

Potential Program Funding Would Fill Gaps to Create Largest System of Trails in U.S.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Michael Case, Senior Planner
(800) 998-RIDE (7433)

Tampa, Florida (March 18, 2016) – As part of the shared goal of completing vital connections between county, city, and state trail systems that improve the viability and safety of bicycle and walking trips, the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority (TBARTA) has been gathering support across the regional community to make the Southwest Coastal Regional Trail the next priority investment in the Florida Shared-Use Nonmotorized Trail Network, or SUN Trail program.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) SUN Trail program is the beginning of a paradigm shift in the way we view Florida's bicycle and pedestrian trails and infrastructure, with a total of \$25 million in funding available per year to complete the gaps between existing off-road trails to create a statewide interconnected network which will eventually be designated as the Florida Greenways and Trails System.

The Southwest Coastal Regional Trail is part of the Regional Multi-Use Trails Network included in the 2015 TBARTA Master Plan that would extend from the Pinellas Trail in St. Petersburg, where it will join with the Coast-to-Coast Connector (C2C), through Tampa, and head south along the coast to Bradenton, Sarasota, Venice, North Port, Ft. Myers, and Naples. Once all segments of the Trail are completed, it will be part of the nation's largest system of locally connected trails, and stands to greatly benefit the Tampa Bay region and the entire state through eco-tourism, economic development, and improved bicycle/pedestrian safety.

TBARTA's dedication to building consensus among community stakeholders throughout the Tampa Bay region to support major transportation investments has led to the coordinated and unified support for completion of the Trail from the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) of Hernando/Citrus, Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Sarasota/Manatee, Charlotte County-Punta Gorda, Lee, and Collier Counties, as well as the Polk County Transportation Planning Organization, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. On behalf of the many voices involved in the effort, TBARTA will speak with one clear message on the importance of the project at the next Florida Greenways and Trails Council public meeting on March 31, 2016, where final recommendations will be made to FDOT for funding allocations.

The importance of recognizing this collective effort is underlined by the fact that the number of pedestrians and cyclists that have lost their lives on Tampa Bay roadways presently ranks the region as the second most dangerous to walk and bike in the United States. With March designated as Bike Month in Florida, and recognizing the collective year-round efforts of agencies and organizations dedicated to spreading awareness on the importance of bicycle and pedestrian education and safety, obtaining the funding necessary to complete this regional project will be a major milestone in reversing this alarming and dangerous trend.

For more information on this effort, or to write a letter of support, contact Michael Case, Senior Planner and Project Manager, at Michael.Case@tbarta.com