



Policy Committee Meeting
Friday, August 26, 2022 – 9:30 AM
Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority
3201 Scherer Drive
St. Petersburg, FL 33716

NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING

AGENDA

- 1. CALL TO ORDER**
- 2. ROLL CALL**
- 3. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Persons wishing to address the Board can do so in either of two ways:

A. Comments no more than 400 words may be sent to publiccomment@tbarta.com and will be read into the record. Written comments must be received no later than the day before the meeting. Comments must include the name, address, organization and topic or agenda item.

B. See staff prior to the meeting to complete a comment card. You will be able to provide comment for three (3) minutes when recognized.

- 4. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS**
 - A. Approval of May and July Policy Committee Meeting Minutes
- 5. DISCUSSION ITEMS**
 - A. Strategic Planning (David Green)
- 6. OTHER BUSINESS**
- 7. ADJOURNMENT**

****NEXT POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING****

September 16, 2022 – 9:30 AM
FDOT District 7 Headquarters
11201 McKinley Drive
Tampa, FL 33612

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May Policy Committee Meeting
Friday, May 27, 2022 – 9:30 AM
Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority
3201 Scherer Drive
St. Petersburg, FL 33716

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 9:35 a.m.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT

Commissioner Janet Long
Commissioner Kathryn Starkey
Commissioner Jeff Holcomb
Commissioner Rene Flowers
Commissioner Kimberly Overman (virtual)
Cliff Manuel, Jr.
Secretary David Gwynn
Executive Director David Green
Legal Counsel Jennifer Cowan
TBARTA Staff

ABSENT

Jim Holton

CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

Approve April Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve the April Policy Committee Meeting minutes made by Commissioner Flowers.
Seconded by Commissioner Long. Motion passed unanimously.

ACTION ITEMS

DBE Program and Goal

Al Burns from PSTA provided an overview of TBARTA's proposed DBE Program and Goal.

DBE Programs are required by grant recipients with federal contract awards greater than \$250,000 in a fiscal year. The program requires the establishment of goals ranging from 1-10% on a triennial basis, which represents a percentage of the federal funds expended by the organization. The calculation to determine the goal ratio is based on the number of DBE contractors who are able and willing to participate in DOT-assisted contracts. After evaluating upcoming procurements, staff recommends a program goal of 2% for FYs 2022-2024.

Commissioner Flowers asked for clarification about how the percentage will grow through the years. Mr. Burns advised that the DBE goal would increase as the agency and its procurements grow.

Commissioner Holcomb asked what type of DBE companies TBARTA would contract with. Mr. Burns advised that there are a lot of disciplines in the areas of engineering and planning.

Motion to approve the DBE Program and triennial goal of 2% made by Commissioner Flowers. Seconded by Commissioner Long. Motion passed unanimously.

INFORMATION ITEMS

State Legislative Update

Ron Pierce with RSA reported that special session ended last night. There is no update on the budget process but he expects Governor DeSantis to receive the budget within the next week or two.

The Tampa Bay Partnership provided a Letter of Support for TBARTA's funding with approximately 13 other organizations. All letters were sent to the Governor's office. TBARTA CAC members also sent letters of support. There is strong support for the TD Tampa Bay program.

Mr. Manuel asked for clarification on the state funding source. Mr. Pierce advised that in prior years TBARTA received funds from the transportation trust fund. This year the funding would come from non-recurring general revenue.

Federal Legislative Update

Harry Glenn with Van Scoyoc Associates reported the House and Senate are both in recess for Memorial Day. Congress, however, is preparing for FY23 appropriations and he anticipates work being complete by December, if not September. Veronica Vanterpool was appointed FTA Deputy Administrator in May 2022 and the Administration continues to roll out new Bipartisan Infrastructure Law grant programs. He also reported on Congressional redistricting and the impact it will have in Tampa Bay.

OTHER BUSINESS

Brian Pessaro provided an update on the CSX Corridor Passenger Rail Study. Staff is working with Al Burns (PSTA) on the procurement with a goal of advertising the Request for Proposals (RFP) in mid-June and awarding a contract at the August Board meeting.

