

Appendix D

Content Analysis: Correspondence and Comments Received for June 9, 2021 Public Hearing to Adopt TIP

Introduction

NVivo qualitative analysis software was used to code the content of all emails, voicemails, Facebook comments submitted on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) 'events' page, and public comments made regarding the public hearing. The correspondence received does not necessarily constitute a representative sample of the general public.

To inform Hillsborough County residents about the TIP and engage their input on funded projects and priorities for future funding, TPO staff initiated an engagement campaign which began by advertising and posting a draft TIP document 30 days in advance of the public hearing. Following the initial advertisements, roadside signs were posted and hearing notices in both English and Spanish were mailed to residences near major projects. In compliance with the requirements outlined in the Public Participation Plan, legal ads were published in newspapers of general circulation (including one with a Hispanic readership and one with an African-American readership), and a Facebook event was created to solicit comments in digital format.

Leading up to the June 9th 2021 public hearing on the TIP adoption, the TPO received 24 emails, 3 Facebook comments, 1 Twitter comment and 3 voicemail messages regarding the TIP and its projects. At the hearing, 20 individuals signed up to provide public comment, which were delivered following presentation of the TIP update. Since 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the public hearing was presented in a hybrid meeting format using the Webex meeting videoconferencing service. While a quorum of board members attended the hearing in person, public participation for this hearing required phone or internet connectivity. Some members of the public have commented that this format is convenient and may have facilitated greater participation among residents with a phone and/or internet access while effectively preventing participation by those without. To inform the public of the non-traditional videoconferencing format, TPO staff advertised the hearing agenda on the Plan Hillsborough website which provided a link to register in advance to the meeting. Roadside signs were posted at 21 locations across the county, especially communities with new, major projects and more than 17,000 informational flyers were mailed to residences within one-quarter mile of these funded projects.

General Overview of Comments Received

A content analysis of the emails, Twitter and Facebook comments received in advance of the TIP Public Hearing mainly represented the following themes – Tampa, City, I-275, traffic, interstate, project, public transit, boulevard, pollution etc.

1. A majority of the comments received as emails were from public who were against the interstate expansion. These comments were specifically requesting the TPO to use public money to fund projects such as Boulevard Project, light rail, improve East-West

connectivity and fund public transit projects. There were 10 such comments out of the 23 emails.

- a. *One of the commenters specifically requested the TPO Board to fund mass transit projects that emit less pollution, decrease commuting time, run on time and provide frequent service and safe and affordable to use.*
 - b. *Another commenter supported conversion of the Interstate I-275 into a Boulevard project. He believed that a Boulevard would ease traffic through the city, create more local business opportunities for Tampa area entrepreneurs, and create a more pleasant living experience for Tampa and Hillsborough residents. Further, it would bring more revenue to the City and County.*
 - c. *On the contrary, one of the speakers supported the downtown interchange expansion and felt that it was a vital artery in Tampa. He also supported the DTI “quick fix” plans that required the acquisition of seven parcels for the downtown operational improvements.*
2. Similarly, among the speakers signed up to speak at the live public hearing, most of them requested that the Board strike Table 2, line items 47, 48 and 49 from the TIP, which would result in removing the general purpose lanes north of downtown on I-275, the exit ramps in Ybor City, 14th and 15th St., express lanes on I-275 from West of Lois Ave to North of Hillsborough River, connections at Himes Ave and Downtown Tampa, and the flyover ramp from Southbound I-275 to I-4 and from Westbound I-4 to Northbound I-275. Many speakers argued that the interstate expansion would encourage induced demand that would in turn fail to solve the traffic problem and increase traffic.
- a. *One of the speakers argued that interstate expansion would create significant harmful effects on the health and safety of the residents. According to the speaker, “The Air Resources Board recommends against building homes within 500 feet of freeways. The pollution they produce significantly increases one's risk of cancer, asthma, heart disease and other illnesses. We the people oppose any new Interstate capacity. We oppose any new property acquired. We support investment in public transit and the research and design laid out in the Boulevard concept study. We support investment in transit alternatives that will encourage and support healthier lifestyle and a healthier environment and ecosystem.*
 - b. *Another speaker requested “the transit friendly TPO Board to once and for all end the failed practices of sacrificing the long-term health and economic resiliency of our city county and region for more cars, more trips, more crashes, more fatalities, more inequity and more right-of-way. The 1950s engineering practices such as being proposed should be considered no longer acceptable by this Board.”. Further, the speaker also argued that there was no such thing as a quick fix package. Adding capacity would only shift those trips to other modes and make it even more difficult. He strongly urged the Board to change the current plan for a future without the interstate. “Plan for a future with other mobility options tonight.*

Plan for a future when these TIP hearings produce more projects that move more people in a safer, sustainable, and more equitable way. Flip that pie chart around where two-thirds of our money should not be being spent on capacity and more money should not be being spent on miscellaneous category than for transit. Do that by removing item. 47, 48 and 49 from the TIP and leave this region and the state into a future in that others are already accomplishing or risk falling even further behind.”

