



# Transportation Planning Capacity Building (TPCB) Peer Program

## Palm Beach TPA Enhanced Transit Peer Exchange

*A TPCB Peer Exchange Event*

**Location:** West Palm Beach, FL

**Date:** January 17, 2020

**Host Agency:** Palm Beach Transportation Planning Agency

**National Peers:** Sam Sargent, Capital Metro  
Wulf Grote, Valley Metro  
Scott Smith, Valley Metro

**Local Peers:** Tim Garling, Broward County Transit  
John Slot, Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority (LYNX)  
Nathaniel P. Ford Sr., Jacksonville Transportation Authority  
Brad Miller, Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority

**Sponsoring Agencies:** Federal Transit Administration  
Federal Highway Administration



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# Introduction

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This report highlights the presentations, discussions, and key takeaways from the “Palm Beach Transportation Planning Agency (TPA) Enhanced Transit Peer Exchange” held on January 17, 2020 in West Palm Beach, Florida. This event was sponsored by the joint Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Transportation Planning Capacity Building (TPCB) Peer Program, and was jointly funded by FTA, FHWA, and the Palm Beach TPA. The goal of the peer exchange program is to facilitate knowledge transfer and capacity building by connecting peers from different States and/or agencies to exchange best practices and innovative solutions to transportation planning challenges.

## Peer Exchange Overview

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The Palm Beach TPA requested a peer exchange from the FHWA/FTA TPCB Program to provide the TPA with examples of how other regions with similar characteristics as Palm Beach County have planned and implemented enhanced, high-capacity transit systems (e.g., light rail, bus rapid transit). In particular, the Palm Beach TPA sought to learn how regions that planned and implemented enhanced transit had:

- Partnered and collaborated with other agencies and entities,
- Garnered political and public buy-in for the plans,
- Told the story of their successes, and
- Funded and/or financed their enhanced transit projects.

### Peer Selections

FTA, FHWA, and the Palm Beach TPA worked together to identify national peer agencies from which the Palm Beach TPA could learn about effective practices for planning and implementing enhanced transit. The two peer agencies were:

- Capital Metro in the Austin, Texas region; and
- Valley Metro in the Phoenix, Arizona region.

In addition to the two national peers, the Palm Beach TPA worked with Palm Trans to invite four Florida peers to participate and present on their enhanced transit experiences. Those agencies were:

- Broward County Transit in the Fort Lauderdale, Florida region;
- Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority (LYNX) in the Orlando, Florida region;
- Jacksonville Transportation Authority in the Jacksonville, Florida region; and
- Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority in the St. Petersburg, Florida region.

A list of key peer exchange contacts is included in Appendix A.

### Peer Exchange Sessions

During the peer exchange, the Palm Beach TPA provided a brief overview of the region and its efforts to explore implementing enhanced transit. Then, the two national peers presented on their experiences in

planning and implementing enhanced, high-capacity transit in their regions. Following that, the Florida peers briefly presented on their experiences in planning enhanced transit. Representatives from FTA, FHWA, and the Volpe Center facilitated discussions among participants on the following topics:

- How best to partner and collaborate with other agencies and entities,
- How to garner political and public buy-in for planned enhanced transit investments,
- How to tell the story of success in implementing enhanced transit,
- Opportunities to fund and/or finance enhanced transit projects, and
- Next steps for the Palm Beach TPA and its partners to undertake in beginning to plan for enhanced transit in the Palm Beach region.

