

Hillsborough County Metropolitan Planning Organization  
**2035 Plan Post-Referendum Analysis**

**Summary Report: TRANSPORTATION FOCUS GROUPS, MARCH 2011**

**April 8, 2011**

**Prepared For:**



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## Executive Summary

With the defeat of the Hillsborough Transportation Referendum in the November 2010 election, the Hillsborough County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has initiated a process to re-visit its 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan. Since the key components of the referendum plan were based on the 2035 LRTP and a broad expansion of mass transit (light rail and commuter rail, in particular), voters' rejection of the referendum raises questions about Hillsborough County residents' priorities for transportation and traffic management, their preferred modes of transportation, and what improvements they believe will make a difference in addressing the transportation challenges facing Hillsborough County today and in the future.

A central part of the process in revisiting the LRTP is to conduct qualitative research among Hillsborough County residents to gather feedback on their perceptions and attitudes on transportation. A series of focus groups of Hillsborough County residents—organized by eight geographic sub-areas within the county—were conducted in March 7-10, 2011 to explore various topics on transportation, traffic congestion and transportation funding. Two main purposes of these focus groups were to obtain direct feedback on the main components of the 2035 LRTP (highway and roadway improvements, mass transit, pedestrian infrastructure, and bikepaths), and to get insights into the transportation “needs and desires” of Hillsborough County citizens.

### Structure & Approach

Hillsborough County was divided into eight sub-areas using ZIP codes, and participants were recruited at random from a database of active voters within each of those sub-areas. The composition of the groups was shaped to create a general profile of the county at large, particularly with a balance of gender, age, and political party affiliation. The focus groups were conducted at a local focus group facility. Given the diversity of the sub-areas in terms of population density and transportation infrastructure, a common discussion guide was developed to standardize and structure the discussions.

This focus group study is a *qualitative* assessment, which means that the comments and themes raised in the group discussions cannot be projected or attributed to the general population of Hillsborough County. The emphasis in analyzing the focus group discussions is on the language, perceptions and attitudes of the participants; discerning why they think the way they do and how they arrive at their positions; and not in counting or quantifying how many of the participants agreed or disagreed with certain points of view. Some of the findings in this qualitative research phase are worthy of follow-up quantitative research (such as a phone survey) to assess the strength and breadth of opinions county-wide among a much broader population of residents.

## Key Findings

Echoing the findings of public opinion research conducted in the context of the 2010 referendum, focus group respondents felt strongly that **traffic and transportation are major concerns in Hillsborough County, and much more needs to be done to improve the transportation system.** Importantly, traffic congestion was viewed by focus group participants largely as **the result of insufficient planning, poor decision-making, and lack of oversight by local governments over Hillsborough County’s steady growth over decades.** An overarching theme that came through the focus groups is that the County has consistently been in “catch-up” mode, adding transportation infrastructure long after the traffic pressures from residential and commercial development have reached problematic levels.

Another takeaway from the focus groups was a **general support for the general principle of expanding mass transit to address traffic congestion. However, there was a great deal of skepticism and concern about the specifics**—which transit modes really work, what service areas and corridors make the most sense for major investment, and, of course, how to fund any expansion of transit service. Clearly, the support for expanding mass transit was not universal. It was a common perspective—and, in some cases, an article of faith—for many participants that mass transit does not and cannot work in Tampa and Hillsborough County because the low-density and sprawling growth over decades makes the area incompatible with public transportation.

There was much stronger support across the board for implementing targeted, “small bore” tactics to improve driving conditions and relieve traffic congestion. Focus group participants specifically mentioned **the need for synchronizing traffic lights, adding turn lanes, and adding stoplights at increasingly busy and dangerous intersections.** Another perception consistent in all the focus groups—among participants from urban, suburban and more rural areas of the county—was that the **conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists are dangerous, and there is a severe lack of infrastructure for bikepaths, sidewalks and trails.**

Another common thread throughout the focus groups was a **lukewarm regard for the area’s public transportation system in general, and a lack of awareness about the HART system in particular.** It should be noted that our focus group recruiting did not set out to recruit Hillsborough County residents who use HART. Yet, even among Tampa and close-in residents where service is more concentrated, available and visible, there was very low awareness of the system, and an at-times dismissive opinion of the bus system’s accessibility and value. And among focus groups participants from the unincorporated areas of the county where HART service is very limited or non-existent, the system is a virtual non-entity. (Indeed, many participants in eastern and southern Hillsborough County complained that they have no bus service at all.) To cultivate support for an expansion of mass transit, there must be a change in public perceptions about HART and how it provides services today.

**These findings from the focus groups indicate that an incremental approach to improving the county’s transportation infrastructure is preferred to the all-encompassing, comprehensive approach outlined in the 2035 LRTP and the 2010 transportation referendum.** Expanding mass transit is viewed by many as one piece of the puzzle—but the support for rail is limited, hesitant, and not based on any sound grasp of how such a system would work, or consensus on how it should be paid for. **Toll roads received generally positive marks**—they provide choice, were not described as overly expensive, and the suggestion that additional toll roads and tolled lanes be added to the county system was met with support and very little opposition.

There was **some interest in the focus groups in “testing out” light rail with a strategically placed “starter” or “demonstration” line**, but without specifics on alignment, costs and timing, the interest level did not translate to enthusiasm. And while expanding bus service appears to be a more readily accepted concept, one obstacle is the limited amount of awareness or support for the existing bus system. The focus groups indicated that the leading edge of the **transportation strategy should be a series of tactics to grab the more “low hanging fruit,”** such as traffic light synchronization, turn lanes and other traffic management tools. Also, the focus groups indicated that **improving the pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure should also be an ongoing priority**, not as a traffic-relief strategy but as a necessary investment in providing additional transportation choices and to ensure public safety.

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## Background and Research Objectives

With the defeat of the Hillsborough Transportation Referendum in November 2010, the Hillsborough County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has initiated a process to re-visit the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan. Since the key components of the referendum plan were based on the 2035 LRTP and a broad expansion of mass transit (light rail and commuter rail, in particular), the defeat of the referendum raises questions about how Hillsborough County residents view traffic congestion and transportation as priorities, their preferred modes of transportation, and what improvements they think will make a difference in addressing the transportation challenges facing Hillsborough County today and in the future.

At the outset of this study, a set of key objectives was established:

