

Phase Two: 2035 Plan Post Referendum Analysis Technical Memorandum: Focus Group Summary

Prepared For:



601 East Kennedy Boulevard
Tampa, FL 33602

Prepared By:

the **kenney** group

1999 Broadway #4190
Denver, CO 80202

Table of Contents

1.0	Executive Summary	2
1.1	Structure & Approach.....	2
1.2	Key Findings.....	2
2.0	Background and Research Objectives.....	3
3.0	Research Format and Structure	4
3.1	Group formation and participant screening.....	4
3.2	Funding Scenario Information	5
3.3	Discussion Guide.....	5
4.0	Discussion of Transportation Issues.....	6
5.0	Primary Findings.....	7
6.0	Additional Findings	10
6.1	Perspectives on Growth in Hillsborough County.....	10
6.2	County and City Perspectives on Transportation	10
6.3	More Reactions to Funding Scenarios	11
6.4	Responses to Adding & Expanding Rail Travel Modes	13
6.5	Recollection of 2010 Transportation Referendum	13

Appendices

Appendix A:	Key Findings from Phase I Focus Groups (conducted March 2011) ...	14
Appendix B:	Focus Group Subareas.....	15
Appendix C:	Screening Interview Script	16
Appendix D:	Population Growth & Vehicle Trip Projections Handout.....	19
Appendix E:	Discussion Guide	20
Appendix F:	Focus Group Participant Worksheet.....	23

1.0 Executive Summary

The Hillsborough County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is engaged in a process that re-visits its 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), and includes public opinion research among Hillsborough County residents on transportation issues. A first phase of focus groups was conducted in March 2011 to obtain direct feedback on the main components of the 2035 LRTP (highway and roadway improvements, mass transit, pedestrian infrastructure, and bikepaths), and to collect insights into the transportation needs, desires and priorities of Hillsborough County citizens. A second phase of focus groups was conducted November 14-17, 2011, to gather feedback on various funding scenarios to finance transportation improvements.

1.1 Structure & Approach

The Phase II focus groups were structured similarly to the Phase I research by dividing Hillsborough County into eight sub-areas using ZIP codes, and recruiting participants at random from a database of active voters within each of those sub-areas. The groups' composition 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.

The Phase II focus group discussions centered on eight potential funding tools to generate new revenues for transportation in Hillsborough County: a local gas tax (one-cent up to five-cents per gallon); a special assessment district for community transportation improvements; a special assessment district to extend the TECO streetcar line; a mobility fee on new construction; express toll lanes with bus rapid transit; tolled intersection bypass lanes with bus rapid transit; a public service tax on utilities (electricity); and a local sales tax.

1.2 Key Findings

The major findings from the focus groups indicate the following:

1. Among the eight funding scenarios, the best-received were a local sales tax and a local gas tax, primarily because they have the broadest base and broadest application in both the economy and in the community.
2. While focus group respondents could easily identify specific local transportation improvements they want to see close to home, there was more positive feedback around funding scenarios that would improve the overall transportation system throughout the county, and not just in small, defined areas.
3. There is a deep lack of trust in local government's ability to be accountable, transparent and consistent with transportation funding.

2.0 Background and Research Objectives

The Hillsborough County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has initiated a process to re-visit its 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), which was adopted in 2010 and proposes a major county-wide expansion of mass transit (light rail and commuter rail, in particular). In November 2010, Hillsborough County voters rejected a one-cent sales tax referendum to fund a proposed package of light rail, commuter rail, bus, roads, pedestrian and bicycle improvements. With that result in the foreground, the process to re-visit the LRTP includes public opinion research with Hillsborough County residents to obtain direct feedback on the main components of the 2035 LRTP (highway and roadway improvements, mass transit, pedestrian infrastructure, and bikepaths), gain insights into the highest priority needs and desires in transportation, and gather feedback on potential funding sources to pay for transportation priorities.

A first phase of focus groups was conducted in March 2011 with an emphasis on assessing the transportation priorities among Hillsborough County residents.¹ A second phase of focus groups was conducted November 14-17, 2011, with an emphasis on gathering feedback on various funding scenarios to finance transportation improvements. A set of key objectives was established with the Phase II focus groups:

- Gather qualitative feedback from a broad profile of Hillsborough County voters on various hypothetical funding scenarios for transportation improvements.
- Understand the perceived ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of each of the funding scenarios.
- Obtain feedback on secondary issues that are connected to the funding scenarios, including the potential for public-private partnerships to accelerate major transportation infrastructure projects, and merging the planning and transportation efforts between Hillsborough County and adjacent counties.

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. Our attention in analyzing the focus group discussions is placed on the language, perceptions and attitudes of the participants to understand *why* they think the way they do on these funding scenarios—not in counting or quantifying how many of the participants agreed or disagreed with certain points of view.

¹ A brief summary of the key findings from the Phase I focus groups is attached in exhibit A.

3.0 Research Format and Structure

Eight focus groups were convened November 14, 15, 16 and 17 (two per evening) at a Hillsborough County focus group facility. Participants were recruited by live phone call from a database of active-status voters from the following sub-areas 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, with an emphasis on Plant City residents
- 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 on transportation issues in Hillsborough County since 2008—including the 2035 LRTP Phase I focus groups in March 2011.

