

# TransitNews

## Transit Ambassadors: Helping Transit Customers Find Their Way

This past Labor Day weekend, the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) had the daunting task of restructuring its fixed-route bus and light rail service due to the inaugural Baltimore Grand Prix. The international racing series event was held in downtown Baltimore and, as a result, many of the city's main arterial roadways in the downtown area had to be closed. Because much of MTA's service converges in downtown Baltimore, roadway closures in downtown meant that MTA would need to adjust its service and schedules during the event. To facilitate communication of these service changes to transit patrons, MTA collaborated with TOA in establishing a Transit Ambassadors Program.

TOA staff, serving as Transit Ambassadors, were placed at key bus stop, light rail station, and metro station locations to direct and inform the riding public of temporary changes to bus stop locations and service schedules. Light rail service was divided in half along with the closure of two key downtown stations. To connect the light rail service, MTA implemented a temporary connector bus service. Transit ambassadors were posted at the two temporary end station locations to direct transit riders onto the connector bus service and race fans to the Grand Prix event entrances.

During the race weekend, MTA was also able to use Transit Ambassadors to respond to customer concerns and complaints in the field, thus deflecting and addressing issues immediately. The Transit Ambassador Program was a huge success, and TOA has been asked to assist with the coordination of transit ambassadors for future events in the city including the Baltimore Marathon.

For more information regarding Transit Ambassadors and other similar efforts, contact Don Kloehn at [dkloehn@tindaleoliver.com](mailto:dkloehn@tindaleoliver.com).



TOA Transit Ambassadors assisted riders during the Baltimore Grand Prix on Labor Day weekend.



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## Ballot Box Success Hinges on Winning Votes, Not New Riders

As federal and state funding options dwindle, transit organizations are increasingly looking to their own local voters to fund infrastructure improvements and daily operations through various tax mechanisms. Since low ridership and the faltering economy may make such undertakings politically treacherous, it is important for transit organizations to have very clear expectations about what they want from voters and have grounded expectations about what campaigns are able to accomplish for them.

Unfortunately, some transit campaigns can falter because they mistakenly – and sometimes quite innocently – ask voters for too much ... of themselves, not money. Public opinion survey data from around the country continue to show that vast majorities of voters agree that they will, in some way, benefit from expanded and improved public transit services, even if they never intend to use them for their own travel and commuting needs. This nuance is a vital one that eludes many transit campaigns and is often misinterpreted in a way that can inadvertently doom their efforts.

Although it may make many passionate transit advocates bristle, in truth, many voters are willing to support transit improvements and expansions because they expect to derive intrinsic benefits. Some of those benefits are based upon laudable intentions to improve air quality and reduce pollution, or increase access for people who would not otherwise have means of transportation needed for schooling, every day errands, or to reach their places of employment. Other voters are willing to vote for transit improvements merely to reduce the amount of car traffic they compete with on the road each day. What both groups often have in common is that they do not intend to use the expanded or improve transit for their own personal needs. In some communities, voters may be more willing to part with money than their commuting habits.

Understanding the difference between the willingness to support transit ballot issues and intentions to use them can have a profound and pivotal effect on the tone and tenor of

public outreach. By using opinion research, and a healthy dose of political pragmatism to avoid intertwining the two, transit organizations in some communities can improve their odds for success by focusing on winning votes, rather than new riders!

