



## 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan Phase II: Funding Scenarios

### Public Opinion Research: Focus Groups

Conducted November 14-17, 2011



#### Research objectives

Working in parallel with the technical review process on potential funding strategies, the public opinion research objectives are:

- Gather qualitative data on perceptions of various funding tools and scenarios for transportation improvements.
- Understand the reasons why various options are viewed positively or negatively—or neutrally.

*Focus groups provide insights on why people think the way they do, instead of telling us how many or how much. . . They cannot provide quantitative conclusions*



## Hillsborough MPO Post-Referendum Analysis Phase II Public Opinion Research: Focus Groups

### Methodology: Phase II focus groups, November 14-17

#### 8 groups arranged by county sub-areas (organized by ZIP codes)

- NW Hillsborough (incl. Carrollwood, Citrus Park)
- NE Hillsborough (incl. Temple Terrace, New Tampa)
- Town & County & Egypt Lake
- Central & East Tampa (incl. Downtown)
- South & West Tampa, including Westshore
- East Hillsborough (incl. Plant City)
- Greater Brandon (incl. Palm River, Mango)
- South Shore (incl. Apollo Beach, Ruskin, Sun City Center)

#### Randomly selected active voters

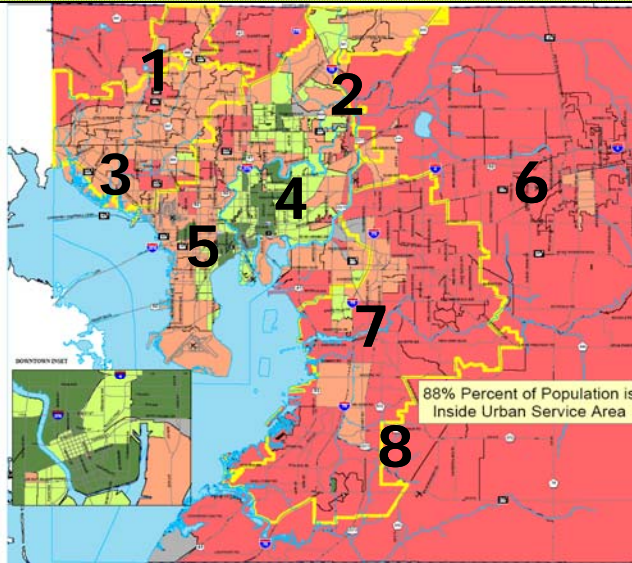
- Balance of gender, party affiliation, age in each area
- Agree that transportation is at least a somewhat serious problem
- Not sure whether would be willing to pay additional tax or fee for transportation

#### Structured around Discussion Guide

- Build upon brief overviews of funding scenarios
- Discussion framework same for all 8 groups
- Analyze transcripts & tapes for themes, messages, contrasts, reactions



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## FUNDING SCENARIOS & KEY FINDINGS FROM DISCUSSIONS



### Local Gas Tax

#### Positives

- Broad-based, applies to nearly all system users and community segments
- 1¢-5¢ does seem manageable
- Direct connection between tax and use of funds

#### Negatives

- Gas is expensive as it is.
- Uncertain on specific uses of funds—for roads? For transit? Other modes?
- Concerns about accountability with funds.

“I see my gas price fluctuate by 5 cents at every gas station that I go to, so I don't see 5 cents in tax as something that matters to me.”

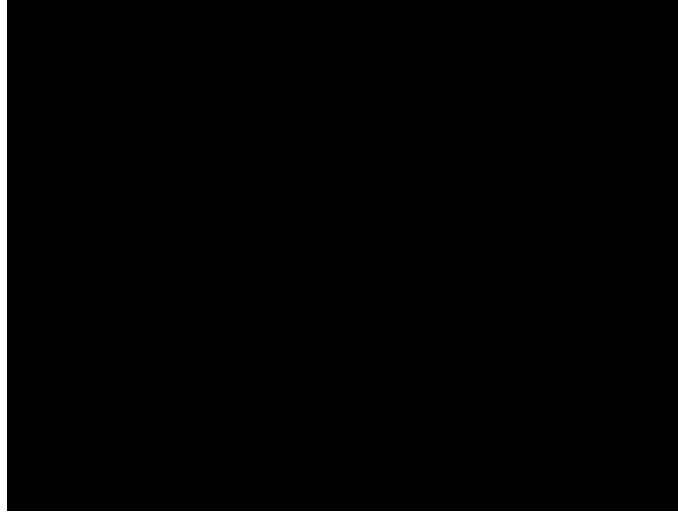
“Companies will just pass it on these taxes to customers.”

“If was 5 cents, it would be worth it, if we were sure it would be used on the roads. You don't know.”

“I would be opposed to it, unless they presented some sort of plan - A, B, and C. . . here's what we're going to do.”



**Key Finding: Concerns about accountability**



**Special Assessment Districts – Community Improvements**

**Positives**

- Improvements can be very targeted and tailored to address local priorities.
- Investing in infrastructure & services can improve prop. values

**Negatives**

- Property tax increase unpopular
- Different impacts & effects in different neighborhoods.
- Does not address community-wide and county-wide needs; a “patchwork” of projects.

“The neighborhoods who need it the most are probably the ones who would have the least amount of tax revenue to generate improvements.”

“I like it. It's your choice, you can live there or not.”

“It's not comprehensive enough.”

“That would create such an inconsistent experience in the city because there are areas with homes with higher property values.”