3.1 Group formation and participant screening

The recruiting program used these criteria to target a mix of participants that represent a general profile of Hillsborough County residents,:

- *Mixed gender*: balanced within each group
- *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 screening interview also included questions on specific eligibility requirements:

- *Professional background* – individuals were screened *out* from participating 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* – unemployed individuals were screened *out* from participating.
- *Perceptions on traffic* – A primary objective with these focus groups was to gather feedback and perceptions from voters on potential funding scenarios to address the system’s transportation challenges. With that in mind, we recruited participants who view traffic congestion and transportation in Hillsborough County as serious problems at some level—

which prior public opinion research has shown includes a very strong majority of Hillsborough County residents.² So in the recruiting interview, we asked this question:

“One of the big topics of discussion in the Tampa region these days is how to improve our transportation system, and that includes traffic congestion and public transportation. How serious of a problem do you think Tampa’s transportation system is these days—a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not that serious, or not serious a problem at all?”

In the screening interview, if the respondent said that transportation system is “not that serious of a problem” or “not a problem at all,” they were screened *out* from participating in the focus groups.

- *Attitude on transportation funding* – Also, in these focus groups we wanted to hear from Hillsborough County residents who are open-minded but uncommitted on paying additional taxes or fees for transportation. In the recruiting interview, we asked the following question:

“In general, just on a hypothetical level, how willing are you to pay more in terms of taxes or fees to improve transportation in the Tampa area? Would you be absolutely willing to pay more, not willing at all to pay more, or would you say you’re not sure?”

Interviewees who said they were either “absolutely willing” or “not willing at all” to pay more taxes or fees for transportation were screened *out* from participating focus groups. Since their answer to the screening question indicates an already-formed opinion on the topic, we sought to avoid overtly impacting and biasing the focus group discussions by including those who have a firm position *for* or *against* paying more for transportation improvements.

3.2 Funding Scenario Information

The discussions on the eight funding scenarios were aided by individual fact sheets presenting basic information on each scenario, and explaining each source of revenue and potential use of revenue. The fact sheets were graphic, colorful and designed to be user-friendly with a minimum of transportation jargon and data. The fact sheets are available from the MPO as a separate document.

3.3 Discussion Guide

Because these focus groups were drawn from distinct sub-areas of Hillsborough County, a uniform discussion guide was used 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 focus group discussion guide is included in this report (Appendix E).

² In a November 2010 survey conducted by the Kenney Group for the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority (TBARTA), 82% of Hillsborough County respondents said that traffic congestion is a “serious” issue, including 47% who said it was an “extremely serious” or “very serious” issue.

4.0 Discussion of Transportation Issues

The centerpiece of the focus group discussion was a presentation of eight funding scenarios to increase funding for transportation improvements in Hillsborough County. The eight scenarios were presented with user-friendly fact sheets describing the source of funds; how much each funding source could raise annually; how much each funding source would cost the average resident (or household) annually; and what the funding source could potentially be used for. The scenarios were presented in the following order:

1. Local gas tax
2. Special assessment district (community improvements)
3. Special assessment district (streetcar)
4. Mobility fee on new development
5. Express toll lanes with bus rapid transit
6. Tolloed intersection bypass lanes
7. Public service tax
8. Local sales tax

After reviewing the main components of each funding scenario, the focus group participants were asked to react to each one, ask questions, and provide feedback—including if they thought each one was a “good idea” or a “bad idea,” and why.³

Additionally, the focus groups were asked to consider other important transportation issues connected to the funding options: the pros and cons of merging Hillsborough County’s transportation services with adjacent counties such as Pinellas or Pasco; the pros and cons of the City of Tampa conducting its own transportation referendum independent of the County; and the option of eliminating the HART *ad valorem* tax and switching it with a sales tax.

³ Participants filled out a worksheet at the conclusion of each session, asking them to check if they thought each scenario was a “good idea” or a “bad idea.” See exhibit F.

5.0 Primary Findings

In evaluating the funding scenarios, the focus groups' overall response was the broader the application of the tax or fee, the stronger the support.

Overall, the funding scenarios that are based on broadly-applied taxes and fees had more appeal than those with narrowly-targeted funding sources. Participants explained that the local sales tax and local gas tax made more sense because they would be imposed on all residents, commerce, tourists and visitors, and thus have the fewest “free riders” compared with the other funding tools. Moreover, participants commented that an additional half-cent or one-cent sales tax was not too onerous or unmanageable, and a one-cent to five-cent per gallon local gas tax generated a similar response. (Although resistance to the local gas tax concept was higher due to the focus group participants perceptions of high gas prices at the pump, especially among those from the south and east areas of the county where they drive a lot of miles.)

“The other [funding scenarios] penalize certain groups or communities while the local sales tax is equitable.” Group III worksheet

“A penny is nominal, you're not going to see it as much, you're not going to feel it as much as if you had a utility bill tax or a gas tax. Like you said, you have to give in somewhere, you have to give something, so of all of them, this one seems the least painful.” Lesley-Jean Group VIII

“But I think [the sales tax] would be the most universally fair way to go.” Brenda Group IV

There are two notable exceptions to this principle of “broad application.” First, while the utility tax scenario also would be applied to a wide swath of commercial and residential consumers, the perceived weak connection between utility use (electricity consumption) and transportation funding trumped the “broad application” principle. Second, the tolling scenarios—which are not imposed broadly, but only on the users of the tolled facility—were very well-received, primarily because tolled facilities feature the overriding benefit of providing *choice*: non-users do not have to pay for the facility.

