



## Residents Discuss Transit Options

By **TOM BRENNAN** The Tampa Tribune

Published: Dec 2, 2006

BRANDON - County planners are asking area residents for a wish list, but not for any gifts that would fit under a tree.

They want to know what would make life better, especially when it comes to transportation needs. As more new residents overtax area highways and byways, the Metropolitan Planning Organization is traveling the region asking people whether they want different ways to get around - including more public transit.

"Our land-use patterns are oriented towards the transportation systems we have now, and we are getting to the limits of some of those systems," said Beth Alden, a team leader with MPO.

"If we are to shift to include other modes of transportation, we are going to have to think about how our communities are built and question what we must keep and what we should change."

The MPO, the county's long-range transportation planning board, is holding a series of meetings to hear from residents. The first was held this week in Brandon.

As part of the process, facilitators are asking people general questions about what they hold dear. More than 20 people at the Brandon meeting were asked to rank statements on the importance of such items as the natural environment, historical heritage, public safety, personal integrity and time spent with loved ones.

Planners and consultants hope to translate the responses into an update of the county's long-range transportation and growth plans.

"I know this may seem vague and esoteric, but it's not," said Whit Blanton, vice president of Renaissance Planning Group, which the MPO has hired to conduct the study.

Tampa-based Renaissance is a planning, design and policy analysis consulting firm that works with communities to integrate transportation, land use, urban design and technology.

Residents at the meeting also were asked their opinions on being able to easily access jobs, stores and other key services by walking, driving, biking or taking public transportation.

Kary Andrews of Riverview said she went to the meeting because she was curious and wants to be part of any conversation about area transportation.

"We've got a long way to go to solve our problems, but at least we're getting started," she said.

Brenda Fewoy of Lithia wanted to do her part to help protect her rural community from future road work.

"I'm encouraged and appreciate them working with and coming to the community," she said.

Similar meetings will be held in Lutz, west and east Tampa, Ruskin, Town 'n Country, Temple Terrace and Plant City.

More meetings are scheduled in the same areas in January, March and May. Planners hope to refine the public input into a list of long-term planning options and potential funding sources by the end of 2007.

Protecting the area's natural assets and existing neighborhoods and communities ranked high with those at the Brandon meeting. But they also want to make getting there easier.

"We have to respect the natural environment, but it has to be accessible," Andrews said. "We don't want to hide it off."

Some residents said they would be willing to take public transit if commute times by car get longer or gas gets more expensive. But using public transportation would have to be convenient, on time and have desirable destinations.

The group also wanted residents and property owners to have more of a voice in transportation decisions.

### IF YOU GO

The next workshop on the county's update of its transit plans is at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at the SouthShore Regional Library, 15816 Beth Shields Way, Ruskin. For information call (813) 273-3777, Ext. 342, or visit [www.hillsboroughmpo.org](http://www.hillsboroughmpo.org).

Reporter Tom Brennan can be reached at (813) 657-4528 or [tbrennan@tampatrib.com](mailto:tbrennan@tampatrib.com).

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.tbo.com/plantcity/MGBTBEV47VE.html>

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

TBO.com is Tampa Bay Online 2006 Media General, Inc. All rights reserved [Member agreement](#) and [privacy statement](#)