Draft Meeting Summary

Representatives of FDOT District 4 engaged in a series of listening sessions with various planning partners in Fall2013 as part of the I-95 Corridor Mobility Plan.

FDOT met with a representative of Palm Tran on November 13. The group discussed the various strategies Palm Tran is undertaking, the indicators they are currently using to track success, and challenges in implementing these strategies.

# Key Themes and Takeaways

* Palm Tran’s vision is focused on increasing ridership, and primarily measures success through passengers per revenue hour of service.
* Palm Tran is concentrating on improving the span of service and improving frequency of the routes as its two main strategies. Palm Tran maintains a focus on serving main activity centers including hospitals and universities, because these are areas of high ridership.
* In order to make Palm Tran a “reasonable alternative” to automobiles, premium limited stop service with high frequency (15 minutes or less) on the major east-west corridors is needed. Palm Tran desires to partner with FDOT to provide service enhancements along Lake Worth Road and Okeechobee Boulevard in particular.
* Better shuttle service to Tri-Rail, including timed arrivals, is a potential strategy for improvement, but Palm Tran is hesitant to introduce service that would compete with Tri-Rail or other existing transit services.
* FDOT is interested in learning more about the marketing of employer Palm Tran bus pass programs as a transportation demand management strategy, and coordination with South Florida Commuter Services is a possibility.
* Palm Tran’s biggest challenge by far is a lack of funding, particularly for transit operations. Transit impact fees and rental car fees are two potential strategies, but these do not appear to be easily implementable.
* The integration of the managed lanes on I-95 in Broward and Miami-Dade Counties with the park-and-ride facilities and express transit system, and the shared revenue for transit improvements is a good example of how transit improvements can off-set trips from I-95 while simultaneously addressing the funding needs.

# Action Items

* FDOT to ask South Florida Commuter Services to reach out to Palm Tran regarding employer based programs.

# Participants

* Jessica Dimmick, Renaissance Planning Group, I-95 Corridor Mobility Plan Project Team – by phone
* Larry Hymowitz, FDOT District 4, Mobility Coordinator
* Karen Kiselewski, Renaissance Planning Group, Project Manager
* Fred Stubbs, Palm Tran, Transit Planning Manager

# Discussion

After an initial overview of the I-95 Corridor Mobility Plan project and status update, the participants engaged in a dialogue on Palm Tran’s vision, strategies, and indicators.

## Vision and Goals

As a transit agency, Palm Tran is always looking at **passengers per revenue hour of service**, relative to carrying capacity, and assessing the adequacy of their routes by this measure. As a general rule of thumb, any route carrying more than 50 percent of their carrying capacity “is good.” Palm Tran looks to serve the higher activity centers, including areas around the hospitals and universities and transfer centers, because these are the areas with the highest ridership.

Palm Tran’s vision for the future is focused on **increasing ridership**. One of the strategies to increase ridership is to **improve the span of service** by starting service earlier and ending service later. Another strategy is **improving frequency** of the routes. These two strategies are the big impetuses on the Palm Tran Service Board. Right now Palm Tran is trying to keep the frequencies of all of its routes at no more than 60 minutes. Palm Tran’s future goal is to improve the maximum headways to 30 minutes in the future

### Activity Centers and Transfer Centers

Palm Tran said the three Multimodal Districts shown on the Aspirational Future Scenario map accurately identify the main activity centers in that area of the County. These are areas of high activity and bus transfer activity, and are thus important areas that Palm Tran focuses on. These areas include the activity center and transfer center at the Town Center Mall on Glades Road, and the transfer point with Broward County Transit at Camino Real and Dixie Highway. Palm Tran also noted it was good to see the connection to Boca Raton and Florida Atlantic University (FAU) on this map. Palm Tran service to make connections to these areas boosts the passengers per revenue hour measure.

Palm Tran noted there is a timed transfer at the 20th Street stop at the FAU campus where Routes 94 and 91 serve the student population at FAU.

### Premium Service on High Performance Routes

In order to make Palm Tran a “reasonable alternative” to automobiles, premium limited stop service with high frequency (15 minutes or less) on the major east-west corridors is needed. Route 1 is the only Palm Tran route that currently provides this type of limited stop service through “The Bolt” on US 1. The Bolt only stops at the major cross intersections, and is a supplement to the regular Route 1 service on US 1.

### Ridership and High Frequency

Route 1 is by far Palm Tran’s highest ridership service. It carries 25 percent of Palm Tran’s total ridership – about 10,000 people per day. Its frequency is 10 to 15 minutes in the peak periods, and 20 minutes in the off-peak periods. Route 2 (Congress Avenue) and Route 3 (Military Trail) are the third and second highest ridership routes, respectively. Palm Tran desires to increase frequency on these routes to 20 minutes, but currently there is no budget to do so. Route 2 (Congress Avenue) in particular functions as a good parallel reliever to I-95, and Palm Tran noted that this route is “like Palm Tran’s Tri-Rail route.”