The opposition in these focus groups to a local sales tax or local gas tax was grounded not so much in these two taxes *per se*, but more so on concerns about adding more taxes of any kind in the current economy, the regressive nature of sales and gas taxes and their impacts on lower income households, and skepticism about government accountability and proper use of funds.

Localized, small-area funding tools in defined areas garnered less support than those that could be used for system-wide improvements.

Focus group participants articulated a common theme that Hillsborough County's transportation headaches and challenges are system-wide, impact all types of trips, and are experienced across the entire county. While participants could identify specific local and parochial transportation improvements they want to see, they voiced more positive feedback for funding scenarios that would improve the overall transportation system, and not just in small, defined areas. For example, neither the special assessment district nor the mobility fee

on new construction generated strong support in the focus groups, primarily because of the narrow reach of the resulting transportation improvements.

This finding is somewhat at odds with one of the primary findings from the Phase I research, which concluded that the most popular strategies proposed to address traffic congestion were small and targeted, centered on improving traffic flow on local roads, and did not add new travel modes to the system. The Phase I focus groups indicated a preference for a more incremental approach to transportation solutions—smaller projects, less intensive infrastructure improvements, and not the broad, sweeping infrastructure improvements like a county-wide light rail and commuter rail system that was proposed in the November 2010 referendum. However, despite the “start small” feedback from the Phase I focus groups—with an emphasis on addressing problems in the “first mile” and “last mile” of trips—the Phase II focus groups made it clear that they do not want to see a disconnected “patchwork” of transportation improvements to the system. Rather, they prefer to see improvements that make the County-wide system more cohesive and consistent, and noted that their daily trips—for work, shopping, entertainment, education, etc.—did not begin and end in their own neighborhood, but often spanned different neighborhoods and sometimes the entire county.

Many focus group participants also commented that a downside to implementing special assessment districts as a transportation funding tool is the issue of fairness. They noted that Hillsborough County residents with higher property values and higher incomes would be more able to pay for transportation improvements just for their local area, while poorer areas with lower property values would not see much transportation investment, causing their infrastructure to fall further behind.

“The neighborhoods who need it the most are probably the ones who would have the least amount of tax revenue to generate improvements.” Tom, Group VI

“That would create such an inconsistent experience in the City because there are areas with homes with higher property values and things of that nature that are probably receiving more income.” Dana, Group VII

“Special assessment district – lack of continuity. Wealthy can afford – poor areas with great needs could not.” Group II worksheet

“You travel through all the communities. You live in Brandon but you go to St. Pete and Tampa and New Tampa all the time. You don’t just stay in your own community.” Jen, Group VII

“The transportation problems are countywide. The transportation that is coming in from the county that is creating the gridlock in the city, unless you take care of it all, you really haven’t taken care of it.” Richard Group IV

Another negative perception of increasing property taxes for transportation is that “free-riders” would benefit from the improvements but would be exempt from paying for them. For example, homeowners and commercial property owners would be obligated to pay for improvements, but other sectors of the community and the economy—renters, commercial tenants, visitors, tourists, etc.—would enjoy the benefits without sharing in the costs.

It should be noted that the mobility funding scenario—which is a site-specific impact fee, and a narrowly-applied funding tool imposed just on developers—was not dismissed outright as a potential funding source, despite its limited application in making system-wide improvements. Several participants commented that the mobility fee does make sense in the spirit of having development contribute to infrastructure:

“We’re woefully behind requiring developers to pay their way. They should help pay for proper transportation planning with foresight for the future and actual roads needed to take care of future transportation needs.” Group III worksheet

“That would be good. It’s a one-time fee. And it’s right there. And we’re not paying it—they are. And the builder knows if he builds there, do whatever they want to do, they have to pay it. They gotta build the roads to get to it. They gotta help the community.” Carl, Group VI

Concerns and skepticism about government accountability and transparency were major obstacles to the focus groups’ support of any of the funding scenarios for transportation.

Each of the funding scenarios was accompanied by a chorus of feedback about the lack of trust in government—at all levels—to spend money wisely.

“My biggest concern with any tax is misappropriation. Who’s going to monitor this five cents [local gas tax]? How is it going to be utilized? Is it really going to be utilized to improve? Or is it going to be used to decorate offices, or new offices?” Noel Group II

“If was 5 cents, it would be worth it, if we were sure it would be used on the roads. But you don’t know.” Carl Group VI

“[I support] local gas tax as long as it will be verified to be only used for transportation expenses.” Group III worksheet

“My problem is not whether it’s one cent or two cents or five, but I genuinely believe that our elected officials, our county, everybody wastes money. It won’t get spent where it should, it goes where? I have no idea. I feel a third of it, a fourth of it, would go to any of these causes, and my problem is that, if I believed that the money was going to go to what they said it would, I’d pay ten cents. But I don’t even want to pay one cent.” Michelle, Group VI

A notable example of this mistrust came in feedback on the mobility fee, which some focus group participants remarked would become politicized. Local governments, they suggested, would find ways to waive the fees for developers, and dilute the fee’s effectiveness in generating new revenues for transportation.