**Special Assessment Districts – Streetcar Extensions**

**Positives**

- Very localized approach—comm. and res. property owners pay for local improvements in their area.
- Interest in making streetcar more commuter-friendly.

**Negatives**

- Property tax increase unpopular.
- Streetcar line extension = very mixed reaction.
- Only local property owners pay, but area/region gets benefits.

“That streetcar was built for tourists, it wasn't built for us.”

I don't work downtown, but if I did and streetcar was available, that'd be great. Or to Ybor for entertainment. Yes, I'd pay extra [taxes].”

“Don't tax the residents to benefit the tourists.”

“Streetcar could be good idea on a bad current system because it would expand into areas where distance to walk is too far.”

**Mobility Fee on New Development**

**Positives**

- Development should “pay more of its own way.”
- Forces the issue on making transportation improvements up front—not later.

**Negatives**

- Poor economy + little development activity = weak tool
- Piling more costs on an important but struggling business sector
- Potential for “politicization” and watering down of its full impact.

“This will become political football, and developers and politicians will squirm out of them.”

“If developers pay them upfront, the public won't be burdened later by the project's impacts.”

“It's a one-time fee. And we're not paying it--they are. And the builder knows if he builds there, do whatever they want to do, they have to pay it.”

“Could be waived to get construction going again.”



**Express Toll Lanes with Bus Rapid Transit**

**Positives**

- Tolls are all about “choice” – users pay for the facility, and only when they want to use it.
- Familiarity with toll roads.
- Adding express buses a plus.

**Negatives**

- High costs and very disruptive construction.
- Raises funds for transportation, but not much congestion relief.
- Is the toll permanent?

“[Tolls are] immediate gratification. . . You're in traffic, you're late for work, to get through, you will pay that three bucks to get to work on time.”

“Some people can't afford to get gas, let alone pay tolls, and I think that's something that we're forgetting.”

“This is going to allow you to spend some money to get someplace faster, but it isn't going to eliminate congestion.”

“Not sure if the toll lanes will be used enough.”



**Tolled Intersection Bypass Lanes with BRT**

**Positives**

- Tolls are all about “choice” – users pay for the facility, and only when they want to use it.
- Could be creative solution for problematic areas and routes.
- Express buses gives option.

**Negatives**

- High cost and disruption of construction with major impacts.
- Skeptical if it would relieve much congestion.
- Is the toll permanent?

“It looks nice.” “This is a neat concept.”

“It's beneficial to those using it without penalizing others.”

“The individual gets to make the choice and the more it's used would help lessen the load on regular roads.”

“It just took 10 years of construction [of overpass on US 19] to just get to that point, and a lot of businesses along there went out of business waiting for that construction to get done. Same thing would happen on Dale Mabry.”



**Key Finding: Public-Private Partnerships**

**Q: What about the concept of Hillsborough County partnering with private sector on transportation projects like these tolling concepts?**

- Neutral to positive response.
- See the value of partnering to accelerate the timing of major infrastructure projects.
- Concerns about price controls on tolls, and risk to taxpayers.



**Local Sales Tax**

**Positives**

- Most broad-based tool—no “free-riders” as with other options.
- ½¢ - 1¢ seems manageable.
- Largest revenues; most flexibility and options for projects.

**Negatives**

- Poor economy and household finances = bad timing.
- Various improvements (roads, bus, rail, etc.) attract & repel different people.

“I think that would be the most universally fair way to go.”

“Definitely. A penny sales tax. As long as it goes to what it supposed to go for.”

Support. . .but “it would depend entirely on accountability.”

“Bad idea – I don’t trust the money would be spent correctly.”

“A penny is nominal, you’re not going to see it as much, you’re not going to feel it as much as if you had a utility bill tax or a gas tax. . . .You have to give in somewhere, you have to give something, so of all of them, this one seems the least painful.”

**Public Service Tax on Utilities (Electricity)**

**Positives**

- More fairness between cities and unincorporated areas.
- Broad-based revenue source—residential and business sectors both pay.

**Negatives**

- A surcharge on utility usage seems disconnected from using funds for transportation.
- Does not seem as manageable for a household to absorb the cost.

“With the economy the way it is, a lot for people--it's all they can do now to pay their utility bill.”

“It will hit fixed income, lower income people the hardest.”

“A tax on utilities is not a bother, unnoticeable.”

“Utilities already have enough ‘fees and taxes’ built in.”

**What modes/improvements were participants willing to support?**

More local road capacity

Express buses

Light rail demonstration line

Toll roads

Bike & ped safety

Park-n-Rides

Feeder bus routes

Ferry (South County)

Rail crossings (Plant City)





### Regional consolidation

**Q: Does it make sense for counties to combine agencies and programs for planning and/or transit?**

**Discussion points:**

- Responses overall were open-minded—neither strongly for nor against, but with some skepticism. (“It makes sense, but is it realistic?”)
- Perception that bigger geography and combined resources may result in more and better services.
- Acknowledgement that transportation issues cross county lines.
  
- Hillsborough, Polk, Pinellas, Pasco counties are very different and have too diverse needs.
- How would unincorporated Hillsborough County priorities be positioned in a larger, multi-county agency?
- Accountability



### Municipalities move forward?

**Q: Should incorporated cities go forward with transportation funding referendum (sales tax)?**

**Discussion points:**

- An overall neutral response—neither strongly for nor strongly against the concept.
- Acknowledgement among respondents in unincorporated areas that Tampa-area traffic has county-wide impacts, and Tampa transportation improvements have benefits for the whole metropolitan area.



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**- Discussion -**