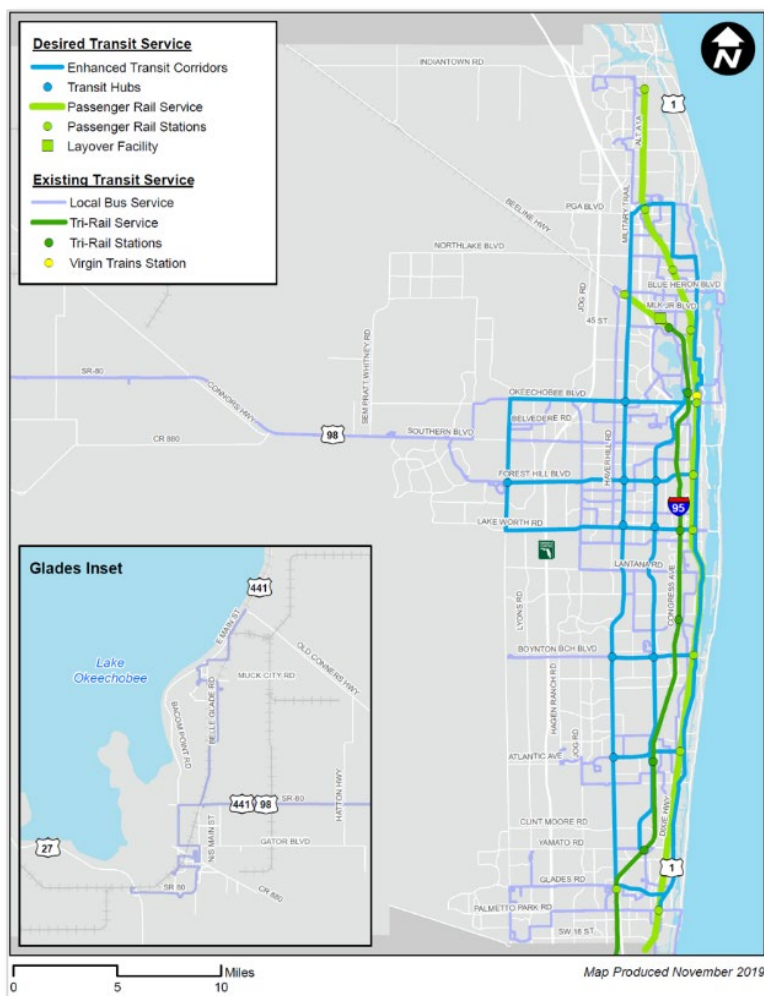
The peer exchange agenda is included in Appendix B.

## Host and Peer Presentations

### Palm Beach TPA

Palm Beach County is the northernmost of three counties in the Miami Urbanized Area. The county's population was approximately 1,471,000 in 2017, and it is expected to grow to 1,641,000 by 2030 and to 1,811,000 by 2045. Palm Beach County is served by three transit providers:

- Palm Tran, which operates 32 bus routes, paratransit, and a flex-deviated bus service;
- South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, which operates Tri-Rail, a commuter rail service from Mangonia Park in West Palm Beach to Miami International Airport; and
- Brightline/Virgin Trains USA, which operates passenger rail service from West Palm Beach to stations in Fort Lauderdale and Miami.



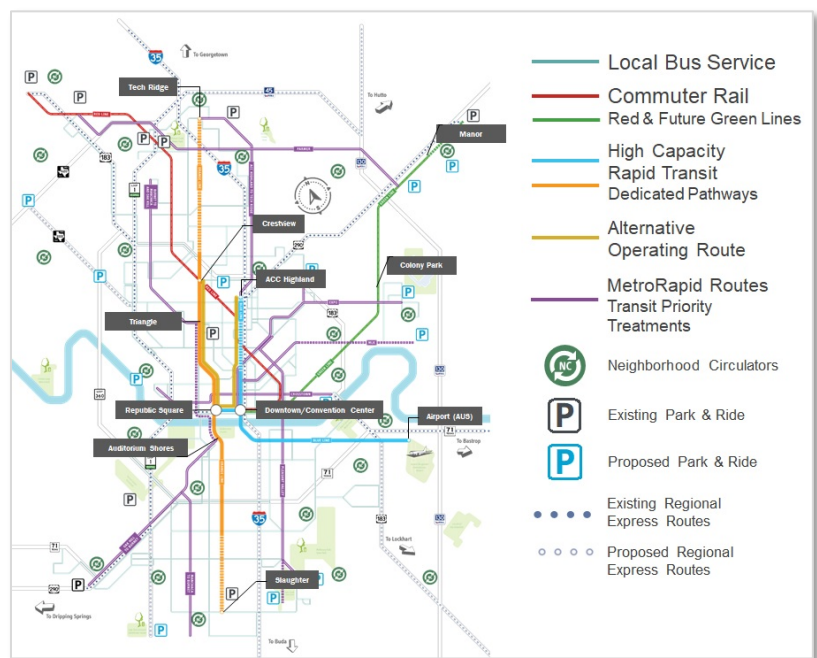
This map shows the Palm Beach TPA's desired transit service corridors and existing transit services (courtesy of the Palm Beach TPA).