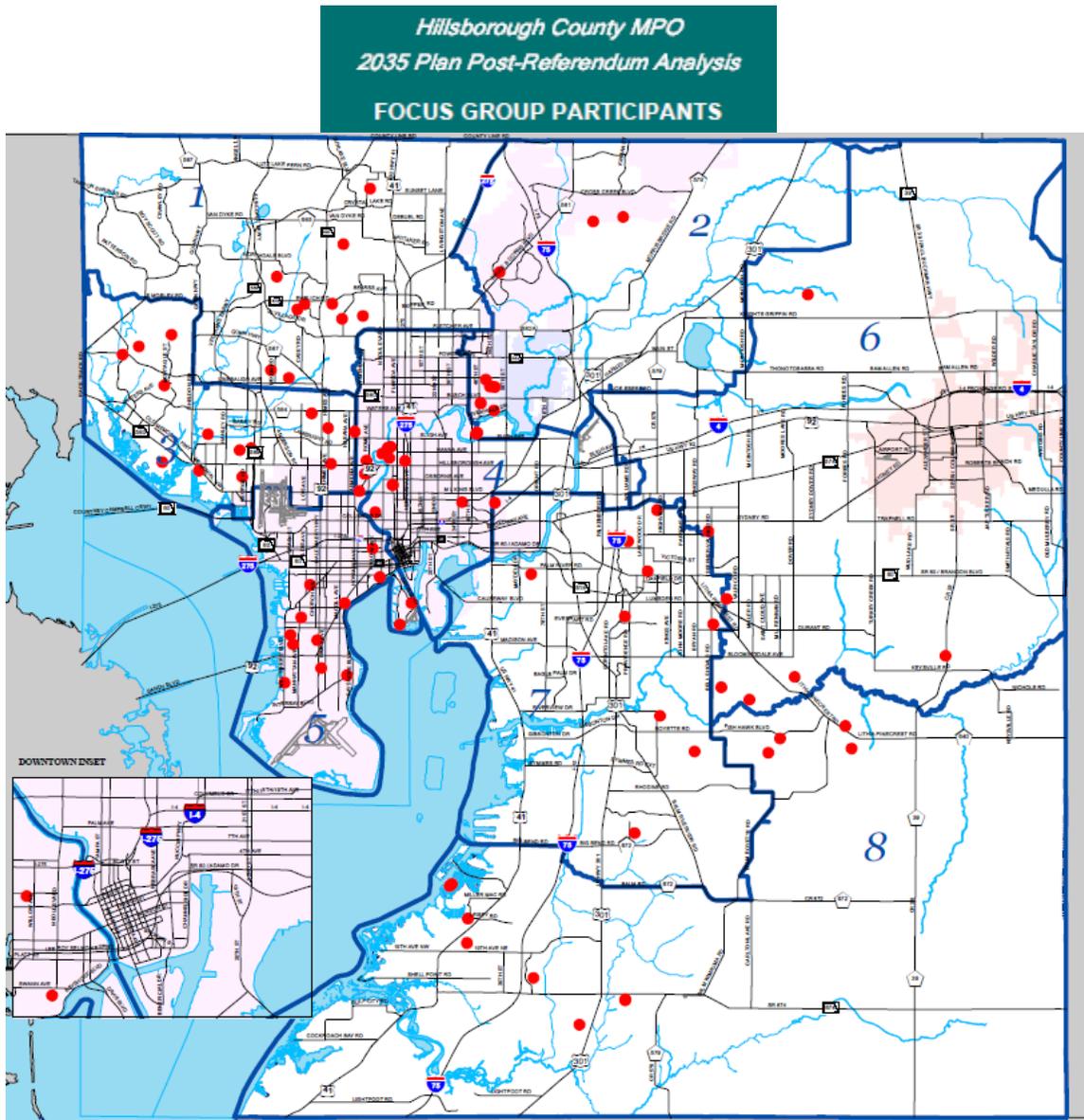
- Explore the community values around transportation, traffic congestion and impacts on quality of life.
- Gauge the top-of-mind concerns about transportation, both locally and regionally.
- Understand the transportation needs of county residents, and to review and ensure the cost feasibility of the 2035 LRTP.
- Understand the perceived benefits and liabilities of the transportation plan that voters rejected in the 2010 transportation referendum.
- Assess willingness to pay for transportation improvements, via taxation and various sources. This includes levels of support for a scaled-down plan (e.g., a rail demonstration line).

## Research format and structure

Eight focus groups were convened March 7, 8, 9 and 10 (two per evening) at a centrally located Hillsborough County focus group facility. Participants were recruited by live phone call from a database of active-status voters from the following sub-areas (as identified by the MPO):

- Group 1: NW Hillsborough, including Carrollwood, Lutz-Keystone, and Citrus Park
- Group 2: NE Hillsborough, including Temple Terrace and New Tampa
- Group 3: Westchase, Town & Country, Egypt Lake
- Group 4: Central & East Tampa, including downtown
- Group 5: South & West Tampa, including Westshore

- Group 6: Eastern Hillsborough, including Plant City, Dover, Lithia and Fishhawk Ranch
- Group 7: Greater Brandon Area, Palm River and Mango
- Group 8: South Shore, Apollo Beach, Ruskin, Sun City Center



The groups were moderated by Ben Kelly, a consultant with The Kenney Group, a public affairs consulting and research firm that has conducted public opinion research in Hillsborough County since 2008 on transportation issues.

### Group formation and participant screening

Focus group participants were recruited at random from a publicly-available list of active-status voters in Hillsborough County. In order to recruit a mix of participants that represent a general profile of Hillsborough County residents, the recruiting program was established using these criteria:

- Gender (balanced)
- Age (18 and up, with a general but unstructured distribution among voters in 20s, 30s, 40s, and so on)
- Party affiliation (mix of Republican, Democrat, unaffiliated/other within each group)

The screener interview also included specific eligibility requirements:

- Professional background – individuals were screened out if they work for a market research firm, media, a public transportation agency or authority, a taxi or commercial driver service, for an elected or appointed official, for local government, or for a public safety official.
- Employment status – individuals who were unemployed were screened out.
- Also, we screened out individuals who said they had participated in any focus groups in the past six months, or who said they rarely or never read the local newspaper (in print or on-line).

### Focus group discussion guide

Because these focus groups were drawn from very distinct sub-areas of Hillsborough County, a uniform discussion guide was devised to maintain consistency and structure from group to group, and to ensure that the same topics and areas of inquiry were included in each group. The discussion guide is attached to this report (see Appendix B).

## Discussion of issues

As a warm-up, the focus groups started with a very general discussion about the positives about living in the Tampa area and Hillsborough County. A wide range of qualities were cited, everything from weather, outdoor recreation, cultural facilities, a great environment to raise families, the central location within the state of Florida, and high-quality higher education opportunities. From there, participants were asked to identify the problems and concerns that present the biggest threats to the area's quality of life. Traffic congestion and transportation were universally identified as a top-of-mind concerns, which echoes the findings of phone surveys and other public opinion research conducted before, during and after the November 2010 referendum. The frustration with traffic congestion was expressed by those who commute to work long distances every day, as well as by those who commute only short distances, those who drive to work or school in off-peak hours, and those who work in home offices or are homemakers. Also, participants were in agreement that traffic will continue to worsen over time, that it is just a fact of life in Hillsborough County, and that they expect it will persist *even if* specific actions are taken to improve traffic flow and expand transportation options.

This discussion about traffic congestion was used as a point departure to identify transportation challenges at both a parochial (“backyard”) level and a regional (“countywide”) level. First, participants were asked to identify transportation issues that they most want to see addressed in the area of the county that they live in. [Note: the issues identified are summarized in Appendix A attached this report.] The most prevalent issues were traffic management and the impediments to traffic flow: poor timing of light signals, lack of well-placed left-turn lanes on busy arterials, and the need for stoplights at busy intersections. In this discussion of backyard transportation issues, many participants also stated their desire for expanded mass transit—both bus and rail. *However, this was usually couched more as strategy to provide transportation choices other than driving their car, and less as a strategy that would reduce traffic congestion.* This desire for more mass transit options was volunteered by participants who live in central Tampa and areas of the city where bus service is already more prevalent, as well as by some participants who live in the eastern and southern reaches of unincorporated Hillsborough County.

When asked about transportation issues a county-wide level, participants expressed a consistent desire for additional road capacity at all levels—interstate, state highways, arterials, well as local streets. Illustrations included building new local roads, adding highway connections around the perimeter of Tampa, extending the Crosstown Expressway and other highways, and building additional lane capacity on various two- and four-lane highways that have become overwhelmed by commercial and residential development in recent years. But again, many participants commented on the dearth of transportation choices, other than driving their car.

After identifying and discussing these local and county-wide transportation issues, each focus group was provided with maps from the 2035 LRTP that showed the proposed improvements in their sub-area for transit, highways and roadways, pedestrian infrastructure, and bikepaths. Respondents were asked to provide feedback, discuss their concerns, ask questions, and identify the positives or negatives in the proposed improvements. Following that, respondents were given a countywide map from the 2035 LRTP that showed just the county transit improvements, and again were asked to provide feedback. At the conclusion of the focus groups, participants were asked to write a “postcard” to their local elected officials describing what they thought local government should and should not focus on to improve transportation in Hillsborough County. The “postcard” worksheet also asked participants to react to various funding sources for transportation—sales tax, property tax, gas tax, toll roads, or another fill-in-the-blank option—simply by checking a box if they thought each one was a good idea, a bad idea, or if they were “undecided” on each one.

