderdale's mayor has called Loop an innovative solution to congestion. The Boring Company and Fort Lauderdale haven't reached an agreement yet, so financial terms are unclear. The Boring Company already has a private project in Las Vegas, that

Elon Musk—cont'd from page 5

transports guests for free at the Convention Center. There are plans to expand to other Las Vegas destinations.

The Boring Company advertises Loop as being different from standard public transportation, in that passengers can travel with people they know, or opt to ride alone.

"Individualized mass transit is the future," Musk has said. There's just one thing. As Beth Osborne, director of the policy organization Transportation for America, sees it, we already have individualized mass transit. "That's the car," Osborne said. Even the Boring Company says

in its sales pitch that Loop "resembles an underground highway more than a subway system."

With Loop, you go directly to your destination, rather than stopping at preceding stops, like a typical subway. It's an express public transportation system, as the Boring Company puts it. Sounds good, right?

But what looks great on paper isn't always a win in the real world.

Source: Matt McFarland, CNN Business, July 24, 2021

Tri-Rail Reaches 100 Million Riders After 32 ½ Years

Tri-Rail reached 100 million riders on Friday, July 9, 2021, exactly 32 and a half years since the agency's inception on January 9, 1989. South Florida Regional Transportation Authority's (SFRTA) Executive Director and staff celebrated the occasion handing out thank you cards to Friday morning Tri-Rail passengers, with an opportunity to win a special prize of a Tri-Rail pass, commemorative t-shirt or a \$5 Dunkin' Donuts gift card.

"It was great to thank people face to face, seeing them go to work, traveling to the airport and even on their way to boxing training," said Steven Abrams, SFRTA Executive Director. "Our passengers have figured out that this service is beneficial to get you to just about anywhere you need to go in South Florida."

Over the years, Tri-Rail trains have taken commuters to work, school and leisure activities. The train is a key link to air travel, accessing all three of South Florida's major



airports, and has also been the scene for holiday parties, baby showers and more, including its first-ever wedding in October 2020, amidst the pandemic.

SFRTA was originally preparing to reach the milestone in the summer of 2020, but reduced service and lower ridership during the pandemic delayed it an entire year. Tri-Rail trains are currently almost at full service, with 46 out of the normal 50 weekday trains and 28 out of 30 on weekends, with weekday ridership at 50% of pre-pandemic levels and 60% on weekends, one of the biggest comebacks of any commuter railroad in the country.

Source: Tri-Rail, July 9, 2021

PSTA Puts the Rapid in Transit

Scheduled for completion in 2022, PSTA's SunRunner will be Tampa Bay's very first Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project connecting downtown St. Petersburg to St. Pete Beach. It will offer a modern and fast transportation service designed to get you to the beach or the 'Burg in a breeze.

The SunRunner will operate at a 15-minute frequency during the day and a 30-minute frequency in the evening. With just a few stops and innovative technology, trips will be faster than ever and will eliminate the need to search for parking spaces.

SunRunner features include:

- Free Wi-Fi

- On-board bike space
- Smooth, level boarding
- Multi-door boarding
- Prepaid fares via smartphone

Additionally, SunRunner will benefit the community by:

- Boosting property values
- Improving safety with wider bike lanes and safer crosswalks
- Showcasing unique community character through public art at stations
- Reducing traffic congestion

Source: PSTA

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New Publications

Innovative Practices for Transit Planning at Small to Mid-Sized Agencies

Diverse small and mid-sized transit agencies are very interested in finding solutions for their transit planning challenges. They will benefit from seeing how similar agencies deal with their transit service issues. Large transit agencies could also apply what is learned to sub-areas in their transit service area that are comparable to the service area of a small or mid-sized transit agency.

<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/26204/innovative-practices-for-transit-planning-at-small-to-mid-sized-agencies>

Public Transportation Fact Book

The Public Transportation Fact Book, published annually, contains national aggregate statistical data covering all aspects of the transit industry in the United States and Canada. Major sections include an overview of U.S. transit facts, transit finances and operating statistics by modes of travel, transit vehicle characteristics and deliveries, facts and numbers relating to federal grants and the Federal Transit Act.

www.apta.com/research-technical-resources/transit-statistics/public-transportation-fact-book/

Upcoming Trainings

National Transit Institute Webinars

www.ntionline.com/webinars/

Webinar Recording

Evaluating the Accuracy of Smartphone-Based Travel Behavior Data

OneBusAway is an open-source mobile app that provides real-time transit information. Previous research by USF added the ability to passively collect (via opt-in process) multimodal travel behavior data directly from OneBusAway users. Over the past year, USF and TTI collaborated on evaluating the temporal and spatial accuracy of OneBusAway on several different mobile phone models in real-world travel settings. This joint presentation by USF and TTI will present preliminary research findings from this collaborative effort.

<https://nicr.usf.edu/2021/10/07/webinar-evaluating-the-accuracy-of-smartphone-based-travel-behavior-data/>

FDOT is interested in your ideas about resources it can provide in support of your transit planning initiatives and professional development. Please contact Gabrielle Matthews with your suggestions for future training topics or guidance and technical assistance needs.