

-FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-

Community Opposes FDOT variable rate toll lanes for I-275

Organization petitions MPO Board in StopTBX action

Tampa, Fla., July 16, 2015 – Sunshine Citizens, a non-partisan grassroots Tampa Bay area advocacy group representing thousands of citizens fighting for smarter growth and transit solutions, announced a major action in the first of a series of such activities aimed at thwarting the Tampa Bay Express project (TBX).

Together with a coalition of like-minded Tampa residents, neighborhood associations and business owners, the group is mobilizing for their first action aimed at persuading the Metropolitan Planning Organization of Hillsborough County to remove the Florida Department of Transportation's TBX project from the five-year Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP).

As part of their ongoing outreach and efforts to educate Tampa Bay area residents about the negative impacts of the TBX project, the group will rally and attend the MPO Board meeting, Tuesday, August 4, 5:30 p.m., at the Hillsborough Fredrick B. Karl County Center (601 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa).

"TBX is a disastrous travesty that will cost this community nine billion dollars, not provide solutions or relieve congestion, and further taxes residents via variable rate toll lanes," said Chris Vela, president of Sunshine Citizens. "There are more pressing transportation needs all over Hillsborough County. How many roads could be fixed or finished? FDOT has still not answered why they would invest so much in just one transportation project- it seems a huge waste of limited taxpayer resources."

Economically unsound, murky data

FDOT has claimed that their TBX plan allows for congestion relief on the highway corridors of I-275 and I-4. When questioned as to what data was used to develop the use of express toll lanes on the federal interstate roadways, FDOT cites their only other similar installation of express toll lanes in South Florida. That installation has failed to achieve the traffic goals and revenue goals set by FDOT, and they are considering raising those rates yet again in South Florida. There is increasing evidence of less safety and increased hazards with the South Florida express lanes. In fact, the roadways being touted as basis for this tolled express lane project are in Los Angeles, Atlanta and Miami – which are not at all

comparable models and are not successful examples of reduced congestion and quicker commutes.

Sunshine Citizens is opposed to the Tampa Bay Express project because it does not present a viable, economically sound plan for addressing the transportation needs of the Tampa Bay region. The variable rate/dynamic-pricing model of the express lane tolls is not proven and early indications point to a double taxation model being imposed without thorough examination and input from the taxpayers.

Additionally, this revenue model is not sustainable and does not follow the law of supply and demand. In this model as demand increases, the supply (available lanes) is set and cannot be expanded- leading to inevitable increases in toll price to meet service level expectations. While FDOT claims a revenue boost, there is very little data available that shows that the revenue projections can be met and no accounting for the additional cost of road maintenance. See our Fact Sheet for more information and sources.

Not aligned with region's planning vision and goals

The Hillsborough County MPO has undertaken comprehensive surveying and community input programs as part of their Imagine 2040 long-range transportation plan.

When residents were asked what the county needs to do to plan for growth and to rank responses, the top response was encourage walkable places, followed by filling in and reusing already developed areas, and building homes near transit.

Tampa Bay residents, business leaders and political leaders have consistently stated that in order to spur economic development and generate interest from leading companies in locating to the region, we must have a mix of transportation choices. Multi modal transportation planning, including good, usable public transit, facilitates economic growth, attracts employers and workforce talent and stimulates job growth. Similar metropolitan areas are focusing on and investing in such models with positive results. Recent projects and planned future redevelopment of downtown, the Channelside district and Tampa International Airport all call for the need to: increase walkability, implement multiple modes of transit (bus, rail, cycling and existing roadways), and connect the region by improving existing roads. The community does not want funding to be solely focused on one project that only adds single occupancy vehicle capacity and taxes drivers.

“We want the MPO to hear our clear and loud call to remove the TBX project from the TIP and the long term plan. It is wrong for Tampa, disregards countywide needs to finish regional connections and is not effective,” said Vela. “The citizens of this region are calling on our elected officials to either let us have a vote on this measure or to come back to the table and have an honest conversation. We want and have expressed in numerous county studies that we prioritize other projects and more viable economic modeling for transportation needs.”

About the StopTBX Action

Launched following the June 12 Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority (TBARTA) board meeting, the StopTBX Action has successfully and rapidly grown. Drawing interest, support and media attention from all over the Tampa Bay area, the action is the first of many steps a concerned group of residents has launched. The action is in direct response to and opposition of the FDOT’s Tampa Bay Express project, which will drastically widen I-275, decimate the Tampa urban core and substantially harm efforts for true multi modal transportation and economic growth in Tampa Bay.

About Sunshine Citizens

Sunshine Citizens is a non-partisan, grassroots advocacy group focused on smarter growth and transit solutions. We are actively building coalitions of like-minded groups, citizens and local leaders in Tampa Bay who share our vision for better choices, smarter growth and positive economic development for our area.

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