Also, multiple focus group participants described (unprompted) how Florida voters approved a new lottery to bolster funding for public education, only to watch policy-makers reduce the base level of education funding to the point that the new lottery proceeds merely maintained—instead of increased—education funding. Cited as a “bait and switch” in the focus groups, this lottery illustration raised serious doubts in several participants’ minds about local government’s commitment to follow-through on using new taxes or fee revenues to actually increase transportation funding above current levels.

6.0 Additional Findings

6.1 Perspectives on Growth in Hillsborough County

Focus group participants generally agreed that growth will continue in Hillsborough County, and that the transportation system is inadequate to meet today's needs, much less the needs of the future with additional growth.

The focus groups reviewed basic data about projected growth in population and vehicle trips in Hillsborough County through the year 2035. (See handout in Appendix D.) Some participants expressed doubts about the pace of growth in the near-term due to lack of jobs and a slowdown of in-migration in the current economy. However, a consistent majority of the focus groups agreed that the long-range population projections were reasonable, and the transportation system county-wide is insufficient to handle today's demands, much less the demands that will come from growth.

"And ultimately, you look at these numbers, we can't just keep doing what we're doing. What, are we going to turn every road into another 301? Have every road have 6 lanes? It just doesn't make sense." Jon, Group VII

6.2 County and City Perspectives on Transportation

The diversity of Hillsborough County's transportation needs presents a major challenge to building unified support for any specific funding scenario.

Focus group participants from Tampa expressed more consistent support for transit improvements—including strengthening the bus system, and possibly adding rail service in a demonstration line—even if they do not expect that they personally would use the system. In contrast, focus group participants from the South County and East County/Plant City areas who were supportive of paying additional taxes or fees for transportation consistently emphasized that *building more road capacity and local road improvements are the absolute top priorities.*

The diversity of transportation priorities among residents from different areas of the County is even more amplified when specific local needs and desires are considered. For example, the focus group from the South County showed strong interest in a water ferry system to ease travel in Tampa Bay, and participants from the Plant City area were unified in their desire for a fix for regular delays from freight train obstructions. Any conceptual funding scenario county-wide will face the challenge of accommodating the different needs and transit modes favored by various areas of the county.

The notion of the City of Tampa moving forward with a transportation funding proposal on its own, separate from the county, generated moderate interest as an option worth exploring.

The focus groups briefly discussed the concept of the City of Tampa going it alone with their own transportation improvement referendum. Tampa residents did not voice strong opposition to the concept, nor were there comments about County residents benefitting as "free riders" on transportation improvements paid for by City taxpayers within city limits.

Again, a central issue among Tampa participants was transparency and accountability with funds. If the City of Tampa asked voters to approve a new tax or fee for transportation, how could the community be assured that the money would be spent properly, and on exactly what it was proposed for?

Combining Hillsborough County transportation efforts (including transit) with adjacent counties received mixed reaction—but overall, participants agreed it is a conversation worth having.

The focus group discussions frequently acknowledged that transportation issues cross county lines, and participants in all focus groups noted that the bigger geographic reach and combined resources of (for example) Hillsborough, Pinellas and/or Pasco counties could result in more and better transit and transportation services. The general sense among participants is that the regional or multi-county approach has some merits.

“I think that there needs to be more regional planning and coordinating of people moving and wherever and trying to accommodate those needs. So what doesn't work over there and doesn't connect over here, that doesn't make much sense. Because there is a lot of mobility between the sides of the bay.” John Group II

However, focus groups from South County and Plant City did express some concern that their transportation priorities—which, to many, already seem secondary to those of Tampa and the more urbanized areas of Hillsborough County—might be further marginalized in a multi-county transportation agency. This perspective was also framed as an “accountability” issue—combining transportation and transit systems with a neighboring county (or counties) does not eliminate concerns about local government accountability, and in some ways, heightens those concerns.

“. . . Because every time Hillsborough County talks about raising our taxes, it only benefits west Hillsborough County. It's all about west I-75, and nothing for us out east.” Tom Group VI

“This is something that's definitely been kind of a battle between the northwest part of the County and the south part of the county, because south county taxpayers have been paying and paying and paying like everybody else, but things only seem to happen in certain districts.” Vicki, Group IV

6.3 More Reactions to Funding Scenarios

Reactions to the various funding scenarios suggest that, at some level, there should be a direct link between the tax source and transportation.

Funding scenarios that contemplate increasing property taxes through special assessment districts, or imposing a surcharge on public utility bills, were unpopular in the focus groups in large part because of the perceived lack of connection between the funding source and the targeted infrastructure. (To paraphrase: *what does my utility bill or property tax bill have to do with the transportation system?*) Through this lens, the focus groups commented that the local

gas tax and the tolling facilities have the strong benefit of being directly connected to improving the infrastructure system they are derived from.

The mobility fee scenario raised concerns about adding costs to a struggling industry in a down economy.