The study will answer four questions:

- How much will it cost to upgrade the Brooksville/Clearwater subdivisions?
- What is recommended passenger rail project?
- What are the upfront capital costs required to implement the project?
- How much will it cost annually to operate and maintain the passenger rail service.

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In January 2022, FDOT met with CSX to explore the possibility of purchasing the Brooksville and Clearwater subdivisions for passenger rail. At that meeting, CSX informed FDOT that they were not interested in selling the subdivisions, but might be interested in leasing them. In May, FDOT had a follow-up meeting with CSX officials, who stated that now is not an appropriate time to discuss passenger rail because they plan to increase their freight rail operations in Florida. Mr. Pessaro stated that CSX expressed a willingness to speak to Tampa Bay area elected officials in either late summer or early fall to make their position clear.

Secretary Gywnn reiterated that CSX was direct about not wanting to consider use of the Brooksville and Clearwater tracks for passenger rail at this time, as they are currently negotiating with Amtrak for passenger rail between New Orleans and Mobile. Those negotiations might be finished by fall, at which time there may be a clearer picture of what passenger rail possibilities exist in Tampa Bay. He added that CSX will mostly determine what upgrades will be needed to the tracks to accommodate passenger rail. If leasing the tracks is the only option CSX will consider, the majority of the funding responsibility would fall on local agencies and not the state.

Commissioner Long asked how much the study will cost. Mr. Pessaro stated he was hesitant to discuss price so as not to influence bids. Commissioner Long replied she cannot not support moving forward without knowing the cost, especially since CSX is not a willing partner.

Commissioner Long commented that public trust and confidence is an issue. It is unreasonable to start a project by leasing tracks. Commissioner Long does not believe the project will qualify for state or federal funds if CSX retains ownership.

Due to time constraints and the need to begin the Board meeting, Committee Chair Starkey suggested continuing the discussion of this topic during the Board meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The Policy Committee meeting adjourned at 10:12 a.m.

****NEXT POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING****

July 15, 2022 – 9:30 AM

FDOT District 7

11201 N. McKinley Drive

Tampa, FL 33612

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July Policy Committee Meeting
Friday, July 15, 2022 – 9:30 AM
Virtual Meeting

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Starkey called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM.

PRESENT

Commissioner Kathryn Starkey
Commissioner Jeff Holcomb
Mr. Jim Holton
Commissioner Janet Long
Commissioner Kimberly Overman
Secretary David Gwynn
Mr. Cliff Manuel Jr
Executive Director David Green
Legal Counsel Jennifer Cowan
TBARTA Staff

ABSENT

Commissioner Rene Flowers

PUBLIC COMMENT

Bill Roberts, Chairman of TBARTA's Citizens Advisory Committee, reported that the CAC is active and has been meeting through the summer. We had a quorum at our most recent meeting. I would like to report that there continues to be good support for the vanpool program and I was glad to hear Commissioner Overman's comments earlier about how that is expanding. That is a true success story for TBARTA and would help us both with the public and our legislators. Let me just close by saying that the representatives on the CAC represent all of your various counties and we stand ready to assist you in any way in getting the legislature back on board however the Board should elect to move forward.

ITEMS FOR REVIEW AND FUTURE APPROVAL

There were no comments on the May Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

DISCUSSION ITEMS

State Funding Veto

Commissioner Starkey continued discussions from the Finance Committee meeting regarding funding for TBARTA.

Commissioner Starkey commented the rubber meets the road when we see who is willing to fund the operating expenses of TBARTA with their dollars. And if you are not going to fund TBARTA and a majority are not going to fund TBARTA then we do not have a TBARTA. We (Pasco) believe in regionalism and are not ready to give up.

