



## Regional Transportation Breakthrough

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Exciting possibilities are on the horizon after the Legislature unanimously approved a bill creating a seven-county transportation authority.

The new board, to be controlled by elected officials from member counties, has no taxing power, but it does have the power to ask for money from the state and federal governments, from investors and from member counties, and to build much-needed regional projects.

Rep. Bill Galvano of Bradenton and Sen. Mike Fasano of New Port Richey deserve accolades for improving their original bills and making smart compromises. Their only failure was not convincing Polk to join, though Polk can always join later.

The new agency will be called the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority instead of the "Bay Area" authority as some interests outside Hillsborough County preferred. The name acknowledges that Tampa is the hub of the region, though broad representation will prevent any one community from hogging the resources.

Despite the good intentions and safeguards, taxpayers must keep a sharp eye on what happens next. The board is authorized to build and operate train lines, express bus routes and toll roads. It can develop property, build park-and-ride lots and even run a ferry. But practically speaking, without local taxpayer approval, it will only issue revenue bonds for toll roads and form partnerships for investor-built roads and new villages.

The region needs much more. The authority has the power to plan a multi-county transit system to get commuters to and from urban jobs. A good plan will win voter support to help pay for trains or fast bus lanes. The new agency's real potential is the power to envision big projects that local governments can't and the state won't. From the cities to the farms, that's a change worth celebrating.

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