### New Future Routes and Service Enhancements

Palm Tran is trying to partner with FDOT to provide a new limited stop service with transit signal priority (TSP) or similar traffic timing on Lake Worth Road with connections to the Turnpike, Palm Beach State College, and Tri-Rail. Palm Tran also desires to extend and enhance service on Okeechobee Boulevard. Mr. Stubbs explained there is a major retail and commercial hub along Okeechobee Blvd along with some trade and technical schools. Currently, Route 40 carries a lot of passengers from the western communities into the West Palm Beach central business district (CBD); these passengers then take Route 43 back west to access these destinations along Okeechobee Blvd. Route 43 is currently overloaded with passengers going into the downtown. Palm Tran is hoping that improving service along Okeechobee Blvd and implementing TSP will help speed up this service.

### Connections to Tri-Rail

Palm Tran provides fixed route bus service to all of the Tri-Rail stations in Palm Beach County, but Palm Tran does not call this a “feeder service” because these routes are not timed with the Tri-Rail schedule. They operate on the normal fixed-route schedule, which may or may not coincide with Tri-Rail train arrivals. Mr. Stubbs noted that the Palm Beach MPO has voiced a desire for better shuttle service. Participants noted the success of the shuttle service in Broward County. Mr. Stubbs explained that Palm Tran is not supportive of a competitive service that would take away ridership from its highest performing routes.

### Transportation Demand Management

Mr. Hymowitz was very interested in Palm Tran’s involvement in transportation demand management (TDM), especially whether employers can purchase bus passes to give to their employees at a discount. Mr. Stubbs explained that Palm Tran has a relationship with the School Board, and the School Board buys passes for its students. The Palm Tran marketing department has looked into employer discounts, and has given employers the opportunity to buy group passes at a discounted rate, but this offer is neither well-used nor well-marketed. To buy a pass, the employer must come into the Palm Tran offices, and the discount for buying in bulk is not very significant. However, the employee saves from the discount as well as from using pre-tax dollars to pay the remaining amount.

There is a possibility of better marketing this offer through coordination with South Florida Commuter Services. Palm Tran has coordinated with South Florida Commuter Services in the past for the emergency ride home program, particularly for the Martin County express bus service. Participants inquired whether South Florida Commuter Services could provide more assistance, and Mr. Stubbs referred the other participants to Lili Finke, Manager of Marketing for Palm Tran.

### Spanish River Boulevard Improvements

FDOT is currently constructing improvements to the Spanish River Boulevard interchange with I-95, which could provide a future opportunity for Palm Tran transit service improvements. Participants mentioned the possibility of a collector-distributer system for buses, although Mr. Stubbs noted the service to Palm Beach State University may complicate this concept.

### Bus Shelter Improvements

Mr. Stubbs mentioned that in the past, Palm Tran had emphasized improvements to bus shelters, both for new shelters and maintaining existing shelters. While this is still part of Palm Tran’s operations, it is less an area of focus. Maintenance of bus shelters includes cleaning, mowing, and trash collection, all of which require funds.

## Indicators of Success

The prime measure Palm Tran uses to judge productivity is **passengers per revenue hour**. Palm Tran analyzes this indicator for the entire system as a whole and for the individual routes. The Palm Tran Transit Development Plan (TDP) also contains information on how many passengers have other transportation options.

Palm Tran’s main focus is on reliability and on-time performance, because these are the things that riders care most about. Palm Tran has an automatic vehicle location (AVL) system, which now provides a “microscopic view” of on-time performance, which they track. Palm Tran can now track intermediate on-time performance, whereas before they were just able to see end-to-end performance.

## Challenges

### Funding

Palm Tran’s main concern is funding. Funding is the main constraint for improving frequency and making other improvements to the transit service. Mr. Stubbs explained that Palm Tran identified a projected funding shortfall for 2015, which they corrected for with a Board-approved fare increase. With this bump in revenue, Palm Tran is increasing its service, and has experienced better running times. Palm Tran is starting out with minimal improvements and hopes that it can continue to make bigger and better improvements in the future.

#### Transit Impact Fees

Mr. Hymowitz asked whether Palm Tran has had any discussions with local government planners about the potential for a transit impact fee. Mr. Stubbs replied that he had a brief discussion with George Webb, the Palm Beach County Engineer. From the highways perspective, the County Engineering and Public Works Department is also looking to acquire some sort of additional tax or fee for transportation, and that transit can be viewed as taking transportation funds away from road projects. Mr. Stubbs noted there is a need to have a conversation about a fair share for transit in the potential future local tax or impact fee, but right now the initiative is not “going anywhere.”

#### Rental Car Fee

Palm Tran in coordination with SFRTA and other transportation providers in the region is investigating the potential implement a rental car fee to provide additional transportation funds to be shared. This was proposed to the state legislature as a bill, which did not pass.