Commissioner Long commented I believe in regionalism. I have been a strong advocate for regionalism. My involvement with TBARTA goes back to 2006 when TBARTA legislation was introduced. I was a strong advocate in my caucus to get the legislation passed and we did. I was also a part of the reiteration of TBARTA in 2016 and 2017. I do not want anyone to think that I do not believe in regionalism. I do not think any of us have time to be involved in an exercise in futility. Until the political climate in Tallahassee changes it is an exercise in futility, to me, to spend the dollars to go back to the legislature and advocate for dollars again. Secondly the reiteration of TBARTA was never intended to be a regurgitation of everything that has been done for the last fifty years. It was supposed to focus on moving our region forward. I have talked about how to solve this problem and mentioned aligning ourselves with another agency, we ought to be taking different action from the last five years because we are not getting a different result. For example, the Regional Planning Council has the same partners as TBARTA does. They have many planners in that agency, we could be a division or a department of that agency and cut out the repetitiveness because we are not doing anything differently than the Regional Planning Council does. I know people will mention the vanpool but to me the vanpool is a glorified bus agency which does not serve the entire region. Several years ago, we created a memorandum of understanding with PSTA, which still exists today. We could eliminate almost all our budget by operating under the memorandum of understanding and if we do not do that then let someone else come up with a different idea for funding.

Commissioner Overman commented Hillsborough has not agreed the contribution yet because Hillsborough has not had a budget workshop to determine what would be included for 2023. I am not certain how our board would participate or would consider participating in TBARTA at this point, but I am not going to suggest that because we have not responded means the answer is no. I do know that I am bringing that information to the board at HART this month. I also know that our planning commission and our TMA are planning agencies and are not transportation agencies. They are not transportation implementors. My understanding is the region is interested in creating a way of helping people get around using transportation and transit. That is how TBARTA was reformulated several years ago, to be more focused on some level of transit whether that be buses, gondolas, trains, or any of the above and to do that there needs to be a transit agency. At the last meeting of the Suncoast Planning Alliance and TMA, the counties of the entire District 7 agreed to really look at moving the needle forward and determining how we would proceed with creating a potential passenger transit avenue

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along the rights of way owned by CSX and to begin that conversation. As the state chose to update the rail plan there was conversation about how to move forward and who we negotiate with or who does the negotiating with the current rail provider in our region as well as Amtrak. Who would be that party that would be able to negotiate and is also involved in transit in our region? That is the reason to me TBARTA exists, and such a project would be a regional project. To qualify for federal funds for a regional transit project would require a regional transit agency and unlike other areas, for example Jacksonville which has its own planning agency and transit agency as part of its county where decisions are made at one board and then apply to get money. Whereas we have multiple counties, boards, and planning agencies working together. We still need a transportation agency to work with all the various entities.

Commissioner Starkey commented that Pasco started the budget process much earlier in the year and is finished with their budget, so Pasco is in a better position to say what their commitment is. I also do not want to give up, and we need a regional transit authority.

Commissioner Holcomb commented we have had our budget workshop and there is no issue with us funding from Hernando County. I have had some struggles with what our focus is. Vanpools are great and certainly work. We need to have a more focused plan that would help Tallahassee see we are serious. We are going to have to go through some uncomfortable situations to make considerable progress and find the best solution. Hernando County is a commuter community, which means people are driving to Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas to work. I support better mass transit. Otherwise, the main arteries are going to get worse.

Secretary Gwynn commented FDOT is the biggest funder of transit in the region and the state does support transit. Five years ago, we faced a similar situation with highway funding for our region, and we came up with a model to address that. We got all the counties and business communities speaking with one voice and went to Tallahassee to get funding for huge projects. The legislature responded by providing funding for the Howard Franklin Bridge, the Gateway Project, and the Westshore Interchange. I think we could have a similar success in transit if the same strategy is implemented, however until we all speak as one voice it is going to be hard to get funding for transit projects like it was hard to get funding for highway projects. FDOT stands ready to be a funding partner and a planning partner.

Mr. Manuel commented he thinks we failed at the Governor's desk because we could not deliver to him a regional voice that included all the various agencies in the region. I do not think we will get funding from Tallahassee until we can present a unified front. I do not think the Governor would have vetoed funding if he thought we were all one voice. The counties and agencies must agree to have one voice and to use that power to get funding from Tallahassee.