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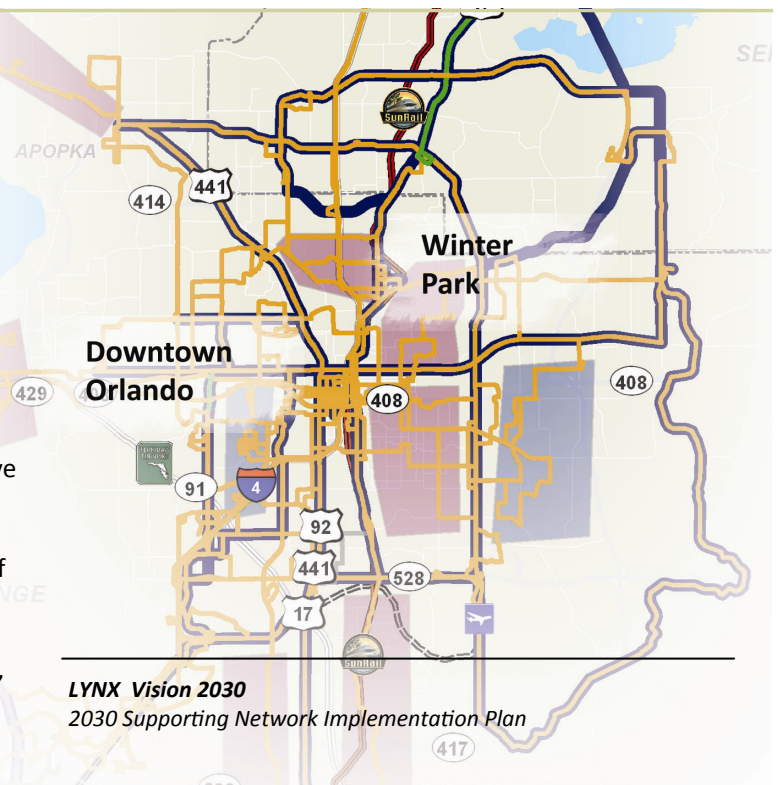


## Visions for Public Transportation

A number of public transportation agencies across Florida are developing broad, long-term system plans in their efforts to meet future transportation needs within their communities. In the past, long-term transportation planning for all modes of travel typically resided with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Largely focused on roadway planning, the MPO Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) update process historically centered on roadway improvements, with public transportation improvements receiving less attention throughout that process. Recent shifts in attitudes toward public transportation resulting from increases in energy prices, urban renewal efforts, and “green” movements have brought transit back on the radar, and many transit agencies have embraced the opportunity to expand their role in the long-term planning and development process of public transportation services in their communities. In addition, efforts to implement premium transit services, such as light rail, bus rapid transit, and express bus service, have served as a catalyst for development of comprehensive system plans.

TOA is currently assisting a number of Florida agencies, including the Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority (LYNX), the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA), Lee County Transit (LeeTran), and the Gainesville Regional Transit System (RTS), in the development of long-term “vision” plans. Although the agencies differ in terms of local desires and public policy, there are a number of parallels among the plans and in the plan development process. Some of these parallels include extensive public outreach efforts, integration into the MPO LRTP, development of service guidelines, and system design, often consisting of a network of premium trunkline services and a complementary circulator/feeder bus network. In all cases, vision plans are incorporating premium transit services.

Planning for future transit services in this manner aligns well with MPO long-range transportation planning efforts, as vision plan development can make use of MPO socioeconomic information. In addition, many transit



agencies prefer that transit planning be performed by their own knowledgeable staff and that the MPO LRTP should be consistent with the transit agency vision plan. Local land use and economic development efforts can also benefit from a comprehensive system plan. The vision plan can be developed consistent with local land use policies that bolster local efforts to build multi-modal, multi-use development projects by complementing those proposed projects with appropriate levels of transit infrastructure and service.

Whether it be to plan for higher-level transit services, redevelop urban areas, or expand the transit “footprint” within their communities, transit agencies across the state are working to define a better road map for their future.

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## New TOA Transit Projects

### Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 4 (Sub-consultant to CUTR)

- Treasure Coast RTO, US 1 Bus Stop Improvement Program

### Tampa-Hillsborough County Expressway Authority (Sub-consultant to PB Americas)

- Bus Toll Lane Concept Feasibility Study

### FDOT District 7 (Sub-consultant to HW Lochner)

- I-75 Regional Transit Corridor Evaluation

### FDOT Central Office

- Update *Accessing Transit*

### Osceola County

- Transportation Funding and Multi-Modal Fee Study

### Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

- Cape Coral Transit Assessment

### Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority (LYNX)

- Fare Technology and SunRail Options Evaluation

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