Several participants commented that imposing a mobility fee on new construction would add another obstacle to getting new development and job creation moving again in a stalled economy. Also, there were concerns that any additional costs imposed on developers would merely be passed on to homebuyers, building owners and tenants—potentially creating more negative drag on the economy.

Public-private partnerships were received as a reasonable approach to major transportation improvements.

The concept of public-private partnerships (P3s) was presented in the context of the tolling scenarios as a method of financing and accelerating the timing of major transportation projects that cannot be financed in the near-term by local, state and federal governments. For the most part, comments on P3s were favorable with neither strong enthusiasm nor pushback, though there was not great depth of knowledge about P3 projects. There were questions asked about financial “what-ifs” and if the public sector and taxpayers would be responsible for the financial obligations if the public-private project were fail financially. Several commented that the approach deserves consideration by local and state policy-makers.

Participants responded positively to the tolling scenarios because they provide a clearly defined choice.

In every focus group, the tolling scenarios were popular because they are all about ‘choice’: drivers have the choice of paying extra to use the facility, and if they don’t, then it does not cost them anything. Also, some participants commented option of adding express bus or bus rapid transit to tolled lanes would be an enhancement because it provides a new mobility option.

“Tolled intersections I feel would be the best because the individual gets to make the choice and the more it’s used would help lessen the load on regular roads.” Group I worksheet

“[I] would use express toll lanes. Gives people the choice. If you don’t want to pay, don’t use it. Great idea – busy working people will have an option to avoid traffic – I would!” Group II worksheet

However, the positive response to the tolling scenarios was accompanied by concerns about the disruption and practicality of constructing such facilities within the existing roadway network. Expanding I-275 to add tolled lanes between downtown Tampa and the Town & County area, or creating five tolled intersection bypasses on Dale Mabry Highway, were both viewed as potentially very disruptive projects to build, with high costs and high impacts on local businesses.

6.4 Responses to Adding & Expanding Rail Travel Modes

The idea of a light rail demonstration line generated supportive response—more so with focus groups from Tampa than the outlying areas of the County—though there was little consensus on where such a line should be built.

Many focus group participants expressed support for a demonstration light rail line as a sensible incremental step to test how this transit option would actually “work” in Tampa. However, there was not a clear consensus on whether such a line should connect downtown and the airport, downtown and USF, or some other combination of destinations. Also, participants did not make a distinction between light rail and commuter rail. Notably, focus group participants in the eastern and southern areas of the county were consistent in not supporting rail modes, as they generally perceived that they would receive little to no benefit from it.

The topic of extending the TECO streetcar line generated neutral-to-negative response.

The funding scenario proposing a special assessment district to construct extensions of the TECO streetcar line was met with mostly lukewarm response. Participants from all areas of the county commented that the TECO streetcar line is primarily a tourist attraction and does not meet the everyday needs of local commuters or residents looking for an additional transit option. Some participants shared the view it makes sense to extend the existing line into residential neighborhoods to provide a transit option to downtown commuters, but there was little to no enthusiasm in the focus groups in those Tampa areas to pay additional taxes to subsidize such an extension. The focus group that included residents of South Tampa and West Tampa were generally more supportive of the streetcar line than participants from other areas of the county, and they also indicated more support for the special assessment district concept to extend the current line—but again, the support was not enthusiastic.