Commissioner Overman commented that the region has not agreed on how to develop and strategize regional transit. My goal is to have TBARTA survive and have a strategy that all counties could support. I

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would like to suggest we recognize we are in a transitory place, and we need to devise a cohesive regional plan to present to Tallahassee for funding a regional transit plan.

Mr. Manuel commented there is a future for a unified transit voice and TBARTA can play that role. The intention today is to have a policy discussion, to take to the Board in August, about whether we want to exist. And if we are going to exist, we must concentrate on a budget that includes more than just expenses and have staff present such a budget. I agree, right now, we should rule out Tallahassee and I believe we mostly have ourselves to blame for that. We must get to a point where we have a unified voice to get funding.

CSX Corridor Assessment presented by Brian Pessaro

Last December, Commissioner Starkey made a motion, at the joint meeting of the Suncoast Transportation Planning Alliance and TMA Leadership Group, that TBARTA be the lead agency on a study for an assessment of the CSX Brooksville and Clearwater subdivisions. The motion passed unanimously. On Friday July 8, TBARTA posted a RFQ to seek the services of an engineering/planning firm to assess those two subdivisions. That study will seek to answer four questions: 1) How much would it cost to upgrade the Clearwater and Brooksville subdivision to passenger rail standards, 2) What is the recommended passenger rail project, 3) What are the upfront capital costs required to implement the project, and 4) How much would it cost annually to operate and maintain the service.

The RFQ is out and proposals are due August 9, 2022, and valid for 180 days, until February 9, 2023. The RFQ is being conducted in accordance with the Consultants Competitive Negotiation Act (CCNA), which means cost is not going to be a factor in selecting a winning proposal. Our internal cost estimate of the study is \$500k. The source of funding will be our FTA section 5307 planning funds.

There have been two conversations between FDOT and CSX, one in January and the second in May. In January, CSX informed FDOT they were not interested in selling the Clearwater or Brooksville subdivisions but could possibly lease them. FDOT has informed the Board that the state's involvement in a passenger rail project would be extremely limited if leasing were the only option on the table. In May, CSX indicated to FDOT that now is not a suitable time for passenger rail discussions. They told FDOT they are planning to increase their freight operations in Florida and the Southeast in general, and are currently immersed in legal proceedings with Amtrak over new passenger rail between New Orleans and Mobile. They did offer to come speak to elected officials in the Tampa Bay Area in late summer or early fall to communicate their position more clearly.

There are two options for the procurement given this information: 1) Recommend staff terminate the RFQ based on CSX's response to FDOT as not being interested, or 2) Allow the RFQ to continue and accept proposals, but delay deciding on whether to award a contract until after TBARTA hears more

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information directly from CSX. This would involve CSX coming to speak at a board meeting and would need to occur before the proposals expire on February 9, 2023.

Commissioner Starkey commented that we do not have a willing partner. Commissioner Overman commented that CSX is dealing with a significant change to their business model given the Amtrak situation. In reviewing the state's freight plan, there was no mention of rail. The freight plan singularly focused on the road networks that would help freight move from one place to another. I find it interesting that CSX is hesitating now that they would have to share lines with Amtrak. Postponing the RFQ until after we meet with them late fall may make sense because that would give CSX time to clarify their position with Amtrak and give TBARTA time to assess where we are as a region on the concept of utilizing the existing rights of way of the Brooksville and Clearwater lines.

Commissioner Starkey questioned if you think you have a hard time financially supporting the BRT with the state's help in funding, how is it better to work on CSX commuter rail with no help from the state? Commissioner Overman replied I am not suggesting we would not have help from the state. I am suggesting that timing matters. I am suggesting postponing these conversations until Hillsborough is in a better position to plan and play. It is critically important for Hillsborough to do that because our roads are not able to handle the incoming commuters from our surrounding counties in terms of a road network and transit given the level of growth we have seen in our entire region. Recognizing the lack of having passenger rail available to us in maybe ten years or more is shortsighted in my opinion. We need to explore and address the right of way issue because that issue is crucial to exploring opportunities for passenger rail in our area. I recommend we delay the RFQ and work with the Suncoast Planning Alliance and TMA, for TBARTA to reach a meeting with the state, FDOT, CSX, and Amtrak to really see what is possible.

