



## Next Stop: Iorio's Legacy Of Mass Transit

Published: Apr 3, 2007

On the night she was re-elected to a second term, Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio stood outside her victory party and waxed ever onward about the importance of developing a mass transit system for the region.

Her Honorship is well versed on this topic, so much so that after all the idyllic chatter over how swell it would be to have mass transit in place, Iorio acknowledged that for all her passion, when she leaves office four years hence, still not a rail will have been laid.

Indeed, even after she completes her two terms as the future county mayor, then the governorship and a U.S. Senate term or two, mass transit will probably be more of a dream than Pete Rose, Hall-of-Famer.

Listening to Iorio swooning over the image of thousands of happy and contented citizens boarding trains to move hither and yon about the Bay area inevitably led to a sort of "Groundhog Day" of choo-choos for me.

Some 34 years ago when I moved to Tampa there was talk then, as there is now, of the charms of creating a regional public transit system.

### Doomed To Oblivion

Back then the costs were estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars, costs considered too extravagant, and thus those plans and all of the others that have followed have been consigned to oblivion.

In 1989, plans were floated to build a 44-mile-long mass transit system with a price of \$1.4 billion.

Nothing happened.

But maybe, just maybe, Iorio might have greater success in moving a mass transit system to fruition for a very simple reason.

Over the years, all the proposals were predicated on supposition that in the future, the Tampa Bay area would be awash in a swelling population leading to massive traffic congestion.

Have you noticed? The future is here and you're sitting behind it on Bruce B. Downs Boulevard for hours on end.

It's always a tricky thing for a politician to peg his or her legacy to something that probably won't happen for many, many years.

### Area Needs System

We also know that whatever the estimated cost of a mass transit system, it will eventually be more.

We also know there will be delays and screw-ups, and what would a multibillion public works project be without some good old-fashioned bribes taking place?

Yet, if this region is ever going to be taken seriously for its quality of life, a mass transit system remains an intrinsic part of that progress.

As well, Iorio will probably find no greater ally in her mass transit dream than former state Sen. Jim Sebesta, who probably knows more about this area's transportation needs than anyone.

Sebesta recalled that in the 1980s, then-state Sen. Malcolm Beard crafted legislation creating the Tampa Bay Commuter Transit Authority, which has, for all practical purposes, remained dormant.

"It was never funded," Sebesta sighed. "My biggest disappointment was that I was not able to get that thing going."

However, Sebesta also noted that the Commuter Transit Authority, which exists on paper, has the power to issue revenue bonds.

Or put another way, Sebesta said, using the authority's ability to generate revenue, a mass transit system could begin taking shape today, thereby putting Iorio's legacy on the fast track.

Helpful chap, Sebesta is.

**Daniel Ruth's column appears Saturday, Tuesday and Thursday.**

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.tbo.com/news/metro/MGBU0QCT10F.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

©2007 Media General Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Member agreement](#) and [privacy statement](#)