## PRIMARY FINDINGS

### *1. Hillsborough County’s traffic situation is a byproduct of local government’s failure to plan ahead and ensure adequate transportation infrastructure.*

A common point of view among all of the focus groups that today’s traffic problems are, in large part, the result of human failure: insufficient planning, inadequate controls, and poor decision-making by local governments in dealing with Hillsborough County’s rapid population growth. (It is worth noting that this issue was also frequently cited as a long-time pattern not just in Tampa and Hillsborough County, but throughout the entire state of Florida.) Focus groups lamented that subdivisions and commercial development had been approved and built all over the county with little regard for the transportation pressures that inevitably followed, requiring a near-constant game of “catch-up” to add the road capacity and—to a much lesser degree—mass transit to allow people to efficiently move around. Participants commented that local governments are too reactive: widening roads and adding interstate highway capacity years after the needs were identified, and (as more than one person said) “obsolete” the day they were opened.

This theme—combined with a lack of confidence in government in general—has important implications for local, county and state government entities in how they propose transportation solutions in the near-term. With very few exceptions, government-sponsored transportation improvements were not identified as well thought-out or successfully implemented. For example, the I-4 and 275 connection, also known as “Malfunction Junction,” came up several times in multiple focus groups as an example of a disruptive, high-cost project that made traffic flow worse, not better. Much of the discussions circled around this point of

view: local government and planners created the mess, so how can citizens be expected to believe that they know how to fix it?

***2. The most popular strategies proposed to address traffic congestion were small and targeted: improving traffic flow on local roads, not adding new modes to the system.***

Many focus group participants spoke freely of the anxiety they feel when confronting Hillsborough County’s traffic, but also described their coping strategies. Many said they are making earlier and earlier departures to arrive at work or school on time; making sure they do not miss their commuting traffic “window” that could turn a 30-minute commute into a hour; planning regular activities to avoid peak traffic congestion as much as possible; and a fear of walking or biking on local streets and roads. Furthermore, the imagery of traffic congestion was not limited to typical, rush hour, bumper-to-bumper gridlock on the interstates, but it also included local scenes such as being stuck in a left-turn lane through multiple light cycles on a busy arterial street, or waiting for fifteen minutes or more at a stop sign coming out from their subdivision, waiting for a safe opening in rushing traffic to get across lanes and enter the traffic flow.

Participants who live in the City of Tampa expressed similar frustrations, but also indicated that they have an easier time avoiding traffic hotspots because they have multiple routes around them.

There was a great deal of discussion in all the focus groups—from urban, suburban and rural communities—that traffic flow could be improved by synchronizing traffic signals, adding more turn lanes and turn arrows, and improving traffic technology at busy intersections. Indeed, given the impacts that these local traffic hotspots have on the quality of life, a coordinated, county-wide effort to improve traffic light signalization and traffic light technology would likely be well-received.

***3. Many focus group participants expressed their perception that the Tampa area and Hillsborough County is too sprawling, too car-centric, and too dispersed for mass transit to ever truly make an impact.***

A point of view shared in all of the focus groups was that owning a car is an essential part of the Hillsborough County lifestyle. A natural extension of this point of view for many participants—not all of them, but many of them—was that mass transit simply cannot succeed in this setting. They described that there’s not enough density; there are no highly-concentrated, dominant business districts that could serve as a traditional “hub” of an expanded system; and there are no suitable connections to cover the distances between transit stops and final destinations. Many participants clearly stated their desire for more transportation choices and expanded mass transit, but overall, the trade-offs between time,

convenience and cost still tilt preferences towards cars as the overwhelmingly dominant mode of transportation in Hillsborough County.

Also, while mass transit “naysayers” were certainly present in the focus groups, the concerns expressed by those who were open-minded about expanding transit perhaps shed some light on the election outcome in the transportation referendum. Some pro-transit participants had qualms about the *timing*—a “not now” point of view that they framed with the poor economy, weak job market, shaky household finances, doubts about high-cost public infrastructure spending, and resistance to proposing new taxes for any purpose at this time. Other pro-transit participants said they were unconvinced about the *location*—a “not over here, not over there” point of view they framed with both uncertainty about where major investments in mass transit would have the greatest impact, and confusion about transit modes. And others said they were not fully persuaded on *value*—a “not that much” point of view they framed with perceptions of how lightly used Hillsborough County’s current mass transit system is, and that a more robust system might likely never attract wide ridership because Tampa and Hillsborough County are just too different from other metropolitan areas that have more sophisticated transit systems. In particular, this latter group viewed mass transit as a piece of the transportation puzzle, but they were skeptical about trying to implement light rail or commuter rail in Tampa or Hillsborough County—that doing so would be like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole.

***4. The focus groups’ collective perception of the current bus system is neutral at best, negative at worst, and for participants from the unincorporated parts of Hillsborough County, there is not baseline perception at all.***

The focus groups touched many times on the current mass transit options in Tampa and Hillsborough County, and overall, the comments were especially negative. HART was not described as convenient, accessible, or able to provide a compelling alternative to driving. “When I see buses, they are empty,” “nobody rides the buses,” or “I don’t see anybody waiting at the stops” were regular refrains. Of course, it should be re-emphasized that these focus groups were not comprised of Hillsborough County residents who are transit-dependent, transit-commuters, or even periodic riders on the HART system—indeed, very few of the participants said they had used the local bus system even once, including some who were Tampa natives.

In the focus groups drawn from the close-in Tampa area where bus service is more prevalent, the characteristics that came to mind about HART were infrequent service, long waiting times, difficulty in finding information on routes and schedules, multiple transfers to get to final destinations, and poor conditions of bus waiting areas. Moreover, the bus system, while seen by many as part of the overall solution to addressing traffic congestion (and more cost-effective than rail, for some), was often described as a *impediment* to traffic flow. One

participant called the HART buses “just a faster-moving speed bump.” In contrast, many focus group participants from the eastern part of the county and Plant City lamented that there’s not bus service “east of Brandon”—and if there was express service to downtown with longer service hours, some said they would consider using it as an alternative to driving.

***5. Participants who were in favor of expanding mass transit generally supported a more incremental approach.***

The continuum of support for expanding mass transit ranged from guarded support to enthusiasm. However, as a whole, the focus groups indicate that an incremental approach would be preferred to the comprehensive, multi-corridor approach proposed in the 2010 referendum. Public opinion research conducted after the election indicated that the poor state of the economy, the weak job market, and general resistance to tax proposals were absolutely central to why the ballot measure failed in the election—and those reasons were also specifically mentioned in the focus groups. But first and foremost, these focus groups suggest that there is not enough community education, awareness, familiarity or first-hand experience with mass transit—*bus service or rail*—to create the traction necessary for a county-wide plan as expansive as the 2010 referendum plan to be successful.

***6. Focus group participants from every corner of Hillsborough County were virtually unanimous that the pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is dismal and a safety risk.***

All of the focus groups, regardless of the sub-area in Hillsborough County, commented on the lack of adequate infrastructure for pedestrians and bicycles, and the dangers of walking or riding a bike. Some commented that progress has been made as new generations of subdivisions and road expansions are required to add bikepaths, sidewalks and pedestrian connections, but those connections were often described as neither consistent nor contiguous, and are widely disregarded by car drivers. In almost every focus group, participants had personal anecdotes about how the lack of adequate walking or bicycling infrastructure limits their choices.

<b>SECONDARY FINDINGS</b>
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- **Toll roads were viewed generally positive asset in the transportation system.** Some, but not all, of the focus group participants said they used toll roads regularly. They generally described the cost as manageable, and the toll roads and managed lanes offer choice in the transportation system. There was no philosophical opposition voiced within the groups to adding more toll roads or toll lanes as a strategy to alleviate traffic congestion.