Commissioner Starkey asked if we should extend the invitation for CSX to come for a discussion. Commissioner Overman advised she would support CSX coming. Commissioner Holcomb advised he would support CSX coming.

Commissioner Starkey asked when CSX would be available. Mr. Pessaro advised we would have to contact CSX and ask. He also asked for clarification on holding off on the study. Is the recommendation to staff that we continue to allow the RFQ process to go forward and hold off on making deciding to award a contract?

Commissioner Starkey asked if we can take an action like that today. Commissioner Overman advised we cannot.

Commissioner Overman stated I think it is important to have a good understanding of what the playing field looks like before we try to design a study that possibly won't address the issues we learn about in the fall. You would not want to redesign the RFQ and the study after talking with CSX. Mr. Pessaro advised the RFQ includes a scope of work for consultant teams to respond to. The scope of work

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includes three tasks: 1) The corridor assessment. The primary purpose of the study is to assess the physical condition of the track and identify all of the necessary upgrades needed to accommodate passenger rail and what it costs, 2) The concept of operations. The consultant will develop a passenger rail concept of operations that includes identifying appropriate transit technologies, a recommended number of stations along with their physical locations, and a recommended span and frequency of service, and 3) Case studies. The consultant will look at case studies of negotiations from other parts of the country between state and local governments and private freight rail operators. The purpose of this task is to give a better understanding of the issues that could come up in any future negotiations with CSX. If the RFQ goes forward, this is what is being asked.

Commissioner Overman commented I think it is important we meet with CSX. And if we meet with CSX in November that only gives us two months to act on whatever proposals come back, is that correct? Mr. Pessaro advised a contract would have to be awarded at the January Board meeting before the proposals expire in February.

Commissioner Overman commented I do not see us having enough information to be prepared for issuing a contract in January after having an initial meeting in November or December with CSX. Mr. Pessaro advised it comes down to whether the 180 day period is enough time to decide.

Mr. Manuel commented the Board should give a clear plan to move forward in August. There is a lot of information requested in the study that would be useful whether CSX is involved or not. Someone is going to have to take the first step to study the corridor, as CSX has never in his experience taken the lead. I would like to have the information that is included in that scope of work. Mr. Pessaro advised CSX would have to provide approval to assess the physical condition of the tracks.

Mr. Manuel questioned whether CSX would allow an assessment of the physical condition of the tracks. Secretary Gwynn advised CSX is willing to talk in general terms, however they will not talk in detail unless they think there is a project or something real. If CSX thinks you are just gathering information, then you will not get the details you need to figure out what needs to happen. I do not know if they would let you on the right of way. We would have to speak with CSX. CSX would also require the state to be involved in the project.

Ming Gao advised that for a consultant to walk along a CSX track they would need CSX permission because CSX has its own police force to intervene in such activity. Mr. Gao also suggested watching the public hearing on the Gulf Coastline services between Amtrak and CSX that was contentious. Even Amtrak did not know all the details involving the yard operations or switching operations. All this information was brought out by CSX. You must bring CSX in to get a true assessment of the impact because it is not public information. For example, the Clearwater subdivision heading toward downtown runs on the edge of two CSX switching yards and the impact to those yards can only be assessed by CSX. CSX is the only entity that knows how many trains are switched in those yards and how often the

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subdivision is used for staging. Moving forward with the study is an option, however you will not have a true assessment unless CSX cooperates.