The [Palm Beach TPA's 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan](#) identifies a “5-6-1 Plan” for enhanced transit, which includes a network of five north-south corridors and in six east-west corridors to form one connected system. The enhanced transit options that the region is considering include light rail transit (LRT), bus rapid transit (BRT), and “BRT Lite,” where buses operate in mixed traffic with frequent limited-stop service, branded vehicles and stations, level boarding, off-board fare payment, and transit signal priority.

## Capital Metro

Capital Metro, the transit agency for the Austin, Texas region, has a service area that covers 543 square miles and 1.1 million residents. It has an annual ridership of 31 million riders and an annual operating budget of \$403.7 million. The Austin region is rapidly growing, with a current population of approximately two million that is expected to double to four million in 20 years. Meanwhile, there is limited capacity to expand the highway network. Because of this, the region must use its transportation rights-of-way efficiently to be able to move people effectively in the future.

Despite the Austin region’s rapid growth, Capital Metro’s bus ridership declined by 11 percent from 2012 to 2017. The agency knew it would be difficult to convince politicians and the public to support high-capacity transit while ridership was declining. Therefore, Capital Metro embarked on [Cap Remap](#), an effort to redesign the bus network to make it more frequent, reliable, and connected. Capital Metro implemented Cap Remap in June 2018 and since has seen bus ridership grow by 15 percent with only a \$6-7 million increase in operating expenses. During its public outreach efforts for Cap Remap, Capital Metro implanted new public involvement strategies, including opening small community outreach offices to directly connect with the public about the changes to the bus network.



*This is a map of Capital Metro’s long-term vision plan for transit in the Austin region, which includes local bus service, commuter rail, high-capacity transit, and other transit services (courtesy of Capital Metro).*

Capital Metro’s long-term vision for transit in the Austin region is called [Project Connect](#). The plan includes new high-capacity transit lines, improved bus service, expanded and improved commuter rail, and new transit hubs to improve connections. The plan also envisions electric-powered transit vehicles, real-time transit tracking at over 100 stations, and improved frequency. Capital Metro sent staff to peer transit agencies as they developed their plan to learn first-hand how others were able to implement similar plans. Capital Metro also found it helpful to avoid discussing which mode of high-capacity transit to implement, which kept the focus on the problem and agreeing on investments to fund the solution.

As part of its public outreach strategy, Capital Metro is considering converting the small community outreach offices established for Cap Remap into customer outreach offices for Project Connect.

## Valley Metro

The Phoenix, Arizona region is one of the fastest growing regions in the country. The region is expected to grow from 4.5 million people in 2020 to 7.7 million people in 2050. Valley Metro, the region's largest transit provider, opened 20 miles of light rail in 2008, and has since expanded the system by 8 miles. Light rail ridership makes up 25 percent of Valley Metro's 65 million annual rides.

Valley Metro currently has several high-capacity transit projects under construction, including a streetcar line in Tempe, an expanded operations and maintenance center, and an expansion of the light rail south of downtown Phoenix. In addition, the agency is planning and designing other transit expansions to the northeast, northwest, and west of downtown Phoenix.

Despite Valley Metro's success in implementing and expanding high-capacity transit in the Phoenix region, it has faced referenda to halt the agency's transit expansion plans. In August 2019, voters rejected a proposition that would have ended Valley Metro's light rail expansion plans. As a result, the plans to expand high-capacity transit in the Phoenix region continued to move forward.

