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## Transit study phase one: develop small towns, not sprawl

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Better transit could make a difference in quality of life in Tampa Bay. That's one of the conclusions from the first phase of results in the Hillsborough County Metropolitan Transit Agency's Transit Choices Study.

Eight community workshops around the county identified community needs and core values, a release said. Participants included citizens from Lutz, South Shore, Temple Terrace, Brandon, Town & Country, East Tampa, West Tampa and Plant City.

To citizens in Lutz and South Shore, both rapidly developing areas, maintaining quality of life means preserving open space and the community's heritage.

Transit could connect to park & rides, linking small towns like historic Lutz and Ruskin, and create incentives for small town development rather than urban sprawl, residents said.

In Temple Terrace, Brandon and Town & Country, a major concern was the reliability and predictability of travel times. With a morning commute varying 30 to 60 minutes or more every day depending on road conditions, residents would prefer to spend less time in their vehicles and spend more quality time at home.

Residents of East Tampa, West Tampa and Plant City would like to see a reinvestment in their communities that would help stabilize local businesses, increase the number of local jobs, and provide a more walk-able and bike-able community with connections to parks and better transportation options both locally and regionally.

The purpose of this transit study is to assess transit service needs and to meet those needs in both long and short-term plans.

"Our goal is to produce a comprehensive transportation plan that includes not only road, sidewalk and trail improvements, but also a transit network that provides the cost-efficient technologies to give people options to get where they want and need to be," said Councilman Shawn Harrison, MPO chairman, in a release. "We encourage the public to participate throughout the planning process, so that the plan will provide the connectivity that people are telling us they want."

The next steps of the transit study will include a countywide public workshop this spring, at which citizens will be able to participate in interactive exercises in order to build community consensus and stimulate dialogue on various transit scenarios.

The MPO is a transportation policymaking board comprised of representatives from local governments and transportation agencies that foster community revitalization by enhancing community quality of life and promoting public transportation.

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