



Relief May Be On Way For Commuters

By **ANTHONY McCARTNEY** The Tampa Tribune

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TAMPA - Commuters in northern Hillsborough County and Tampa could benefit from \$500 million in improvements being considered by a transportation task force.

Ken Hagan, a county commissioner and chairman of the task force, unveiled a draft plan that would spend \$250 million on roads but also contribute modest sums to improving bus service and to buying land for a light rail system.

Before any building starts, county commissioners would have to approve a bond measure.

Most of the road money would be spent on extending Citrus Park Drive and widening Lutz Lake Fern Road.

County Public Works Director Bob Gordon said the projects will fill a need for major east-west thoroughfares in northern Hillsborough County.

Those projects, along with improvements to U.S. 301 and Gornito Lake Road, would cost less than \$200 million.

The task force also is considering helping Tampa finish some of its projects, including improvements to 40th Street and Cross Creek Boulevard.

Hagan said he thinks the task force likely will pay only for part of the Tampa projects instead of footing the entire bill.

"I don't think it's right or prudent to fund other jurisdictions' obligations," he said.

Hagan also plans to lobby fellow commissioners for a \$10 million increase in property tax contributions for road projects. The money would come from existing taxes, rather than a millage increase.

Despite plans by state lawmakers to slash the county's property tax revenue, Hagan said he is confident he can convince the commission to steer more property tax money toward transportation improvements.

Under the plan released Monday, the rest of the half-billion dollars could be spent on:

- \$160 million for intersection improvements;
- \$40 million for bus-line improvements;
- \$30 million to buy rights-of-way for a rail lines;
- \$20 million on making signal lights smarter.

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