

TBARTA/Tampa Bay Express (TBX) Regional Facts

This community is at a critical decision-making point that will greatly affect our future destiny as a region. The proposed Express Lanes, now referred to as TBX Lanes, have been part of the FDOT Long Range Plan for over a decade. The only difference from the original decade old plan now is the funding source being tolls. State policy now proposes funding for new interstate capacity to primarily tolled, enabling more lanes to be built for less tax dollars. This concept has become a predominant method of providing new roadway and transit capacity in metropolitan communities across the country.

The TBX lanes are the foundation of a project that includes 4 out of the 8 top regional priorities for TBARTA's seven-county region. These projects form the very core of the region's main transportation plan providing access to Hillsborough County's regional centers which includes three large employment centers forming the largest job center in West Central Florida, Tampa International Airport, University of South Florida, the largest hospitals, largest port, largest convention center, largest museum area, and Busch Gardens, the largest attraction. Just the airport itself serves 11,000 people a day, equaling 4,000,000 a year from outside of Hillsborough County; 20,000 a day when you include Hillsborough County residents. Put together these numbers make up only 39 percent of airport passengers with the other 61 percent being tourists, who do not live in the region, but use our roadways.

Together with the attractors mentioned, Hillsborough County absorbs huge amounts of incoming traffic each day with 230,000 vehicles entering from the north, 240,000 vehicles entering from the west, not even counting the traffic from the east and south. These lanes will greatly help in separating some of this traffic from local traffic, thereby freeing up more capacity for Hillsborough County residents. These are facts that exist and must be dealt with using all forms of transportation solutions. The plan for the TBX lanes include the opportunity for express bus transit connecting the immediate areas outside the City of Tampa, but also could ultimately include the entire seven-county region with premium transit. This can provide an important move forward for premium bus transit while at the same time providing the transit envelope for future rail transit. We have to start expansion of transit somewhere and the express lanes provide the opportunity for doing that.

The reconstruction of the our interstate system to serve the immense transportation needs of a region approaching 4,000,000 in population can help address neighborhood issues that already exist through consideration of sound walls, landscaping, trails, and other possible amenities to be considered as part of the design process. The majority of right of way (ROW) is already owned by the FDOT from Pinellas County to downtown Tampa and from Martin Luther King Boulevard, north to Bearss Avenue. There is little new ROW needed north of Martin Luther King Boulevard since the proposed construction, unlike the original construction done in the 1960s, is almost completely within the existing ROW. Construction is also almost totally within existing ROW between downtown Tampa east to the Polk Parkway.

The bottom line is, this is a way for the Tampa Bay area to move forward toward transit that can include both bus and rail in the future, if decided upon. It is our turn for a major project in this region. If we let this opportunity pass, we will only be that much further behind in addressing our transportation problems. This can be a win/win situation if we work together. We can't work on solutions unless we move forward and together work on a plan through the PD&E process.

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