Valley Metro stressed the importance of having a robust community engagement process and political champions that can garner support for high-capacity transit projects. They also recommended getting consensus on the alignment of the transit routes, managing the project's scope, and having agreements with the cities through which the transit will pass.

## Florida Peer Panel

During the Florida Peer Panel, representatives from four Florida transit agencies briefly presented on their experiences planning and implementing enhanced transit.

## Broward County Transit

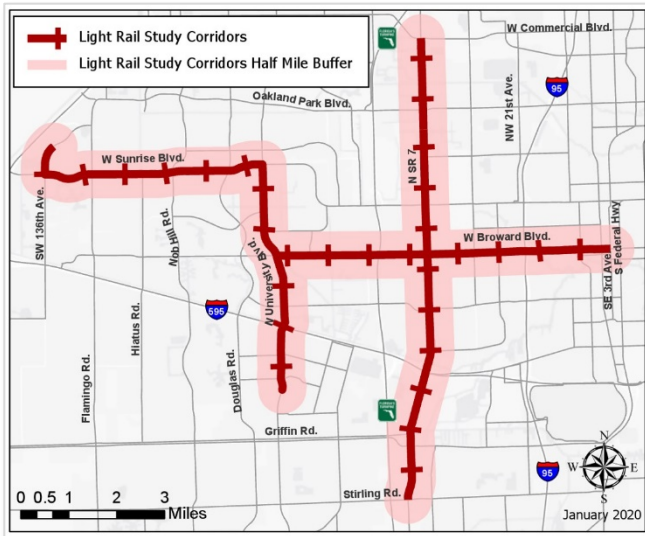
In 2018, Broward County voters approved a one-cent sales tax increase for the Mobility Advancement Program. Broward County Transit (BCT) marketed the initiative as a "penny for transportation" and focused on what the region could do with the revenues instead of the costs of the projects. Now that the funding source is in place, BCT is planning how to invest in transit in the region. It began by



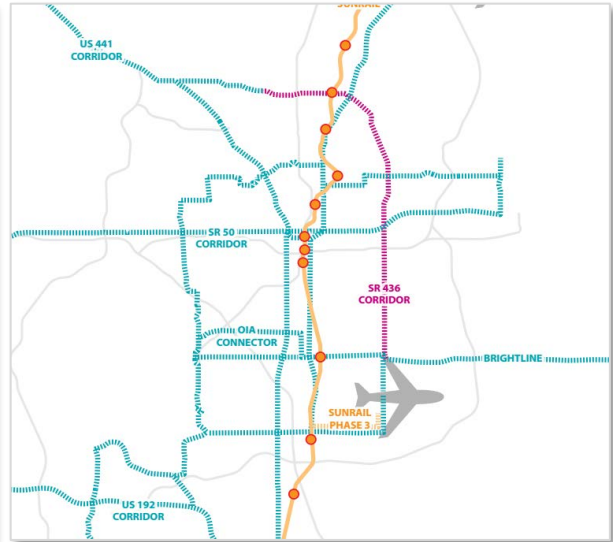
*Valley Metro redesigned its community offices to be more inviting and engaging to the public (courtesy of Valley Metro).*



increasing service on the fixed-route bus network by 20 percent. The agency is also planning to implement BRT on seven major corridors and 26 miles of light rail.



BCT is planning 26 miles of light rail (courtesy of BCT).



LYNX is planning a BRT system to provide efficient, high-frequency service to the Orlando region (courtesy of LYNX).

### **Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority (LYNX)**

LYNX is planning to expand upon its existing bus services by implementing BRT in the Orlando region. The agency has identified key corridors for BRT that would connect major destinations, including Orlando International Airport, with high-frequency and high-capacity transit service. In addition to supplementing LYNX’s bus service, the planned BRT would also make critical connections to SunRail, Central Florida’s commuter rail service, which the Florida Department of Transportation operates.