6.5 Recollection of 2010 Transportation Referendum

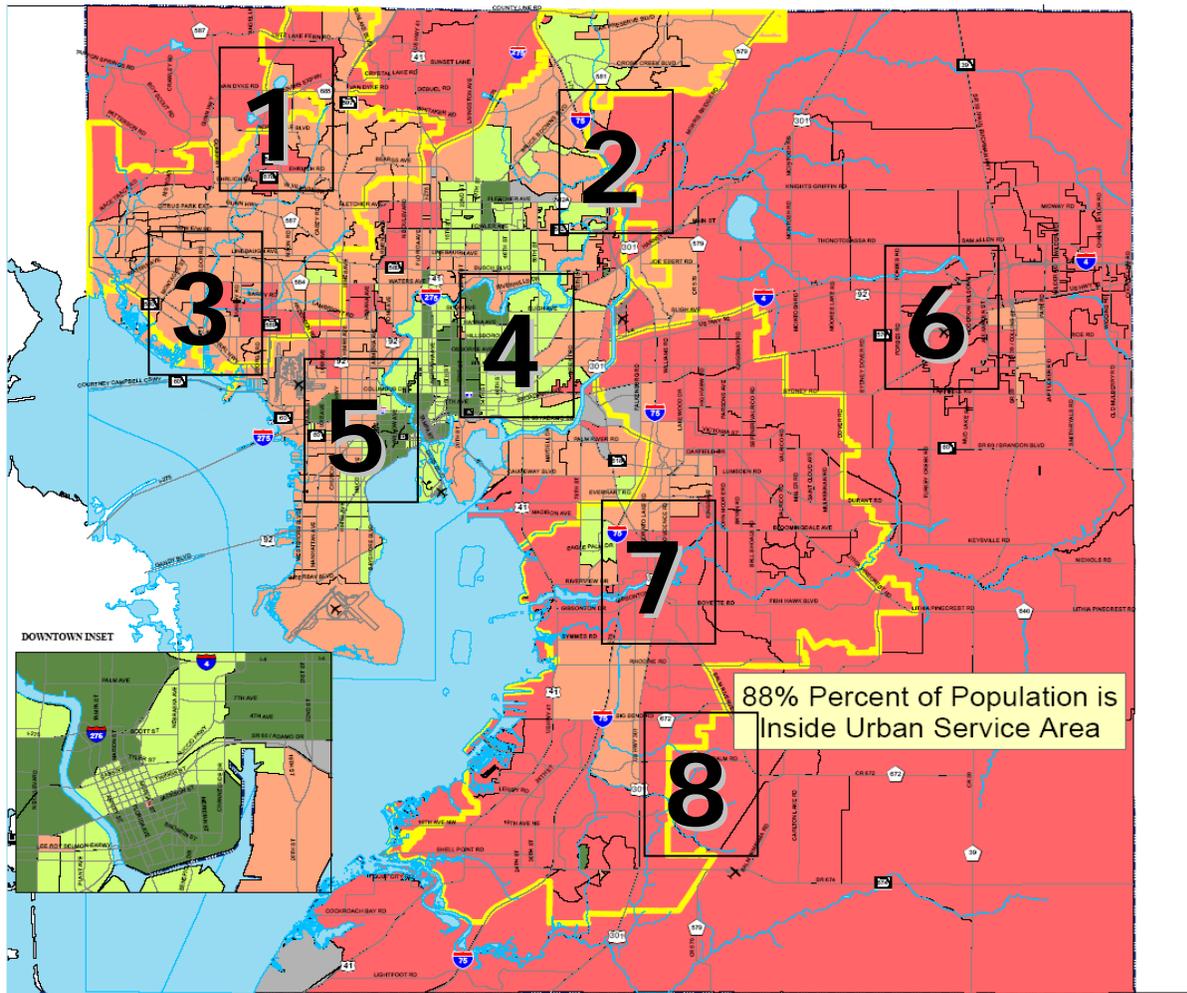
The focus groups’ recollection of the 2010 Hillsborough County transportation sales tax referendum was very limited—and mostly inaccurate.

Though not part of the discussion guide, the 2010 county-wide transportation referendum did frequently come up, unprompted, in the focus groups. Most often, the references were confused with the canceled high speed rail line from Tampa to Orlando, which was not part of the 2010 referendum. There was little awareness among these focus groups participants of what the 2010 referendum package included.

Appendix A: Key Findings from Phase I Focus Groups (conducted March 2011)

1. Hillsborough County's traffic situation is a byproduct of local government's failure to plan ahead and ensure adequate transportation infrastructure.
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.
3. Many focus group participants think that the Tampa area and Hillsborough County are too sprawling, too car-centric, and too dispersed for mass transit to ever truly make an impact.
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 no baseline perception at all.
5. Participants who were in favor of expanding mass transit generally supported a more incremental approach.
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.

Appendix B: Focus Group Subareas



Appendix C: Screening Interview Script

The Kenney Group

Contact: Ben Kelly 303.534.4399 x 283

Hillsborough County MPO – Long Range Transportation Plan 2035

Focus Group Dates: November 14, 15, 16, 17

Focus Group Recruiting: Interview Screener

#	Date	Time	Group sub-area description [sub-areas defined by ZIP code in voter file]
Group 1	Monday, November 14	6pm – 7:30pm	NW Hillsborough
Group 2	Monday, November 15	8pm – 9:30pm	NE Hillsborough
Group 3	Tuesday, November 16	6pm – 7:30pm	Town & Country, Egypt Lake
Group 4	Tuesday, November 16	8pm – 9:30pm	Central & East Tampa, downtown
Group 5	Wednesday, November 17	6pm – 7:30pm	South & West Tampa, Westshore
Group 6	Wednesday, November 17	8pm – 9:30pm	Eastern Hillsborough – <i>emphasis on Plant City & Plant City area residents</i>
Group 7	Thursday, November 18	6pm – 7:30pm	Greater Brandon area, Palm River
Group 8	Thursday November 18	8pm – 9:30pm	South Shore, Apollo Beach, Sun City Center

Group quotas to be established: mix of gender; mix of ages 18+; mix of political party affiliation

Determine county sub-area 1-8 [from sample]

Determine gender [from sample]

Determine party affiliation [from sample]

Determine age [from sample]

BEGIN BY ASKING FOR THE PERSON WHOSE NAME APPEARS ON YOUR CALLING LIST. IF THAT PERSON IS NOT AVAILABLE, ASK WHEN IT WOULD BE CONVENIENT FOR YOU TO CALL BACK. DO NOT RECRUIT ANYONE WHOSE NAME DOES NOT APPEAR ON YOUR LIST.

Hello ... my name is _____ I'm with Accudata Research in Tampa ... we're conducting a very brief survey tonight and I was hoping I could ask you a few quick questions.