- **Gas prices are a universal complaint and sore spot given the recent spike in fuel costs at the pump.** However, not one person indicated they had, or were seriously contemplating, changing their commuting or transportation behavior. There was a general concession in the focus groups that increasing gas prices helps make the case for expanding mass transit, but it is not at the level of a paradigm-shifting crisis.
- **Participants from the eastern and southern areas of Hillsborough County spoke of feeling “left out” and “forgotten” in the transportation plan.** Focus groups from the outlying areas of Hillsborough County commented that their transportation needs are not given the same level of attention as the rest of the county. There were complaints that bus service “does not go east of Brandon,” and some uncertainty about how the transit components of the 2035 LRTP connected them with jobs, education and other key destinations.
- **There was no consensus on which tax revenue source is best for transportation improvements.** In a worksheet exercise at the conclusion of the focus groups, we asked the participants to give us their opinion on four potential revenue sources for transportation: sales tax, property tax, gas tax and tolls—and let us know if each one was a good idea, a bad idea, or if they were undecided. The reaction to sales tax and tolls was mixed, and the reaction to property tax and gas tax were decidedly negative.
- **There was only limited support for the proposed Tampa-Orlando high speed rail line.** Among those who had a formed opinion about the high speed rail line between Tampa and Orlando, there many unanswered questions about the proposed line and its impacts. Many questioned whether the relatively short distance to Orlando made taking rail a competitive advantage versus driving. Others mentioned the lack of information on how much it would cost to ride (particularly for a family of four or five people), compared to the costs of a tank of gas. And others raised the issue of connections to final destinations—once you arrive in the Orlando train station from Tampa, how do you get to where you ultimately want to go? Also, skeptics of light rail also raised objections similar to those cited in the cancellation of the high speed rail project—that light rail it will never be financially sustainable, it won’t “pay for itself” or be profitable, and it will require more and more taxpayer support over time. There was some light mention of the jobs the rail line could create and its economic impact to the region, but it did not create much traction in discussion.
- **A hurdle to embracing mass transit is a perceived lack of connectivity—i.e., “If I take a train or bus, what do I do once I get there?”** When discussing both bus service and rail service, respondents frequently cited the challenge of how to connect from bus stops and rail stops to get to their final destinations. This was a key issue in discussions about high speed rail to Orlando (“Do I have to rent a car when I get there? How will I get around?”), as well as taking local

bus service from work centers to residential areas (“I can’t walk a mile or two to my front door from a bus stop”).

- **There is not a clear, accurate understanding of rail modes and how they function.** Focus group participants did not have a strong grasp of light rail and commuter rail characteristics—what they look like, how fast they go, where they can and cannot be placed, how many stops they can make. When discussing light rail, participants used terms such as *monorail*, *trolley* and even *subway* almost interchangeably, and they regularly referenced mass transit systems in Chicago, Atlanta or New York. The ongoing debate about the Tampa to Orlando high speed rail line only compounded the confusion.
- **Respondents had an open mind to partnering with other counties in addressing transportation challenges.** The focus group discussions briefly touched on the issue of planning transportation infrastructure with neighboring counties. On the whole, focus group participants were positive about coordinating with other counties, and no one voiced an opinion that Hillsborough County was better off going it alone. In particular, Pinellas County was cited as an important county to work with. There was one comment about Hillsborough County residents already paying for a regional asset such as Raymond James Stadium, mentioned in the context of enrolling neighboring counties to contribute financially to infrastructure that benefits the entire region.

### **A Note on the 2010 Referendum --**

Focus group participants registered a very low awareness of the November 2010 referendum. This is not entirely surprising given the low voter turnout in the election, which was less than 40 percent overall, and as low as 15 percent in the third district of the Hillsborough County Board of Commissioners (where the referendum actually garnered a majority of votes in favor).<sup>1</sup> Focus group participants had a shallow grasp of the facts of the referendum, such as the proposed tax to be levied (sales tax), how much the increment was (one percent), and what it was intended to pay for (more than just rail, but multiple modes of travel). There was no mention of the referendum’s organized opposition campaign, and only two participants mentioned specific facts about the campaign itself.

The focus groups also revealed that Hillsborough County residents remain confused between the rail plan proposed in the referendum and the Tampa to Orlando high speed rail line, which is a completely different project that was not part of the referendum. Many focus group participants conflated the two: several indicated that they thought the

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<sup>1</sup> Focus group participants were asked if they voted in the November 2010 election, and if they recalled whether they voted in favor or against the Hillsborough County Transportation Referendum. Fifty-three of the 81 participants said they voted in the election—a 65% “turnout”—and among them, 23 (43%) said they voted in favor and 30 said they voted against (57%). The rest said they did not vote, or voted but could not recall how they voted on the referendum.

November 2010 election was a referendum on the high speed rail project, and others said that Governor Scott’s decision in February to cancel the high speed rail project also canceled the county’s light rail plan.

Among the focus group participants who said they voted against the referendum, the rationales reflected the broad number of reasons found in survey research conducted after the election: poor economy; weak job market; confusion about the transportation plan; opposition to taxes in general; lack of confidence in government to implement the plan; and uncertainty about mass transit and the effectiveness of light rail. Notably, two “no” voters in the east Hillsborough County focus group said they voted against the proposal because their husbands were unemployed and household finances were tight—and if not for that, they would be open minded about voting yes on a sales tax proposal to fund the transportation plan.

Another noteworthy finding from the focus groups was the instability among some participants who said they voted in favor in the referendum, but would now reverse their decision after they considered the length of time to build and implement the county-wide system, the amount of disruption caused by the construction, and whether the sales tax was the right funding tool compared to, say, increasing the gas tax. Conversely, some participants said they would reconsider their “no” vote based on improvement in the economy, demonstration of how specific transportation improvements would benefit their local area, and more education about the overall transportation plan.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

Primarily, focus group participants had the most positive outlook on some very practical initiatives to improve transportation and alleviate traffic congestion at a local level. These strategies included light signal synchronization, new roads and lane capacity (road widening), and safer infrastructure for walking and biking. Toll roads were also viewed as a positive component in expanding the transportation system, particularly because it is seen as a purely “user-pay” option that provides choice.

These focus groups also discussed that adding transit options throughout Hillsborough County should also be part of the mix—not to “solve” traffic congestion, but as a way to create more options and provide additional transportation choices. However, just framing the conversation about a multi-corridor expansion of mass transit—especially light rail and commuter rail—has major perceptual obstacles:

- Very limited first-hand experience with transit of any type.
- Perception by many that transit “just doesn’t work here.”
- Transportation is seen as a very narrow issue—it’s not really viewed in the context of jobs, recruiting businesses, competing against peer metro areas, or land use.

Furthermore, these perceptions are a backdrop for other major concerns about taxes, low confidence in local government, and the economy—making it even more challenging to gain traction in a broad conversation about how to fund transportation improvements and expanding transit. The focus groups also revealed a very low level of exposure to Hillsborough County’s existing mass transit system, and this lack of familiarity is connected to perceptions about expanding mass transit. Improving awareness, understanding and education about transportation and transit issues should be an ongoing area of attention for all stakeholders.

The focus groups indicate that the more readily accepted next steps for the transportation system are options that are targeted (“first mile/last mile”): light synchronization, pedestrian and bikepath connections, improving the levels of bus service, and road enhancements. Incremental efforts to expand mass transit—especially light rail or commuter rail—may be more readily accepted than an expansive, multi-corridor, county-wide approach.

## Appendix A: Main “local” area transportation concerns, by focus group

**“What is the transportation issue in your own backyard that you want to see addressed the most?”**

Group	Local sub-area issue raised
Group 1 NW Hillsborough	Lights could be timed better More highway overpasses, underpasses East-west highway More sidewalks More lanes and “jug handle” cloverleafs Length of lights Can’t walk anywhere Lights More traffic lights Re-time the lights Time lights better
Group 2: NE Hillsborough	Widen 275 and I4 More bus options Another bridge over the river Limit road construction hours to night More mass transit More mass transit, non-car options Expand Busch Boulevard More mass transit More stop signs, unsafe roads More express bus service routes Express bus lanes outside of regular traffic
Group 3: Town & Country, Egypt Lake	Blinking traffic lights in some locations Traffic cameras Better light timing Better public transportation, rail Left turn signal at Kennedy & North Blvd E-W highway that ties into Veterans/275 Streetlight timing Security cameras at intersections Cheaper car insurance Better turn signal times Longer bus routes Longer turn light times 275 – I4 connection dangerous Traffic lights, red lights on Hillsborough Ave.

