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Space along I-275 corridor identified as “catalyst” for future regional transit network

*41 miles of rapid transit in dedicated lanes provides a cost-effective option,
and could be modified for autonomous vehicles in the future*

Tampa Bay, FL, Jan. 19, 2018 – The team creating the Regional Transit Feasibility Plan has identified a 41-mile, rubber-tire transit line along Interstate I-275 from Wesley Chapel to St. Petersburg as the “catalyst” to stimulate the implementation of a variety of transit projects across the Tampa Bay area.

The catalyst project is not like the traditional buses you see on our streets today, but instead would operate more like a train on tires. The vehicle itself would look and feel like a train, run within its own lane to bypass congestion, and would travel as fast as a train.

The project could be completed for approximately one-tenth of the cost of passenger rail. By using a transit system on rubber tires, there is an opportunity to direct more spending to constructing stations that act as neighborhood centers. The corridor could also be converted to deploy autonomous or driverless transit vehicles when that technology is ready.

This first phase of the Plan identified both a long-range Regional Transit Vision for Tampa Bay, which may include rubber-tire and rail transit technologies in the future, as well as the catalyst, planned to be the first of many transit projects proposed to bolster projects across the region.

The project team, led by the Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HART) and funded by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), developed transit concepts for I-275 from Wesley Chapel to St. Petersburg and for the CSX rail corridor between the University of South Florida area and downtown Tampa.

As the team studied the options, it found that passenger rail or a dedicated bus lane within the interstate median would cost between \$2.5 and \$4 billion to build. Given the expense, the project team determined that operating rapid transit in areas already available along I-275, like the shoulders, and partnering with FDOT’s interstate modernization plans could reduce the project costs to \$450 million by leveraging roadway dollars and incorporating transit in the highway.

Identifying this catalyst project is not an all-or-nothing proposition; it’s the first of many steps in building the Regional Transit Vision. Passenger rail is recommended as the second project, using the existing CSX rail line that runs between downtown Tampa and USF. While planning for that rail project could start right away, the catalyst project represents an option that could become a reality as soon as five years from now.

The catalyst project also connects to a number of transportation projects in the region either underway or in the planning stages, such as Pasco County's Vision 54/56, the City of Tampa's Streetcar Extension, FDOT's identification of Regional Intermodal Centers, and Pinellas County's Central Avenue BRT.

The project team determined that rubber-tire transit makes sense for the Tampa Bay area for a number of reasons. This system would be extremely cost-efficient; utilizing the I-275 route would take people where they need to go; and the system would create the opportunity to move to autonomous vehicles in the future, an exciting prospect as our region focuses on future transportation technologies.

The project team's recommendation is being formally presented at a meeting of the Tampa Bay Transportation Management Area (TMA) Leadership Group today. The team is working closely with FDOT, HART, and many government, business, and community groups from around the Tampa Bay region.

The next step in the process is to take the technical recommendation to the public for its comments and ideas. Representatives of the project team will conduct outreach around Tampa Bay to discuss the plan over the next six months with residents, and information-gathering tools will also be developed for the project's website.

After incorporating feedback from the public, the plan will be finalized in the fall, allowing the region to move the catalyst project towards engineering, design, and a defined funding strategy.

To learn more about the Regional Transit Feasibility Plan, visit the project website at <http://www.TBRegionalTransit.com>.

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