#### Operating Funding

The biggest challenge for funding is a lack of funding for operations. Palm Tran can much more easily acquire funds for capital, but operating funds are more difficult to acquire because they require a larger state share. Participants asked whether models for funding operations from other places exist, and no one knew of any.

## Other Items of Discussion

### Business Community Outreach

Outreach to the business community is important. The former Palm Tran Service Board was a representative of the business community, which helped provide more insight and influence in the political arena.

### Community Buses

Mr. Hymowitz asked about the potential for community bus service as a partnership with localities to supplement the County fixed route service, like Broward County Transit’s community bus model. Mr. Stubbs explained that a few services of this type existed in Boynton Beach and Lake Worth, but these have been discontinued. The Delray Beach and West Palm Beach trolleys are still operating. The City of West Palm Beach operates the trolley service which receives funds from SFRTA and the Downtown Development Authority.

### Miami-Dade and Broward Counties Example

When asked what strategies would help most to off-set trips from I-95, Mr. Stubbs replied that the integration of the managed lanes on I-95 with the park-and-ride facilities and express transit system is a good example from Miami-Dade and Broward Counties. Commuters can park their cars and ride transit.. Simultaneously, the funds that are collected from the toll are going towards transit improvements.

Express service could be a possibility from Boca Raton and northern Broward County to the Palm Beach County government center in West Palm Beach, because there is a known demand for commuter service for the government workers. However, this could create an issue of competition with Tri-Rail.

### Interagency Coordination

Palm Tran coordinates with many agencies. Palm Tran representatives sit on the Palm Beach MPO Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and represent Palm Tran on the MPO board. Palm Tran staff are working with the SFRTA Planning Technical Advisory Committee to examine transit on a regional basis, and also have a good working relationship with the SEFTC Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Committee.

Palm Tran is involved with discussions on land use with the MPO TAC, which includes planners from Palm Beach County and representatives from the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council. This committee is involved with discussions on Transit Oriented Development and Corridor designations.

It is especially important to work with the planners from Palm Beach County to ensure developers provide the needed infrastructure for transit services and access to transit. Palm Beach County has a mass transit review policy for the unincorporated areas that requires developments over 50 dwelling units or 50,000 square feet to provide a transit easement.

### Affordable Housing

Meeting participants discussed the relationship between the location of affordable/workforce housing and transit service.. Participants were in agreement that if located in proximity, a household’s expenses could be reduced. However, the determination of where new housing developments are built is outside Palm Tran’s purview.

### Martin County Express Service

Mr. Stubbs noted it would have been nice to have done more research before instituting the express bus service from Martin County with the intent of seeing it succeed. There was discussion that the park-and-ride lot location may have been a factor. Also during this discussion, participants noted that some community members dislike the idea of spending public funds on transit services that serve people from outside of the County, and would like for the funds to be spent locally.

# Strategies and Indicators

The following tables list the strategies and indicators that Palm Tran mentioned throughout the listening session.

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| Strategies |
| System-Wide* Extend span of transit service by starting service earlier and ending later
* Adopt a maximum headway of 60 minutes for all routes
* Pursue decreasing the maximum headway to 30 minutes in the future, and implement by increasing frequency on high ridership routes first
* Pursue partnerships with FDOT for new service funds and TSP
* Partner with South Florida Commuter Services to increase marketing of employer bus pass program
* Maintain bus shelter improvement program
* Anticipate funding shortfalls and adjust accordingly (e.g. fare increase that now provides service improvements)
* Coordinate with local government planners on potential new revenue sources (e.g. local taxes and transit impact fees)
* Pursue potential new revenue source with SFRTA from rental car fees (or other sources)
* Maintain connections with business community through outreach activities and business representation on decision-making boards.
* Explore integrated solutions like managed lanes with park-and-ride facilities, express transit service, and shared revenue for transit improvements to further incentive transit use and maximize benefit of infrastructure investments (e.g. Miami-Dade and Broward Counties)
* Maintain involvement in MPO TAC, SFRTA PTAC, and SEFTC RTTAC for interagency coordination

Facilities* Implement premium limited stop service with high frequency on major east-west corridors

Places* Maintain and improve transfer service at high activity centers, including hospitals and universities
* Enhance feeder service around transit stations and time feeder buses to arrive with passenger rail
* Consider transit service enhancements around interchange improvement areas (e.g. a collector-distributor service system at Spanish River Blvd)
* Consider partnerships with local governments for community bus service to supplement County fixed route service
* Work with Palm Beach County on transit infrastructure through the development review process (formal process/resolution)
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| Indicators |
| * Passengers per revenue hour of service, relative to carrying capacity
* Span of service (start and end times, weekend/holiday service)
* Route frequency
* Percentage of riders who have other travel options
* On-time performance
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