Group	Local sub-area issue raised
Group 4: Central & East Tampa, downtown	Finish road construction faster Less congestion on highways More public transportation Improve street conditions, especially around schools Encourage more bus riding Widen local roads Better coordinated lights, longer turn signals Turn one-way streets to two-way
Group 5: South & West Tampa, Westshore	Adjust timing of traffic lights Add left turn lanes on Dale Mabry Fix Dale Mabry and Himes Express bus service or light rail to downtown Fix dips and bumps in roads Post more transit information Malfunction Junction Not enough HART info
Group 6: Eastern Hillsborough	Options instead of always driving car Deal with traffic on 60/traffic lights Extend Crosstown Expressway past Brandon Mall More direct route to interstate Better route to get in and out of schools Extend US92 and 39 to four lanes More public transportation
Group 7: Greater Brandon area, Palm River	Build streets & roads BEFORE subdivisions More cameras, stop signs Dangerous intersections Wider roads Fix 275 to Fletcher Plan roads for new growth Better timed lights More nearby bus service Tampa to Orlando rail system Fix/widen roads
Group 8: South Shore, Apollo Beach, Sun City Center	Freight trains stopping traffic on 41 Expand 301, road connections Widen Fishhawk Boulevard Connect to I4 and Crosstown Expressway Better access to USF and city More buses, longer service Better roads (widening) A shuttle system (bus) Widen Franklin, better planning for roads Better long-range planning

**APPENDIX B**  
**Discussion Guide**  
**Tampa**  
**March 7, 8, 9, 10**  
**(90 minutes total)**

*Note: Questions and subject areas in this discussion guide may not be presented in exact order or verbatim, and additional issues may come up. Each discussion will have its own flow, and the moderator will keep things on track to touch on subject areas.*

Main objective is to explore the challenges and opportunities for the future of transportation improvements within the contexts of each sub-area and countywide.

**INTRODUCTION**

Focus group rules & format

- How many people are familiar with focus groups?
- Similar to and different from polling – get behind answers, the “why” criteria/rationale
- No right or wrong answers – no prize – want to hear what you really think
- I might push back – not trying to put words in your mouth just trying to understand. Informal – please jump in – but be respectful of others
- Mirror – observers, filming

Respondents’ self-introductions: name, years in Tampa area, occupation

**WARM UP – GENERAL ISSUES**

Around the table: Tell me one thing you really like about living the Tampa area?

What’s one thing you would change to improve the quality of life, if you could? [*listen for traffic, traffic congestion*]

**TRANSITION TO TRANSPORTATION**

Transportation and traffic were mentioned - how many of you agree that it’s a concern? Show of hands - Is it a major problem, or just a minor irritation? How much does it directly impact your life?

What should be done about traffic congestion? What are the “solutions” for it, or is it ultimately “unsolvable”? [*Listen for, but do not prompt, on November 2010 referendum*]

Problem identification

Write down on your pads: number one specific problem with transportation system in the area of the county where you live. [*“parochial” issues*]

- [round the table]
- **[Probe: traffic signalization; inadequate road capacity]**

Now, write down on your pads: number one problem with transportation system for the region/county. [“regional” issues]

- [round the table]

How much of a priority should it be for your local officials to deal with these local and region/county traffic issues?

**Word Association (10 minutes)** - words written on flipchart, read off each one and around the table for word or phrase

*Chart Page I*

- Highways
- Growth and development
- Mass transit
- Gas Prices

*Chart Page II*

- Buses
- Toll roads
- Sidewalks and trails
- Bike lanes
- Light-rail
- High speed rail
- HART

*listen for: feelings about quantity/quality, positive/negative impressions]*

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***Building on discussion above***

Let’s discuss the transportation system further. How many of you personally ride mass transit [or the HART bus line]? How do you use it?

For those of you who don’t – what would prompt you to use it? Would you ever?

*[Listen for: increasing gas prices; more convenient routes/service; necessity (only way to get around/ back-up if car breaks down); connect to airport or downtown, used to ride transit before moving to Tampa]*

Even if you don’t use the bus system, or won’t use the bus system, is it important? Why?

*[Listen for: only transportation option for elderly, disabled, low income]*

- **How much of a priority is expanding mass transit in Hillsborough County?**  
High/medium/low
- **Now how much of a priority is widening roads in Hillsborough County?**  
High/medium/low
- **How much of a priority to improve traffic signals and intersections?**  
High/medium/low

<b>TRANSPORTATION PLAN REVIEW</b>
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**Pass around handouts with maps – sub-areas first.**

**1. Sub-area Plans** [sub-area plans from MPO LRTP website] *Maps show components included in plan: rail transit, bus routes, new & enhanced local bus service. Spend a couple minutes describing the modes.*

- The map shows the major transit parts of the plan—there are also some pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements, and some road improvements.
- What are some general impressions of this plan? Anyone seen this before (awareness)?  
*[Listen for: November 2010 referendum]*
- Do you think this plan would alleviate traffic congestion? Does this plan address your local traffic concerns you identified earlier?
- What are your questions? What concerns you?
- Do you think this plan would benefit you and your family and your quality of life?

*Now, thinking not just about your backyard but more broadly about Hillsborough County. . .*

**2. Countywide map plan** [LRTP map 10-1 Cost Affordable 2035 Transit system] *Spend a couple minutes describing the modes.*

Discuss perceptions of the system.

- What are your impressions of this plan?
- Do you think this system would make a difference in dealing with traffic congestion? Are there other benefits to having a system like this? *[listen for: environmental, economic/jobs, competing with other cities for jobs, getting to the airport]*
- What are your questions? What concerns you? *[listen for: cost, too expensive]*
- Is this a long-term vision for transportation that you support? **TRADE OFFS** *[Probe: should plans like this be done county-by-county, or should there be a coordinated, regional approach? Listen for: connections to the beaches, the Rays]*

<b>2010 ELECTION/COST REDUCTION - FUNDING MODULE</b>
--

Voters rejected this plan in the November 2010 election. How many voted in that election?  
[show of hands]

- Did you vote for or against? [Those who voted: ]What was the main reason?
  - *[Listen for: doesn't make sense in this economy; anti-tax; system was too big; too much (or not enough) focus on transit; trust in government officials to implement the system; did not understand specifics of the plan; unanswered questions about plan]*
  - *Probe: Were you aware or not aware that there was more in the proposal than just rail—that 25% of the funds was for roads?*

**Cost reduction strategies – TRADE OFFS**

- One option is to start smaller than this countywide plan—for example
  - Do starter line from that connects downtown, Westshore, the airport and into southern Carrollwood.

*[Listen for levels of support/opposition based on geography of groups]*

- Or use a less expensive kind of transit, like running passenger cars on existing railroad tracks, or using high-tech buses that talk to traffic signals.

Discuss perceptions –Why do you think a “start small” approach is better/worse?

If the plan was scaled back, would you be willing to vote for something less ambitious and less costly than the plan in the November 2010 election? **TRADE OFFS**

- *Probe: Even if the starter line is not in your part of the county? Does the cancellation of the High Speed Rail to Orlando change your opinion about the importance of a rail connection to the airport? \*
- *Probe: What would have to be in the Plan in order for you to support it? Thinking back to your comments about quality of life in Hillsborough County, are there any **non-transportation** improvements that should be considered?*

<b>EXERCISE: POSTCARD TO LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS</b>
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On the sheets I'm passing around, I'd like you to do 2 things:

First, I'd like you to write a brief postcard note to your local elected officials. In your own words, tell them what you think the priorities *should be* and/or *should not be* to make Hillsborough County transportation better.