### **Jacksonville Transportation Authority**

The Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA) operates the largest BRT system in the southeastern United States. The BRT system consists of three routes totaling approximately 45 miles. In addition, JTA is planning to implement the Ultimate Urban Circulator (U<sup>2</sup>C). The agency plans to convert and expand the Skyway (an automated people mover) into an autonomous vehicle network. U<sup>2</sup>C supports the vision of a vibrant, revitalized and better-connected Downtown Jacksonville.



JTA is testing the vehicle technology for U<sup>2</sup>C (courtesy of JTA).

### **Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority**

In the last 10 years, there have been 57 BRT studies conducted within the Tampa Bay region. Also during this time, two ballot initiatives to fund transit expansions in Hillsborough County and one to fund transit expansion in Pinellas County failed. However, in 2018, Hillsborough County voters passed a ballot

initiative to support transit expansion. One of the differences between the previous failed initiatives and the successful 2018 initiative is the transit agency did not provide maps of what the ballot initiative would fund, under the theory that voters in areas not served by the routes on the map would not support the initiative. Instead, the transit agency highlighted the traffic reduction and pedestrian safety benefits that the funding would yield. Pinellas County voters will decide on a transit funding initiative in 2020. In the meantime, the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) is currently constructing its first BRT line, which will connect downtown St. Petersburg and the beach.



*PSTA recently broke ground on its first BRT line (courtesy of PSTA).*

## Group Discussions

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### Partnerships and Collaboration

During this discussion, the peers and participants discussed the following opportunities for partnerships and collaboration to advance plans for enhanced transit:

- Valley Metro recommended close coordination between the transit agency and the metropolitan planning organization (MPO). Valley Metro collaborated with the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG, the MPO for the Phoenix region) on developing the transit component of MAG's Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). For the transit expansion itself, Valley Metro conducted the planning, engineering, and environmental analysis, and the MAG Governing Board approved the project's mode and alignment.
- Capital Metro collaborated with the City of Austin to form a local government corporation via a joint development agreement. The corporation represents a dedicated joint governance to implement Project Connect. The corporation can issue revenue bonds, leverage Federal funding, and fund transit operations and management.
- Valley Metro also recommended partnering with local governments in areas where transit will be improved or expanded, as well as with professional and business organizations, chambers of commerce, and neighborhood groups. Colleges and universities can also be effective partners in supporting enhanced transit. Valley Metro also found AARP to be an effective partner in communicating the plans with older residents.
- Both Capital Metro and Valley Metro partnered closely with "friends of transit" organizations in their areas to promote and sell the high-capacity transit plans.

## Getting Public and Political Buy-In

During this discussion, the peers and participants discussed effective practices for the public and politicians to support enhanced transit:

- One participant asked the peers about what inspired their political leaders to support enhanced transit. Political leaders can convene key stakeholders and draw media attention, which makes disseminating the message easier. You also need political leaders to “close the deal,” using their political capital to assist in garnering public support at key decision points. It also helps to convince political leaders that the project will be their legacy project.



*Valley Metro is expanding the light rail system, the first phase of which opened in 2008 (courtesy of Valley Metro).*

- One common concern from the public is transit projects involve old technology, and with automated vehicles on the horizon, investing in transit is taking a step in the wrong direction. Valley Metro acknowledged that transit will be different in the future and will include new automated technologies. Valley Metro recommended explaining to the public how the plan will be part of an automated transportation future. Because of limited corridor capacity, high-capacity transit will be needed to move more people in the same amount of space.
- Crises are sometimes the catalysts to motivate communities to support enhanced transit, or at least to the point where people agree on the problem and that something needs to be done about it. In crisis, you look for the most familiar way out, which often leads to support for more traffic lanes. Transit has to be more aspirational; you need the community to believe transit is necessary for economic development, equity, and congestion mitigation.