- c. *There was a comment from a citizen who supported the priority 47 and urged the TPO Board to keep the additional lanes North of Bearss and to continue with the expansion plans to maintain the integrity of the improvements and to avoid bottlenecks and tapering of I-275.*
3. The next most frequently appearing theme was “transit”. Most of the commenters who were against the interstate expansion strongly supported the need for transit, streetcar expansion and light rail. Residents felt that the need for transportation was to serve the local residents and hence it was important to invest in transit.
 - a. *One of the commenters argued that the interstate roads were dangerous, and the drivers were impulsive. Hence it would be better to remove the drivers from interstate and encourage mass transit.*
 - b. *Another commenter urged the Board members to encourage Transit Oriented Development (TOD) projects. The commenter supported the expansion of streetcar into Tampa Heights which would be a boon for locals and tourists. Providing more transportation options to people would help the economy by increasing the spending at the local restaurants. In addition, the Bus Rapid Transit from USF to downtown Tampa was also a commendable project.*
 - c. *Some of the speakers at the public hearing also expressed their concern about the need for FDOT to invest in transit. One of the speakers encouraged the TPO Board to work with HART and FDOT to reinstate the priority for a high-capacity East-West Transit connecting East Tampa to Westshore. The speaker also supported the Streetcar modernization and extension study and the transit project to connect downtown to USF area.*

Figure 1 below shows the word cloud that has been created based on the most frequently used words and themes that appeared in the emails, voicemails, social media posts and the public comments. Due to the limited data in each individual category, the comments were collectively analyzed as one dataset and the word cloud was generated using NVivo software.

correction tools and language modeling in order to reduce errors from unanalyzable cases.² For this supplementary analysis, however, deviations from expected inputs have not been corrected for the aforementioned reason. Autocoding is a technique that identifies and generates codes based on syntax, word frequency, and word uniqueness. Code, here, means a “word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data”.³ (Saldana, 2015) In a dataset with few items of correspondence, reliability may be compromised. To account for this limitation of the software, an assessment and validation technique known as “triangulation” was applied to establish a loose consensus of the themes based on “examination [by] multiple observers, theories, methods, and data sources”.⁴

NVivo 13 is the latest version of the software and the autocoding procedure now requires the user to produce a word bank of key terms representing themes to code. This technique is sometimes referred to as ‘informed coding’, meaning that the researcher approaches the raw data with pre-existing theoretical knowledge and hence, with expectations of which codes and themes exist within the raw data.⁵ The decision to change the methodology is pragmatic because, as mentioned, TIP comments have been thematically coded for 6 years and similar themes continue to appear each year. Although NVivo 13 refers to this procedure as “autocoding”, this seems to be a misnomer as it requires codes to be input manually and are no longer generated automatically, in the strictest sense of the term. To eliminate confusion, we will continue to refer to it as autocoding.

NVivo is also limited in its capability to autocode pictures, diagrams and hand-drawn maps. While it is possible for codes to be manually applied to images,⁶ the additional insights gained from coding images compared to the effort required render this impractical – not to mention that coded imagery introduces additional problems of bias, credibility, validity, and confirmability.⁷

The emails received were manually reviewed to make sure that they were free of spelling errors and complete before inputting into the software. Long email chains and partial conversations could introduce the possibility data processing errors if the emails are imputed to NVivo as-is. To reduce this risk, email threads were manually scrubbed to eliminate duplicate data. The comments received at the public hearing are usually transcribed by the Clerk’s office. This time, they were manually transcribed from the video recording of the public comments. The

² King, L. and Dickinson, M. (2014). Leveraging known semantics for spelling corrections. *Proceedings of the third workshop on NLP for computer-assisted language learning*. NEALT Proceedings Series 22 / Linkoping Electronic Conference Proceedings 107: 43-58.

³ Saldana, J. (2015). An Introduction to Codes and Coding. *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers (3rd ed.)*. 1-31. London: Sage.

⁴ Denzin, NK. (1978) *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods (2nd ed.)*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

⁵ Thornberg, R. (2012). Informed Grounded Theory. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*. (56), 3, 243-259.