1. In the past six months, have you participated in any focus groups or other market research studies? **[Participation in telephone surveys is allowable]**

Yes - - - **terminate**

No - - - ***continue***

2. Which of the following best describes your working status?

Full-time for an employer	CONTINUE TO Q2A
Part-time for an employer	CONTINUE TO Q2A
Self-employed or home-based business	CONTINUE TO Q3
Homemaker or stay-at-home parent	CONTINUE TO Q3
Retired	CONTINUE TO Q3
Student	CONTINUE TO Q3
Unemployed	<u>TERMINATE</u>
Other	CONTINUE TO Q3
Prefer not to respond	CONTINUE TO Q3

2A. Do you work in any of the following fields or industries?

- Market research firm
- Media (including print, TV, radio)
- Public transportation agency or authority (local, state or federal)
- Taxi or commercial driver service
- For an elected or appointed official
- For local government
- Public safety official.

If yes to any of the above, terminate

3. How often you typically read a local newspaper, either the actual newspaper or reading it on the internet?

Every day	
Couple of times per week	
At least once per week	
Hardly ever	TERMINATE
Never	TERMINATE

4. One of the big topics of discussion in the Tampa region these days is how to improve our transportation system, and that includes traffic congestion and public transportation. How serious of a problem do you think Tampa's transportation system is these days—a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not that serious or not serious a problem at all?

Very serious	CONTINUE
Somewhat serious	CONTINUE
Not that serious	TERMINATE
Not serious at all	TERMINATE
Don't know, not sure, no answer	TERMINATE

5. In general, just on a hypothetical level, how willing are you to pay more in terms of taxes or fees to improve transportation in the Tampa area? Would you be absolutely willing to pay more, not willing at all to pay more, or would you say you're not sure?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Absolutely willing | TERMINATE |
| Not willing at all | TERMINATE |
| Not sure | CONTINUE |
| Depends (volunteer, don't read) | CONTINUE |

6. Part of the reason I'm calling is that we will be conducting focus groups in your area the week of November 14. Are you familiar with focus groups? Basically, focus groups are a form of research where a small group of people get together to discuss important issues impacting their community. We conduct focus groups purely for research ... we are not selling anything. The groups typically last about an hour and a half and are actually pretty interesting ... and ... since we understand your time is valuable And since you are helping us with our research ... we will pay you \$100 cash for participating ... the group will be held this coming:

[ENTER TABLE]

Do you think you'd be able to join us?

Yes

No **THANK YOU GOOD NIGHT – TERMINATE**

IF YES.... RECORD INFORMATION.

I would like to send you a confirmation letter and directions to the facility. In order to do so, could you please tell me your mailing address and a phone number where you can be reached:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Date of focus group: _____ Time: _____

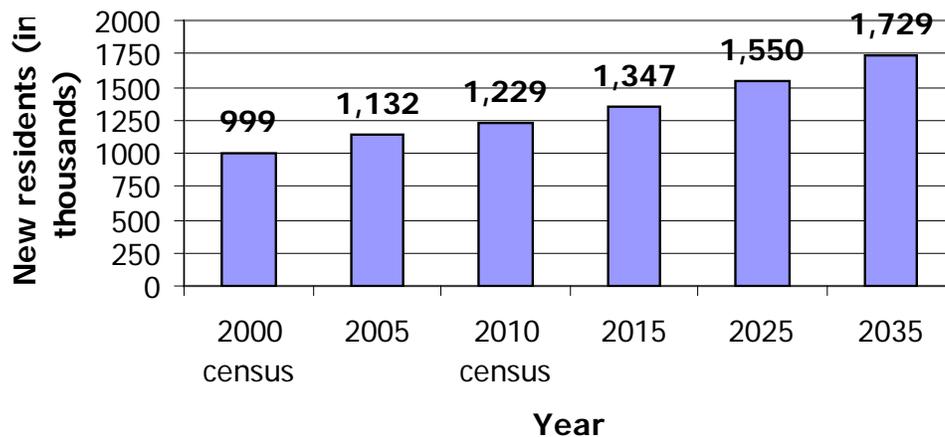
We are only inviting a few people, so it is very important that you notify us as soon as possible if for some reason you are unable to attend. Please call [recruiter] at [telephone number] if this should happen. We look forward to seeing you on {date} at {time}. If you use reading glasses, please bring them with you to the focus group.

[END]

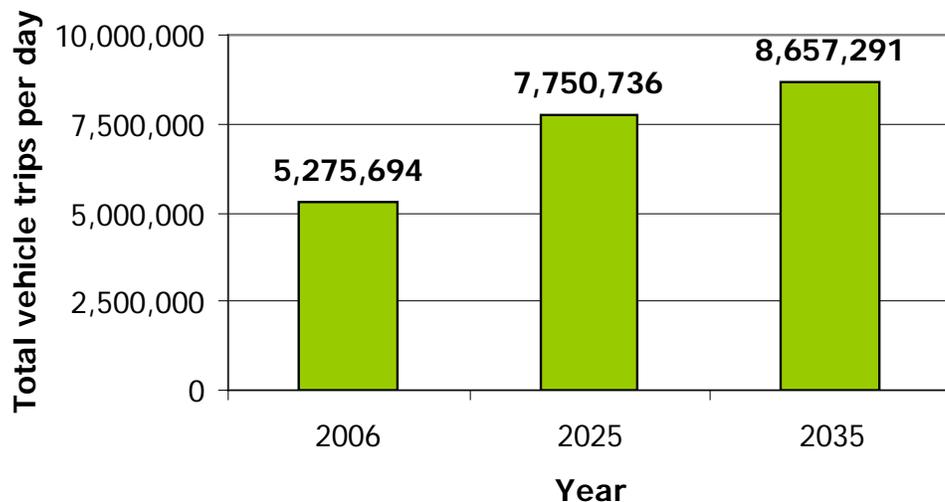
Appendix D: Population Growth & Vehicle Trip Projections Handout