## Telling the Story of Success

During this discussion, the peers and participants discussed effective practices for telling the story of success to build support for enhanced transit:

- Capital Metro knew it had to change the conversation about transit in the Austin region as ridership was declining. The Cap Remap project turned around the ridership trends, and the agency celebrated Cap Remap’s successes in increasing ridership and farebox revenue in order to build support for its transit expansion plans as part of Project Connect.

- In 2018, Valley Metro released a Quality of Life Report: *Building Communities + Enhancing Lives*. The report highlights the impacts the light rail has had on transit ridership, job creation, housing affordability, and other areas. The information in the Quality of Life Report has helped build a case for future expansions of high-capacity transit in the Phoenix region.
- Participants also discussed focusing on the economic benefits of investing in transportation. One stated that transportation is the one investment that government makes that guarantees an increase in economic activity.

## Funding and Financing

During this discussion, the peers and participants discussed various funding and financing strategies for enhanced transit:

- Both Capital Metro and Valley Metro have sought or are seeking competitive Federal funds for their high-capacity transit projects. The agencies' Federal funding sources included FTA's [Capital Investment Grant Program](#) (which includes New Starts, Small Starts, Core Capacity, and program of interrelated projects), the [Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement \(CMAQ\) Program](#), and the [Surface Transportation Block Grant Program](#). Most Federal funding programs require a local match.
- Other funding sources the peer agencies have pursued or are considering pursuing include sales tax increases and vehicle emissions taxes, both of which voters must approve.
- One participant remarked that transit agencies seeking to invest in enhanced transit should coalesce around a significant funding source to be able to make a significant impact.
- Another participant said ballot initiatives, often for sales tax increases in transit, can be successful and significant sources of revenue if the community has bought into the concept, and therefore supports the program.

## Getting Started with Enhanced Transit in Palm Beach

During this discussion, the peers and participants discussed how the Palm Beach TPA and its partner agencies might continue the planning for enhanced transit:



10 years after its first light rail line opened, Valley Metro published a quality of life report to showcase the light rail's impact on the Phoenix region since it opened (courtesy of Valley Metro).

- Several participants cautioned against identifying specific transit modes or solutions up-front. First, agencies should define the problem, and then make sure everyone, including the public and politicians, agree on what the problem is and that there needs to be a solution. Once you have this mutual understanding, then you should seek dedicated funding. Then, once the funding stream is in place, plan out exactly how to implement enhanced transit.
- Valley Metro also recommended not leading the public message about the project with a transit mode already identified. First, agencies should get agreement on the problem and that there needs to be a solution first. Then, get the public to buy into the concept of enhanced transit in specific corridors first.
- One participant anticipated members of the public arguing it is too hot and humid for enhanced transit to be effective in Palm Beach; people will not be willing to wait in the heat for transit. One peer suggested designing the transit system to mitigate the weather, including using heat-reducing materials and providing shade at transit waiting areas as well as along pedestrian and bicycle facilities to access transit to improve the experience. Another recommended pointing to successful systems in other warm cities, including Phoenix and Austin, among others.

## Key Takeaways

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At the end of the peer exchange, each participant offered a key takeaway that they learned during the event. These key takeaways are summarized below, categorized by the group discussion topics:

- How best to partner and collaborate with other agencies and entities:
  - Friends of Transit groups can help promote plans for enhanced transit.
  - Conduct peer city visits with staff, leadership, and community members to experience transit in similar communities.
- How to garner political and public buy-in for planned enhanced transit investments:
  - Innovation requires political buy-in.
  - You need to have champions for your plans and support from the communities.
  - A successful overhaul of the bus system can tee up public support for enhanced transit.
  - Celebrate your successes, big and small.
  - Today's commute will be your best commute going forward unless we act now.
  - You need to involve the public and stakeholders in developing and selling the solution to the problem.
  - Focus your message to the public on building a community, not just building transit.
  - Even if you think the problem is worth solving, you need to ensure the community agrees.
  - It is important to invest time into understanding what the community needs.
  - Lead with a "blank piece of paper" without maps, but have a vision that people can identify with. Transit expansion is more likely to be successful if you have grassroots support.
- How to tell the story of success in implementing enhanced transit:
  - Humanize your story and build the brand.
  - Vision is passion backed up by data.
  - Talk about the positive impacts to the community before you talk about the cost.
- Opportunities to fund and/or finance enhanced transit projects:

- Consider the costs over the entire lifecycle of light rail.
- Value capture is an opportunity to catalyze enhanced transit development.
- Palm Beach County needs a robust dedicated funding source to make enhanced transit a reality.
- Explain up-front how the annual operating expenses will be paid for.
- Next steps for the Palm Beach TPA and its partners to undertake in beginning to plan for enhanced transit in the Palm Beach region:
  - Preserve the rights of way that you intend to use for enhanced transit corridors.
  - Make transit stops pleasant, comfortable, something that reflects and supports the neighborhood, and is an advertisement for transit.
  - Think about transit as a utility – it should be there when people want or need it.
  - People will ride transit that serves them.
  - We have a number of successes in Palm Beach County we can celebrate and build upon as we plan for enhanced transit.
  - Palm Beach County needs more transportation options to be able to support economic development.
  - When planning enhanced transit, consider where growth will occur, not just where growth has already occurred.

# Appendices

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## Appendix A: Key Contacts

**Stacie Blizzard, Transportation Planning Specialist**  
FHWA Florida Division  
850-553-2223  
[stacie.blizzard@dot.gov](mailto:stacie.blizzard@dot.gov)

**Fred Bowers, Community Planner**  
FHWA Office of Planning  
202-366-2374  
[frederick.bowers@dot.gov](mailto:frederick.bowers@dot.gov)

**Clinton B. Forbes, Executive Director**  
Palm Tran  
561-841-4227  
[cforbes@pbcgov.org](mailto:cforbes@pbcgov.org)

**Nathaniel P. Ford Sr., CEO**  
Jacksonville Transportation Authority  
904-632-5500  
[nford@jtafla.com](mailto:nford@jtafla.com)

**Tim Garling, Deputy Director**  
Broward County Transit  
954-357-8424  
[tgarling@broward.org](mailto:tgarling@broward.org)

**Wulf Grote, Director, Capital & Service Development**  
Valley Metro  
602-322-4420  
[wgrote@valleymetro.org](mailto:wgrote@valleymetro.org)

**Tonya P. Holland, Community Planner**  
FTA Office of Planning and Environment  
202-493-0283  
[tonya.holland@dot.gov](mailto:tonya.holland@dot.gov)

**Brad Miller, CEO**  
Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority  
727-540-1800  
[bmiller@psta.net](mailto:bmiller@psta.net)

**Valerie Neilson, Deputy Director, Multimodal Development**  
Palm Beach Transportation Planning Agency  
561-725-0803  
[vneilson@palmbeachtpa.org](mailto:vneilson@palmbeachtpa.org)

**Robert Sachnin, Community Planner**  
FTA Region 4  
404 865-5606  
[robert.sachnin@dot.gov](mailto:robert.sachnin@dot.gov)

**Sam Sargent, Deputy Chief of Staff**  
Capital Metro  
512-389-7525  
[sam.sargent@capmetro.org](mailto:sam.sargent@capmetro.org)

**John Slot, CIO and COO**  
Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority (LYNX)  
407-254-6146  
[wslot@golynx.com](mailto:wslot@golynx.com)

**Scott Smith, CEO**  
Valley Metro  
602-495-8205  
[ssmith@valleymetro.org](mailto:ssmith@valleymetro.org)

**Nick Uhren, Executive Director**  
Palm Beach Transportation Planning Agency  
561-725-0818  
[nuhren@palmbeachtpa.org](mailto:nuhren@palmbeachtpa.org)