⁶ Banks, M. (2014). Analysing Images. In Flick, U. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, 394-408. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

⁷ Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *Nursing Plus Open*, (2), 8-14.

transcription of comments made during the hearing was also scrubbed to remove personal identifiers including names of the speakers to prevent Nvivo from generating a code.

Themes Emerging from

A sample of the most common themes emerging from the emails, voicemails, social media posts and the comments received at the public hearing include:

- “Tampa”
- “Project”
- “Item”
- “City”
- “Interstate”
- “Community”

The most frequently appearing word was “Tampa” referring to projects in the City of Tampa, Tampa Bay Next, Tampa Heights, Downtown Tampa, Tampa St., etc. The word tree below in Figure 2, shows the matches for Tampa as they appeared in the comments and the emails which has been referenced in over 56 places across the data. Various commenters also introduced themselves as Tampa residents while they expressed their opinions. Many commenters requested the Board not to expand the highway and the downtown interchange. Instead, they expressed a desire to convert the highway into a boulevard and concern over the sound and the air pollution caused due to the highways.

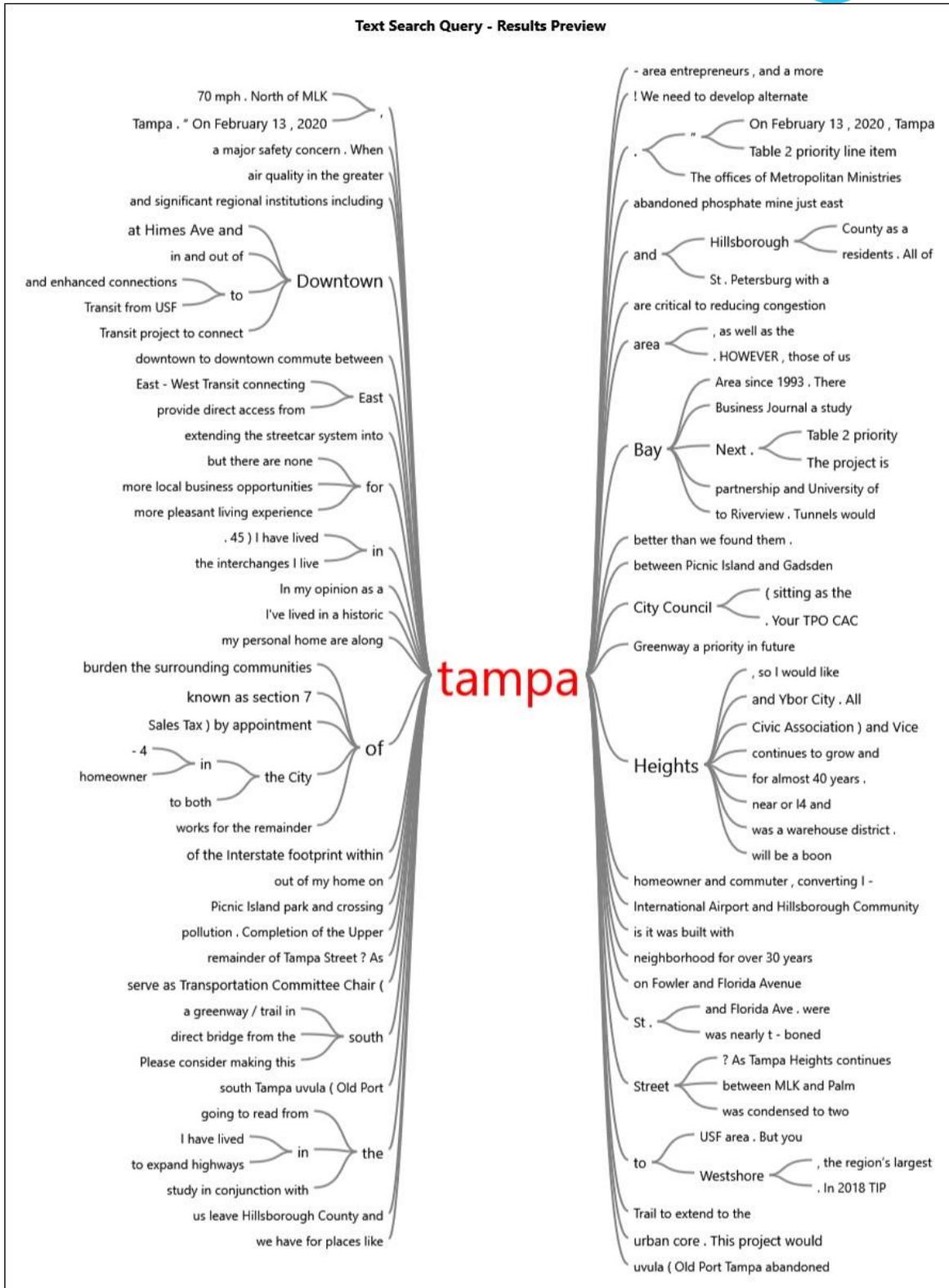


FIGURE 2: TEXTUAL WORD TREE OF THE COMMENTS RELATED TO "TAMPA" AND ITS STEMMED WORDS. THE LARGER FONT SIZE INDICATES THAT A SUB-THEME EMERGED, WHICH WAS OFTEN STEMMED TO THE PREDOMINANT THEME.

quality of life. One of the emails requested the Board to reinstate the East-West MetroRapid to provide access from East Tampa to Westshore.

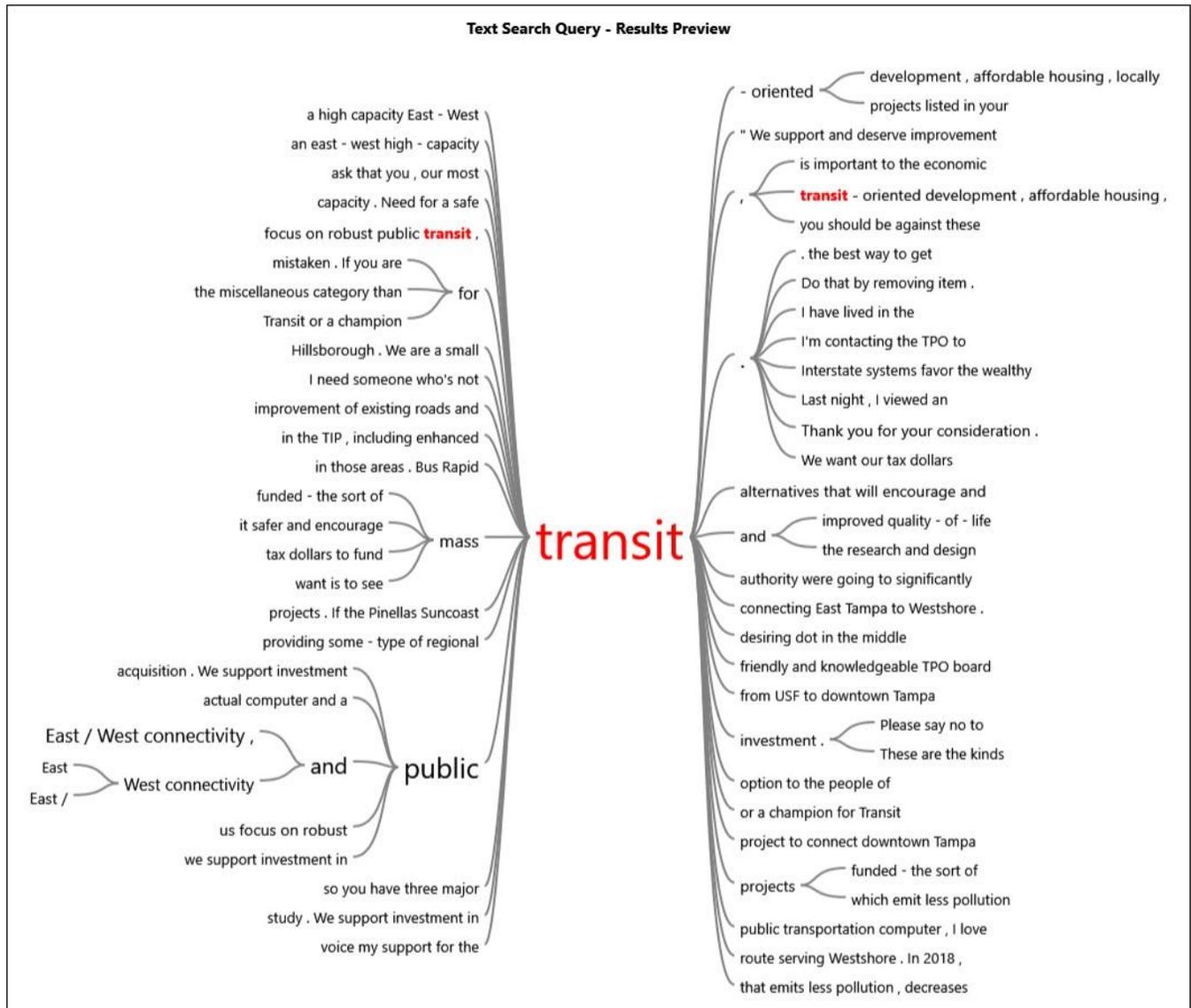


FIGURE 5: TEXTUAL WORD TREE OF THE COMMENTS RELATED TO 'PUBLIC' AND ITS STEMMED WORDS. THE LARGER FONT SIZE INDICATES THAT A SUB-THEME EMERGED, WHICH WAS OFTEN STEMMED TO THE PREDOMINANT THEME.