Second, since we have spoken about the 2010 election and touched on funding for transportation, I've put down 4 very common sources of funds that could be used to expand transit and make transportation system improvements: sales tax, property tax, tolls, and the gas tax. For each one, just check off whether you think it is a GOOD idea to

increase that source to improve transportation, or a BAD idea. If you have another idea, please write it in the space.

[3-5 minute break]

Read postcards around the table.

Write your name on your postcard, please leave it behind.

<b>CONCLUSION</b>
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Final comments, summary, thanks.

**APPENDIX C***Postcard Exercise**Summary of Responses*

***“Q: What should your local officials focus on—and/or NOT focus on—to make transportation better in Hillsborough County?”***

**Group 1**

**6:00PM: NW Hillsborough County, including Carrollwood and Citrus Park**

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I would like to see more highway projects and road widening projects north and south and very importantly, east and west. If transit projects are put in place – benches and weather proof waiting areas and traffic flow – *not finished*

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Please stop focusing on light rail/high speed rail. Seriously, It isn't going anywhere. Focus money, instead, on improving roads and bus services in Hillsborough. Dale Mabry onto Veterans' Expressway - remove traffic light for left turn onto Vet's. Better timing for lights in general. New E-W Highway, prevent people from clogging intersections.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

Cut spending and lower taxes, evaluate where tax money goes.

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No. Taxes are never temporary.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Have a detailed plan. Specific details related to how you plan to implement the bus transportation system. How can the project be designed to provide the most good for the general public? The average Tampa resident is probably not going to use the mass transit system on a regular basis. It is the people who need it the most who can least afford it. Have a plan to pay for it.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Please spend money on the transportation infrastructure that we already have in place before adding systems that will require future maintenance. Prove that we can afford to maintain what we have.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

Cut other programs/Shift to transportation

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No – this is almost always a flawed premise because taxes are rarely reversed once in place.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

As a citizen of Hillsborough County, my thoughts on alleviating the transportation problems would include additions of ramps for turn lanes, dedicating lanes for public buses, etc. and re-evaluate how our tax money is spent to support these recommendations.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

Re-evaluate where our tax money is being spent and re-budget.

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Having moved here from Northern NJ, one of the more congested areas of our country, I do not understand why there is so much traffic here. Instead of opening side roads to connect major roads so there is more flow to the traffic, you keep closing off roads or putting up speed bumps. There's a need for over passes and “jug handles” to eliminate some traffic lights and left turns. We do not need light rail right now. Improve the bus routes and improve roads.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Transportation should be improved u better planning smaller projects that would benefit locals should be seen thorough before turning our sights outward. The flow of traffic lights could be easily attended to, as could the enforcement of driving laws. The planning of new highways should be given more though and time. Intersection lights, timing, congestion, more bus stops, closer to stores. Flow of lights, especially during rush hours in morning and evening.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Please focus on the east- west roads or highways, along with north and south solutions. Light rail would be a good idea in small doses. I believe you can accomplish these things with the funds you already receive from the taxpayers. We will support you on this.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

Cut funding for wasteful projects

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No, this has never worked.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Please do not waste taxpayer money on light rail. Fix roads, buy buses, and build sidewalks before raising taxes to build a stupid light rail system. I think that it is disgusting that you even suggest raising taxes with the waste that already exists.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

Cut Spending

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Unidentified participants: No questions answered – random thoughts**

More accessibility via walking

More options from A to B

Congestion

Larger circular corridor

Ehrlich and Hutchinson intersection

Expressways

Land locked

To open streets up – speed bumps and more ways to get places

East-west highway  
Pre-planning

**Sources of funding for transportation improvements cumulative results for group 1  
– 6:00PM:**

	Good Ideas	Bad Idea	Undecided
Sales Tax	2	6	1
Gas Tax	2	7	
Property Tax	1	8	
Toll For New Lanes	7	1	1

**Group 2 – 8:00PM: NE Hillsborough County including Temple Terrace and New Tampa**

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I think it would be a great idea to expand the transportation services in Tampa. I think the most important is the bus system. The bus route needs to expand to all areas – New Tampa, Brandon, Riverview and Ruskin. There are a lot of people w/o cars who can't get to where they need to be.

Light Rail – North Tampa to Downtown

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Please expand the rapid system to the outer counties. Open. Light Rail – east to west. Expand Busch Blvd. Bus system to outside of town.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I am recommending that you approve the high-speed rail. I truly believe that this system will have a great impact on our area. Please take the gas taxes to help pay the fees for this expansion. Start with Dale Mabry and complete a square of the Tampa Bay Area.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Please look to the future with “vision”. Floridians need to work together to connect all areas of this state. We have a tourist driven economy. Businesses will not relocate to Florida without a greatly expanded bus/rail system.

Light-rail should begin and end in downtown with feeder to the airport.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I would like you to focus on buses, work on getting the out there and making them affordable and profitable. Tampa is a growing cit and transportation needs to grow with it. O feel that the high-speed rail and light rail is much needed down the road. Change is always focused on and Tampa needs to work with the change. Light rail to New Tampa to downtown to Clearwater.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No, not at all.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I believe an express route between Orlando-Tampa- Miami is an excellent start. Use existing road add a divider and signage.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

Rider pay

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

It may.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

The professional business community is constructing the edge-of-city office space as single story strips or duplexes. This is not necessary and it takes up space that could be used for convenient transportation.

Light rail along I-275 from Bearss to Pasco line.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No, to me 3 years is forever.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Please show us options plans/phases and costs/funding of your transit plans. Let us know % improvements of traffic flow and better time savings.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

To whom it may concern, please focus on the needs of the people and community as opposed to the political approach to what just seems right and would work on paper.

Light rail line – Hillsborough, Pinellas, Pasco and Hernando counties.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

Bonds – Federal Infrastructure Funding

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Maybe

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Please start with improvements on the local bus routes. I would like to see less switching of buses making more direct routes from point A to point B. Tampa to Orlando rail would be a great idea to alleviate traffic.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea:”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes

**Unsigned responses: no questions answered, random thoughts.**

More lanes – Jug handles, east west. Selmon – south east west.

Lights timed better, more overpasses, east west highway (this is circled), slow traffic keep right! Express lanes above large streets.

**Sources of funding for transportation improvements cumulative results for group 2**

**– 8:00PM:**

Boxes unmarked - 2

	Good Ideas	Bad Idea	Undecided
Sales Tax	4	1	4
Gas Tax	1	9	
Property Tax	1	7	1
Toll For New Lanes	7	0	3

<b>Group 3 – 6:00PM: Town &amp; Country and Egypt Lake</b>
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**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

While during difficult economic times, government roes to resolve issues perpetuated initially by greed and corruption, developing studies and opinion polls that break down issues on, not only a cultural scale, but economic and spiritual, to allow individuals some feeling of worth may help out some. Projects that supply jobs while boosting tourism is a way to showcase what your city is about. The accessibility of businesses without U-turns as well. Better bus and changes to the layout of current roads.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No, because as long as there is nothing established for afterwards that is secure, a temporary solution is never an answer.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Raise taxes on sales and high-income houses, which would bring in revenue, millions of dollars. Cut off people who are generations into welfare and create jobs that would educate and help rebuild their society. Stop feeding welfare to illegal aliens. All these things would bring in millions of dollars for revenue. Lower cost of car insurance.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

Cut welfare.

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Need system for moving traffic from outer areas to airport, downtown, stadium, Tampa Palms, South Tampa then transfer to bus system. Bus loading and unloading is too time consuming, causes more traffic delay.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

Users pay

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I would like to see a left hand turn signal on Kennedy going onto North Blvd. UT students use this to turn into the University's parking garages and there isn't enough time for more than 2 or 3 cars to turn. Students will often run the light or the oncoming traffic will run the light too. I would like there to be more cameras installed because so many cars run red lights. This would prevent accidents, injuries, traffic back-ups, etc. Also, extending the amount of time for green lights would thin out traffic. Also, taking away since if the no U turn signs would prevent drivers from having to go further than necessary and slowing down the drivers behind them.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

This is what toll fess are already for.