# Appendix B: Peer Exchange Agenda

## Palm Beach TPA Enhanced Transit Peer Exchange Agenda

**Date:** January 17, 2020

**Location:** Palm Beach TPA | 301 Datura Street | West Palm Beach, FL 33401

<b>Time</b>	<b>Topic</b>
<b>8:30 – 8:45 a.m.</b>	<p><b>Welcome and Introductions</b> FTA and FHWA welcome attendees, review the agenda, describe documentation/follow-up, establish ground rules for discussions, and introduce TPCB and the Peer Program.</p>
<b>8:45 – 9:15 a.m.</b>	<p><b>Palm Beach TPA Overview and Presentation</b> The Palm Beach TPA presents an overview of the vision and desire to enhance transit in the region.</p>
<b>9:15 – 10:15 a.m.</b>	<p><b>Valley Metro Presentation: Enhanced Transit in the Phoenix Area</b> Overview of Valley Metro’s experiences with planning and designing an enhanced transit system, including Q&amp;A.</p>
<b>10:15 – 10:30 a.m.</b>	<b>Break</b>
<b>10:30 – 11:30 a.m.</b>	<p><b>Capital Metro Presentation: Enhanced Transit in the Austin Area</b> Overview of Capital Metro’s experiences with planning and designing an enhanced transit system, including Q&amp;A.</p>
<b>11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.</b>	<p><b>Group Discussion: Partnerships and Collaboration</b> A facilitated group discussion on how Valley Metro and Capital Metro engaged in partnerships and collaborated with other agencies to implement enhanced transit. Questions may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What role did the MPO play in the process?</li> <li>• How can the Palm Beach TPA build a coalition to implement enhanced transit?</li> </ul>
<b>12:00 – 1:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Lunch (to be provided by the Palm Beach TPA)</b>
<b>1:00 – 2:00 p.m.</b>	<p><b>Group Discussion</b> A facilitated group discussion on the following topics:</p> <p><b>Getting Public and Political Buy-In</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you get buy-in from politicians to move forward with enhanced transit?</li> <li>• How did you get buy-in from the public to move forward with enhanced transit?</li> <li>• How did you address opposition to your plans?</li> </ul> <p><b>Telling the Story of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What data did you collect for before/after metrics to tell the story?</li> <li>• When and how did you collect this data?</li> </ul> <p><b>Funding and Financing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were your funding strategies?</li> <li>• How was the private sector involved in funding the transit expansion?</li> <li>• Did you use any Public Private Partnerships?</li> <li>• Did you consider Value Capture? If so, how?</li> </ul>



<b>Time</b>	<b>Topic</b>
<b>2:00 – 3:30 p.m.</b>	<p><b>Florida Transit Agencies Panel: Experience with Enhanced Transit</b></p> <p>A series of presentations from transit agencies in Florida that are working toward implementing enhanced transit. This session will also include a facilitated group discussion on opportunities in Florida for transit agencies to implement enhanced transit. The transit agencies will include, Jacksonville Transportation Authority, Miami Dade Transit, Broward County Transit, Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority, and LYNX.</p>
<b>3:30 – 3:45 p.m.</b>	<b>Break</b>
<b>3:45 – 4:30 p.m.</b>	<p><b>Group Discussion: Getting Started with Enhanced Transit in Palm Beach</b></p> <p>A facilitated group discussion on how the TPA, transit agencies, and partners can begin the process of exploring enhanced transit in the region. Questions may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you overcome the chicken or the egg challenge of land use change or transit first to move forward?</li> <li>• How did the climate in your region influence your plans for enhanced transit?</li> <li>• What did your early public involvement approach look like?</li> <li>• How did you plan for impacts to businesses along the enhanced transit routes?</li> </ul>
<b>4:30 – 4:45 p.m.</b>	<p><b>Summary of Key Takeaways</b></p> <p>A facilitated discussion among attendees of key takeaways from the peer exchange’s discussions and next steps for the Palm Beach TPA and Palm Tran to address.</p>
<b>4:45 – 5:00 p.m.</b>	<p><b>Closing Remarks</b></p> <p>FTA, FHWA, the Palm Beach TPA, and local transit agencies make closing remarks.</p>