Hillsborough County Projections for Population and Vehicle Trips

Mid-Range Projected Population Growth, Hillsborough County



Daily Hillsborough County Vehicle Trips



Appendix E: Discussion Guide

the **kenney** group

Discussion Guide

Hillsborough County MPO – Post-Referendum Analysis, Phase 2

November 14, 15, 16, 17, 2011

(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 gather qualitative information from a broad profile of Hillsborough County voters on various hypothetical funding scenarios for transportation improvements.

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 / TRANSPORTATION

When we called you to invite you to participate in this focus group, we asked you a couple questions about local transportation.

First off, tell me what you think about local transportation – around where you live, and in Hillsborough County generally? [listen for but do not prompt: public transit, highways, commuting, congestion, intersections, pedestrian & bicycle infrastructure]

- Brief exercise: on your pads, please write down very briefly what “works” and what “doesn’t work” in the transportation system?
- How many of you would agree that the transportation system in Hillsborough County is a concern? Show of hands - Is it a major problem, or just a minor irritation? How much does it directly impact your life? Is it getting worse?

CONTEXT: TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM TRENDS / “PRESSURES”

I’d like to briefly lay out a couple realities [“hard facts”?] about traffic congestion and the transportation system in Hillsborough County [facts could be tailored/customized for each focus group sub-area]

Handout showing: 1) recent and projected population growth chart; 2) recent and projected population growth graph for Hillsborough County through 2035; 3) projected job growth for Hillsborough County through 2035

Questions:

- What are your perceptions of this information, and does it fit with your personal experience—or not?
- Do you believe these projections and this information on the county [regional] transportation system? *[Listen for: trust in local policy makers, elected officials, etc.]*
- Considering the information on the transportation system’s future needs, do you think the *status quo* in transportation funding is acceptable? Why? Why not? *[listen for relationship to state of the economy, jobs, attitudes on government spending, other public priorities]*

Is this at a “crisis” level?

FUNDING SCENARIOS

Pass around fact sheets

Intro: There’s an ongoing discussion about how to fund the transportation system. I’m going to pass around a series of fact sheets that describe—in simple terms—various options for transportation funding. In each one, we have illustrated a source of funding, described “how much it would cost me,” what the estimated revenues would be, and how the money could be used (“what could it pay for?”).

- Spend a couple minutes describing the scenarios.
- For each scenario, briefly discuss;
 - What are some general impressions of this scenario?
 - What do you like, or dislike, about each one? Why?
 - Does this plan address what “works” and what “doesn’t work” in transportation, as we discussed earlier? Why, why not?
 - What are your questions? What concerns you?

-
- **Local Gas Tax** [How much does the price at the pump today affect your opinion?]
 - **Special Assessment District (Community Improvements)**
 - **Special Assessment District (Streetcar)** [with emphasis on expanding streetcar as a commuter/transit service, in addition to the tourism service]
 - **Mobility Fee on New Development**
 - **Express Toll Lanes with Bus Rapid Transit**

- What is your perception about the private sector being involved in—and even owning—these improvements (i.e. public private partnerships)?
- Tolled Intersection Bypass Lanes with Bus Rapid Transit [*Dale Mabry illustration*]
- **Local Sales Tax** [probe on: attitudes on a sales tax mechanism just in Tampa/Temple Terrace and not in the county; what-ifs on trading out ad valorem property tax for sales tax]
 - Would you be more or less willing to support a sales tax if the three counties' (Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas) transit agencies and transportation planning agencies were to merge, possibly including a county expressway authority as well?
 - Local government responsiveness—single county vs. multi-county models
- **Public Service Tax on Utilities (Electricity)** [already assessed in municipalities, not in unincorporated areas]

We've talked about potential sources of funds and how they could be used in Hillsborough County. Does this conversation need to take place on a regional or multi-county level? [*probe on sales tax mechanism imposed just in Tampa/Temple Terrace, if voters approved*]

FINAL EXERCISE

Worksheet: Which scenario(s) are a good idea or a bad idea, and why?

CONCLUSION

Final comments, summary, thanks.

Appendix F: Focus Group Participant Worksheet

Good idea?	Bad idea?	
_____	_____	Local Gas Tax
_____	_____	Special Assessment District (Community Improvements)
_____	_____	Special Assessment District (Streetcar)
_____	_____	Mobility Fee on New Development
_____	_____	Express Toll Lanes with Bus Rapid Transit
_____	_____	Tolled Intersection Bypass Lanes with Bus Rapid Transit
_____	_____	Local Sales Tax
_____	_____	Public Service Tax on Utilities (Electricity) (note: this tax is already imposed in Tampa, Temple Terrace and Plant City)

In the space below, please list some reasons why you like the ones you like, and/or reasons why you dislike others.