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I would like to see safer roads for bicyclists. I would like to see traffic lights that are synchronized so that the traffic runs smoothly. We need turn lanes not U turns. HART needs to expand its time schedule. A light-rail system truly needs to be looked into further. I would like to be able to get into my apartment complex without having to go 5 blocks to a half mile to make a u-turn and come back. Also, the turn light at Himes and Hillsborough does not change before the crossing cars go first.

I would like bicycle lanes wider and maybe even marked with illuminated paint. We have too many bicycle accidents.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

The transportation system needs to have longer routes, longer time of running, be affordable to the poor and needy people. [The system need to] have more places to park your car and get on the bus, reach further outside the city limits of Tampa and go across into St. Pete and Clearwater – more buses to stadium and out.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I feel that increasing transportation options are a good thing for the area. We need to know the cost of each route; I mean the amount the person will pay for each route, and cost for the family. We need to know the advantage of taking the public transit versus your car. We need to know more cost information and it needs to be given to the public. *Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No, it would be the same.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Please start with improvements on the local bus routes. I would like to see less switching of buses making more direct routes from point A to point B. Tampa to Orlando rail would be a great idea to alleviate traffic. Improve the traffic condition on W. Hillsborough Ave. More police visibility to help with those running lights and people weaving in and out of traffic. More police everywhere.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I would like to see much better, more effective and more efficient light rail system network in Tampa. It is long overdue. As long as the stops and destinations are properly considered, it should work well and be profitable. People are tired, I think, of needing to drive everywhere to get from point A to point B.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Offer incentives to have businesses move their facilities further away from central Tampa to spread traffic out instead of being so centralized. More roads connecting main roads or highways. Stretch out lights to thon out traffic and move business districts.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Light rail is very important to better traffic flow, less congestion, less accidents and less toxic fumes polluting our environment.

High-speed rail is essential to the economy between Tampa and Orlando. If people continue to move into our communities, we need to add to and stimulate our economy, which will pay back on our investment. With the increase in local education, a better school bus system will also aid this cause. More traffic signals, even blinking lights and cameras on lights.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

Fair tax

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Sources of funding for transportation improvements cumulative results for group 3 – 6:00PM:**

	Good Ideas	Bad Idea	Undecided
Sales Tax	7	3	1
Gas Tax	2	7	0
Property Tax	1	9	0
Toll For New Lanes	6	2	0

Boxes unmarked - 6

<b>Group 4 – 8:00PM: Central &amp; East Tampa including Downtown</b>
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*This next group of participants did not have the worksheet form to fill out, and used large index cards to record their thoughts.*

**Respondent:**

Some suggestions for improvements would be to fix lights. Turn signals are needed at Hillsborough and Central Ave. One-way streets, potholes.

**Respondent:**

I would like better sidewalks and bike paths. Frequent bus routes that don't take too long to get to your destination. Ability to go downtown and not "sweat" parking. Special buses for the fair/Bucs games/major events.

**Respondent:**

I would like to see real improvements in our city in terms of transportation and many other areas. I would be glad to pay taxes or contemplate an increase on them.

**Respondent:**

I think the proposal for mass transit needs to show value and cost responsibility. I think the bus rapid transit with dedicated lanes (certain hours) would help traffic. In order to increase ridership on buses, they should have reduced fares for residents. Wi-Fi.

**Respondent:**

Wider roads, better light system, flashing lights on non-main roads after a certain time in the evening. Bus lanes that do not stop traffic.

**Respondent:**

Pros: 1-4/275 on off hours, toll roads, wider streets in high traffic areas.  
Cons: Tax increases for every plan, rail projects no one will ride.

**Respondent:**

It would be nice to improve but not waste money [at the same time]. We do so many things to improve and then it fails. Bus lines would be nice if improved. It would be nice if we widened roads.

**Respondent:**

I really think to signal more with the traffic. Basically, build more roads or lanes for citizens to get to their destination on time.

<b>Group 5 – 6:00PM: South &amp; West Tampa including Westshore</b>
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**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

We need reliable public transportation that includes a good alternative to the bus system. Many people will simply not consider it as an alternative if the only real choice is riding the bus. Even if the transportation is limited to concentrated areas, such as downtown/Ybor, it is still a great option and alternative to driving. The trolley is an okay source but it is more for tourists and the experience. It is not an efficient in the sense of speed.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

A specific period of time would be more desirable.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Focus on being economically responsible. Improvements have to be used. Light rail, if it was like Washington DC or Atlanta would be great if it worked. [If it worked] it would be used here. Do not focus on service like bike trails that are only decals on the road or bike lanes that take away part of the car lane.

Buses, for some reason, seem not to work here. Either scheduling, routes or something. They buses are empty.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes always a cap.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I think it is important to focus on a way to make traveling around Hillsborough County safer and easier. Congestion is expected, however, our roads and traffic lights should be better equipped to handle these things. It is as if the city has grown but not the transportation. It is important to focus on making commuting easier for residents of Hillsborough and Pinellas County before spending money for residents to access other areas. The first transportation issue that should be dealt with is the congestion occurring because of traffic lights and turn lanes.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

It is important to focus first on making improvements to existing mass transit options. For example; the HART bus line is barely used or often described as “inconvenient.” Perhaps by focusing on A) Making sure routes are servicing as many people as possible. B) Educating the public as to when/where the buses run, more people would ride them in turn decreasing the number of cars on the road. I think many improvements could be made without increasing taxes, perhaps by readjusting budgetary priorities.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

Change budget priorities.

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No new taxes. Take the money from current budget.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

1. Focus on using existing funding to sustain transportation. Make expenditures that will grow the business sector and make businesses more willing to come here.
2. Do not focus on spending more tax dollars and increasing taxes locally or at state levels.
3. Traffic is acceptable with existing efforts to accommodate growth.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

Cut taxes.

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

It would, but it won't ever be limited. It will never go away. It will resurface with a new face.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I would focus on the bus rapid transit down Himes and Dale Mabry, because it would help people get from A to B faster. It would also get buses out of traffic and would clear things up in rush hour. I wouldn't focus on affordable rail. It seems to just follow bus route. Also, make construction finish faster and work harder to make it easier on commuters.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Let's start our rapid transportation. Have the high speed rail. I like the bus line route. Make progress on the roads as shown. Some are in progress already. Make some tolls so the transportation can be paid for.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I think that some focuses for transportation in the Tampa area should include the streets (i.e. making them better, smoother), traffic lights (i.e. making sure they are in sync, especially in higher traffic areas), and post more information about our present public transportation system. I think that many people in our area don't know or don't need the use of our buses. If there were more information posted, it would be used more. I think a lot of people do want improvements, but don't want to be taxed even more than they are.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I would like to see you focus on the light rail system and express buses. I think the bike path and trails should be separate projects at another time. I think it is best not to overload the people with too much.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Sources of funding for transportation improvements cumulative results for group 5 – 6:00PM:**

	Good Ideas	Bad Idea	Undecided
Sales Tax	5	2	2
Gas Tax	1	7	1
Property Tax	0	7	1
Toll For New Lanes	3	6	0

Boxes unmarked - 5

**Group 6 – 8:00PM: Eastern Hillsborough County including Plant City  
Dover and Fishhawk Ranch**

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

It has come to my attention that our county needs to focus on “decongesting” its major highways and expanding the transportation system with more buses, more often, and light rail. I don’t think we should focus on bike lanes on busy roads due to the fact that it is not ideal or safe. I do think our side walks need improvement and expansion. Our traffic lights need better timing and to be monitored regularly. I strongly believe we need to expand all transportation ideas eastward to promote more efficiency for the smaller cities as well as Tampa.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Not really

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

In an effort to modernize the transportation system while unifying the region, I believe it’s important to develop regional light rail system. This would be paid for by all municipalities, which want to be part of it. The economic benefits would more than cover the cost in the long run, and the beginning investment in building this enterprise, I urge you to consider the initiative.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