Mr. Manuel asked how we sit down with CSX and negotiate if we do not have a project. How would that work without the study or any idea of what we are trying to accomplish? Wouldn't we need the study and RFQ to determine if we want a project? Mr. Gao advised when you talk to CSX you need to present what scenario you are considering. CSX wants to know how much impact the proposal will have on their overall operations and switching yards. Secondly, a project of this magnitude would require federal funding, state funding, and local participation. Without these specifics it is hard to have this type of conversation. We have previously studied this line with the Tampa Rail Study and found it not suitable, which is how we came up with Tampa Light Rail concept that runs closer to the I-275 corridor. Without supporting ridership, it is tough to ask FTA and the state for funding. Thought would have to be given to what type of project you want and how to finance and justify the project.

Mr. Manuel asked if the study would provide any benefit to the state to help define a project. Mr. Gao replied we already have this information. TBARTA conducted an assessment of viable regional corridors, which produced two options - the CSX corridor and the regional BRT project. From the cost benefit analysis, it was decided that the BRT project was the project to move forward, with the CSX project being a long-term project. Now the question is what project the region would like to pursue. If the decision is to pursue the CSX project, then we need to reexamine what we are looking for. CSX is a private company and bringing them to the discussion is important because their strategy has changed from the 2015 information we already have. If CSX uses the majority of operating time for freight operations, then we do not have a feasible window for passenger service. We need to better understand CSX's approach before we have that conversation.

Secretary Gwynn advised we could meet with them and set some basic parameters and then figure out how to guide our study to try to make it move toward a project. When we get all the counties together and if there is an interlocal agreement that shows there is support for this then CSX may start being more serious with us.

Commissioner Overman commented if the RFQ gives CSX a clear indication that we are serious about moving forward and we will have a project then I would like to see the study done. I would also like to hear what CSX says.

Commissioner Starkey commented we have consensus to move forward with the study and to invite CSX to come and speak to us.

Mr. Green commented it is a good idea to get more information from CSX and it sounds like everyone agrees with that course of action. What we are talking about now is just the procurement, not spending any money or beginning the study. We are talking about receiving responses and evaluating consultants

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to see who would best be able to complete such work. We are not talking about awarding a contract until well after we talk to CSX and get the information everyone is looking for.

Commissioner Starkey asked about FDOT's need to widen I-275 for BRT to be successful in Hillsborough or if they have the right of way. Secretary Gwynn replied that FDOT has the right of way. We do not necessarily need to widen I-275 but in order to use highway funds to build those improvements we would have to widen the highway. You cannot just use highway funds to build transit. By widening, you could make transit improvements incidental to the highway with no cost to the transit project.

Mr. Gao advised that to accommodate BRT, the shoulder would need to be widened by two to five feet. FDOT prefers to have a 15-foot shoulder, however we cannot just go in and widen the shoulder. We could use highway funds to improve the shoulder as part of a project in order to provide the infrastructure for transit. If it is strictly a transit shoulder project, then the transit project will have to carry the cost of widening the shoulder. Secretary Gwynn advised widening the shoulder does get complicated and is not as cheap as one would think.

Commissioner Starkey asked whether the state's participation in CSX financially is a policy decision and what the rules are for putting money into a line you do not own. Secretary Gwynn replied there are specific rules that relate to commuter rail.

Mr. Gao mentioned that for TBARTA to work on a rail project there would have to be legislative approval. Mr. Green agreed that TBARTA can do a feasibility study and would have to provide the study to the legislature and to all the MPOs and counties. There would need to be agreement between the MPOs and counties.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Starkey adjourned the meeting at 10:42 AM.

****NEXT POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING****

August 26, 2022 – 9:30 AM

PSTA Headquarters

3201 Scherer Drive

St. Petersburg, FL 33716

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Strategic Planning Discussion

Policy Committee Meeting

August 26, 2022

Problem Statement

With no state funding and limited local funding, TBARTA will exhaust its agency operating funds by the end of FY 2024 (September 30, 2024).

Assuming TBARTA continues to receive annual state CAP funds, the agency needs \$1M/year of support to sustain agency operations.



Discussion Questions

- 1) Is there collective support for a regional transit agency?
- 2) Can we stand united and speak with one voice?
- 3) Should TBARTA continue to exist in its current form?
- 4) Should we reorganize?
- 5) Should we request state funding again?
- 6) How do we make up the shortfall?