"City", "Interstate" and "275" were other commonly appearing themes that appeared in almost 50 emails and comments. One of the commenters requested the Board to improve the inner-city air quality and health by making investments in electric vehicles including buses. Another request was to knit the city's urban grid back together. Another resident urged the Board to convert I-275 from highway to boulevard and ease traffic pattern through the city. In general, the ideas expressed were in support of mass transit and avoid any further interstate expansion. There were other comments that expressed concern over lack of sidewalks and the need for creating a safe bikeable and walkable neighborhood. Other residents requested the Board to consider trail network as a priority funding.

General Overview of Live Comments and Emails

There were various opportunities made available for the public to participate, including a phone-in option and a live virtual public meeting, where the public could register ahead for the meeting to speak; or send their comments through emails. Twitter or Facebook. The Webex platform was used to present the meeting which was recorded and made available to the public through YouTube following the hearing. It is to be noted that although there were many opportunities provided to the public to express their concerns at the public hearing, there were still barriers that reduced effective public participation for those who did not have access to internet, phones, or computers.

Twenty speakers signed up to speak at the public hearing, including one who donated their time to another speaker. Several of the speakers who attended the public hearing requested that the Board strike line items 47, 48 and 49 from the Table 2, which would result in removing the general purpose lanes north of downtown on I-275, the exit ramps in Ybor City, 14th and 15th St., express lanes on I-275 from West of Lois Ave to North of Hillsborough River, connections at Himes Ave and Downtown Tampa, and the flyover ramp from Southbound I-275 to I-4 and from Westbound I-4 to Northbound I-275. A couple of the commenters pointed out the negative effects of induced demand and the effects on traffic congestion and increased pollution. Instead, the TIP should focus on robust public transit, transit-oriented development, affordable housing, locally owned businesses, historic preservation, sustainability and resilience. They felt that an enhanced transit network would support the economic prosperity of the neighborhoods and support local businesses.

Discussion & TPO Board Actions

In analyzing the comments regarding the TIP update, the results indicate that there is a sizable sample of residents desiring a robust public transit system instead of highway expansion and this theme is strongly reflected in emails, social media posts, and in-person comments. Several commenters reference comments articulated by other speakers, indicating that the sample of residents is organized and very specific in their suggestions. Nearly one-quarter of comments received mentioned a desire to convert of Interstate 275 into a boulevard in the hopes that this will encourage greater investment in transit modes and improve East-West connectivity. Similarly, more than half of all comments received expressed opposition to interstate expansion, addition of toll lanes, or to the downtown operational improvements mentioned above. There were also concerns over the lack of availability of sidewalks and appeals to the Board to invest in complete streets projects to improve bike and walkability.

After receiving public comment and discussion by individual members, the TPO Board passed several motions. The final motions were as follows:

1. Amendment to remove Projects #448505-1 and 445652-1 [SR582/Fowler Ave (I-275 to I-75)] from TIP Table 1: List of Priorities Funded for Construction and move them back to TIP Table 2: List of Candidates for Funding. These amendments moved projects #448505-1 and 445652-1 to 5th rank in the TPO priority list. The motion passed unanimously with a 15-0 vote.

2. Amendment to revise the description of Projects #431821-3 and 431821-4 [I-275 from North of Martin Luther King Jr Blvd to N of Bearss Ave] on TIP Table 2: List of Candidates for Funding was passed with a 11-4 vote.
3. Amendment to move the HART Scheduling Software project to the top of the Smart Cities priority list (making it Priority #26 on TIP Table 2), which was passed unanimously.
4. Commissioner Overman directed staff to host a workshop and identify strategies for moving forward to study the feasibility of the HART CSX right-of-way acquisition study. This motion was to develop cost estimates and identify timelines for implementing passenger rail along CSX Transportation railroad tracks. That motion passed unanimously.
5. The TPO Board approved the FY2021/22-2025/26 Transportation Improvement Program Update and Priority List with a 11 to 4 vote.

The detailed motions from the TIP hearing can be found in the [TIP](#) section of the Plan Hillsborough webpage.⁸

⁸ <http://www.planhillsborough.org/transportation-improvement-program-tip/>