My thoughts on the expansion of the cost affordable projects in the Hillsborough County would be to suggest extending the cross-town expressway to the east side of Brandon and Valrico. There is so much congestion on highway 60 and Bloomingdale Ave. These two roads are the only routes that get you to I-75 or the cross-town expressway. I suggest widening the roads on Bell Shoals and Lithia. With more projects and homes developing, there is not enough road development, but there is more traffic.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Regarding new taxes to improve transportation: First thing – clean up your own house, then you can ask me to pay more. I believe that if people trusted the elected official, they would feel the same. Example “Pat Bean, I would approve light rail”

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I am a Valrico resident and did not realize that we do not have any type of transportation to and from our local area and Plant City. I lived in Atlanta and used the MARTA System there. I would use a similar system here. I feel we need to expand the Selmon Expressway out further east. I also feel we need a bigger bus system for our local area in Valrico, Plant City and Riverview.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No, it is hard enough with the price of gas now – it changes too frequently.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I believe we need to bring the rail more east all the way to Dover road. Then, from Dover road on to SR 539. You will have express busses and local buses from SR539 to Sam Allen Rd.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

Flex sales tax

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

I think it needs to flex from .07 to .08 and 1 and 2 year periods.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I feel that we need wider roads, spanning from Plant City to the Tampa and Brandon area. The plans for a light rail and bus system would be great, but only if they are available in Plant City and surrounding areas. I do not feel that sales tax or gas tax should increase. Taxes are already a problem with today’s economy. I also feel that the patrons voting yes on the situation at hand should be the only people to pay the price.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

Pull funds from other government activities.

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

If only stretched over 10 years, the tax increase could be beneficial.

**Sources of funding for transportation improvements cumulative results for group 6 – 8:00PM:**

	Good Ideas	Bad Idea	Undecided
Sales Tax	3	3	1
Gas Tax	0	4	1
Property Tax	0	5	1
Toll For New Lanes	2	3	1

Boxes unmarked - 4

**Group 8 – 6:00PM: South Shore including Apollo Beach, Ruskin and Sun City Center**

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I would recommend that the county concentrate more on roads that improving walkways and trails. Widening roads, making more turn lanes, synchronizing lights so that the flow of traffic is smoother. Put more emphasis on rapid bus transportation and cost effective transportation.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Today’s economy forces us into an era of saving through all means. Money is being spent without the idea of not planning all situations involved. Rail is no good at the present time.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I have lived in Apollo Beach for 10 years, with the last 5 years; the growth has caused the commute to Tampa to take twice as long. Highway 41 needs to be expanded. The trains need to run at times that isn’t during rush hour. The highway 75 exit, going on and off at Big Bend road, need to be improved.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I believe our main focus in today's economy is to improve roadways and public transportation without increasing taxes, but finding monies that we are using in wasteful projects, such as Downtown River walks or high-speed rail system.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I feel that you should spend their money on the busing system. It needs to go more places, have flexible hours and be more direct in its destinations. I.E. not so many stops. The roadways need to have to spend their money to have the adequate roadways. I feel that walkways and bike paths are more a waste of money than good. Schools should have roads built into planning. Lights should be synchronized on highway 60.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I am writing you regarding the local roads and highways in the Hillsborough County area. I feel that we are lagging behind in the infrastructure of our roads and transportation verses the growth of communities and traffic. I am in favor of increasing sales tax by 1 cent in order to fund the projects to relieve the traffic congestion in our community, as long as the funds are dedicated solely for the roads.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Bus transportation needs to be addressed. I don't use public transportation because it is not easily accessible. The traffic back ups need to be addressed before they happen. Stop adding more taxes. Use the money more wisely. We are being taxed to death. Our property taxes are one of the highest in the state.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Do not allow developments unless the infrastructure is in place. Roads need to be at least adequate. More money should go towards road building and maintaining improvements. More bus routes are needed. No rail or high-speed or commuter; it is not cost effective.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Do not spend time/resources on rail. Spend more time gathering and analyzing rail information, identifying the issues and plan for real needs. Make sure the revenue spending decisions are not solely in the hands of appointed official. No appointed officials spending revenue.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

Divert from other sources (prioritize)

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I would like to see you focus more on the issues of cramped roadways. Quit trying to jam this rail down my throat that you know won't be used or profitable. I also would like to see you put more of a responsibility on developers. I like our toll roads and would like to see more of them. I find that they are not as crowded.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Sources of funding for transportation improvements cumulative results for group 8  
– 6:00PM:**

	Good Ideas	Bad Idea	Undecided
Sales Tax	3	4	3
Gas Tax	0	10	0
Property Tax	1	8	1
Toll For New Lanes	5	3	2

**Group 7 – 8:00PM: Greater Brandon Area including Palm River and Mango**

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I believe that you should start with a better bus system, followed by light rail and high-speed rail. These are the most needed! I like the highway system but believe that biking and walking trail project could wait.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

These are the issues which are important; more bus service, larger street signs for major intersections, more traffic lights, stop signs, speed bumps in residential areas, and driving tests after a certain age. High-speed rail is a good idea.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

Consumption tax

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I believe that we should improve the condition of the road potholes, especially. We also need to put lights on busy or dangerous intersections. More bike paths would also improve the situation, making more of these and the one we have safe would help with road congestion.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes – gives people a deadline – maybe more willing to say yes.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Concerning improvements on transportation; I believe you should concentrate on prior proper planning for any design or implementation of building or improvement of transportation. Concentrate on residential nodes.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

Yes, would probably vote yes for both sales and gas tax for 10 years minimum.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I would like to see more mass transit in the way of light rail and buses and to have light rail parallel our interstate and highways with stops in areas such as University of Tampa and Ybor. Downtown Tampa and St. Pete and the beaches. This would relieve dense traffic to these popular locations to. Busing would also help these commuters to travel around these high rail stations.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Focus more locally. There are more and more sub-divisions and apartment complexes being added which is causing more and more congestion. Local transportation within the town would greatly decrease and make things more accessible. Not everyone has a car and so many places are just too far to walk to. Property tax would be a good option if people are paying maybe they'll use the transportation that reduces road congestion.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

User Fee

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

These plans for light rail, high-speed rail, better bus services seem like a good idea. However, there is the matter of paying for them. I'm concerned about government/federal handouts, as our country is in so much debt already. It seems people want this money but do not realize the cost involved for themselves and our future generations.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – "other idea."*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

It's always good to have an end time.

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I think you should improve the transportation by adding more cameras and stop signs. You can improve the roads; they are bad down here. You can make the buses go everywhere in Tampa. Enforce the bike lane.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – "other idea."*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

Build roads before subdivisions and build school along with the subdivisions. Need mass transit for future light rail and high speed rail. We can't keep on widening highways. We will be unable to attract new businesses to the county with out improved transportation as time goes on. We are one of the only metro areas without mass transit.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – "other idea."*

Special Real Estate Commercial tax near major high speed stations

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

No

**Respondent:**

*Dear local elected officials of Hillsborough County:*

I think the transit system needs some improvement. Transportation, public transportation should be readily available to everyone whether you are going a long distance or short distance. I feel the high-speed rail is very important to all residents of this region as long as the tax is reasonable and does not get aggressive.

*Sources of funding for transportation improvements – “other idea.”*

N/A

*Does your opinion change if the tax or fee is for a limited period of time, such as 10 years?*

N/A

**Sources of funding for transportation improvements cumulative results for group 7 – 8:00PM:**

	Good Ideas	Bad Idea	Undecided
Sales Tax	5	1	2
Gas Tax	5	0	2
Property Tax	2	5	1
Toll For New Lanes	6	1	1

Boxes unmarked - 9

Sources of funding for transportation improvements cumulative results for all eight focus groups

	Good Ideas	Bad Idea	Undecided
Sales Tax	29	20	14
Gas Tax	11	44	4
Property Tax	6	49	5
Toll For New Lanes	36	16	8

Boxes unmarked - 26