



Transportation Board Coming To "Bay"

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Legislative give and take has produced a good bill to create a regional transportation board to plan and build roads and possibly transit throughout a seven-county area.

The amended bills, sponsored in the House by Rep. Bill Galvano of Bradenton and in the Senate by Sen. Mike Fasano of New Port Richey, are much better than either original versions and are likely to pass.

The Senate bill, as first written, would have disbanded the Tampa-Hillsborough Expressway Authority, but that unnecessary provision has been dropped.

The new versions also require regional projects to be consistent with local growth plans. The House bill originally said the regional board would "coordinate" with local plans, an imprecise word suggesting county or city plans might be ignored by regional projects pushing intense growth to rural areas that don't want it.

Other safeguards have been added to maintain a healthy balance between regional and local concerns. The board can issue revenue bonds and go form partnerships, but it has no taxing power.

The board will be dominated by elected officials from Citrus, Hernando, Pasco, Pinellas, Hillsborough, Manatee, and Sarasota counties, along with the mayors from major cities. The governor will appoint four.

Unfortunately, Polk County could not be convinced to join. And equally disappointing is the name, Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority. The bay is Tampa Bay, and Tampa is the crossroads of the region.

The name snub won't matter if the new board fulfills its mission to solve big transportation problems, not bypass them.

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