

## **E: Appendix – Regional Agency Adopted Transit Strategies**

### ***Adopted Transit Strategy for Sarasota County***

SCAT has been implementing a three-stage strategy developed in 2006 that is intended to guide system development. The three stages are:

- System consolidation;
- Efficiency investments;
- System expansion.

The first phase of SCAT's strategy calls for improvements in transit service design and the investment in upgrading routes in key corridors. As an element of this strategy, and as concrete evidence of the support of the region for transit system improvements, the County Board of Commissioners increased SCAT's operating budget by approximately \$13.2 million between fiscal year 2006 and fiscal year 2007.

SCAT is now well into this phase, having restructured routes and added service to key routes. Beginning in March 2007, SCAT will near 75 percent completion of this planned system expansion. SCAT is currently planning additional phases of the effort, including improvements in service span for key routes to better match employment shifts and the introduction of Sunday services. SCAT implemented the service hour expansions including peak hour services, new Sunday and evening service in 2007.

The second phase of SCAT's strategy call for capital investments in guideways and transit priority techniques (ITS) including the implementation of high capacity/high frequency transit in order to create a sustainable competitive advantage for transit services, better target the core of the region, with transit friendly land uses, and significantly improve the operating characteristics of the system through increased flexibility, reliability and decreased trip times. An AA is the first major step in the Small Starts process and this is the reason for this document.

The third phase of SCAT's strategy follows on the development of an efficient core, by systematically looking at tying more distant locations into the core to create an effective and efficient regional transit system. This phase is also designed to support the County's adopted 2050 land use strategy, which seeks to develop transit-friendly villages and village centers throughout the County.

### ***Bus Route Structure***

Sarasota's current bus system is based on a modified grid network, with significant route deviation along many routes. Approximately one dozen routes currently terminate at the Downtown Transit Center. This facility was opened for operation in March 2006 and is centrally located to serve the core of downtown Sarasota. The Downtown Transit Center is of limited size and the continued significant expansion of service has taxed its ability to provide bus bay accommodations to all buses. At this time, this facility has no excess capacity and cannot accept further trips especially during peak hours without a facility expansion.

Implementation of high capacity/high frequency transit in the U.S. 41 corridor will allow existing bus routes to be reconfigured and optimized. This reconfiguration will:

- Shorten some routes by not routing buses to the Downtown Transit Center. Instead some routes will turn back at a station on the proposed transit line – allowing for more frequent and efficient service to other parts of the service area or at a minimum the neighborhoods they are serving today;
- Fewer buses utilizing the Downtown Transit Center will negate the need for further facility expansion; and

- Providing more frequent service on the high capacity/high frequency “spine”, will dramatically reduce the amount of time needed to transfer to a crossing bus route or to complete a trip.

### **Market Conditions and Current Ridership**

SCAT primarily serves a transit dependent population. But, according to a recent study published in the Journal of Public Transportation, the City of Sarasota was the only mid-sized city in the Southeast United States to experience a per capita increase in transit ridership in recent years. Meetings with stakeholder groups have generally produced a positive feedback about transit services, which is supported by numerous anecdotal comments received in favor of transit services. As many of Sarasota’s residents had moved from major cities in the Northeast U.S. (with extensive and well-used public transit systems), the population is favorably disposed to increases and improvements in the transit system.

The U.S. 41 corridor, broadly defined, includes some of the most heavily used transit segments in the County. The segments of with the greatest number of boardings/alightings are mostly located north of Downtown or adjacent to U.S. 41. Many passengers transfer at the Downtown Transit Center to access routes that travel to the south and east.

The Study Corridor served approximately 3,295 riders a day as of March 2006, with two-thirds boarding within the corridor and the rest boarding outside. Corridor use was evenly split between the section north of Downtown and the section that includes Downtown and the corridor south of Downtown. The service expansion (that includes longer spans-of-service and increased frequencies from 1 hour) implemented beginning in July 2008 is expected to further increase corridor ridership above natural growth. Finally, it is further expected that the implementation of a high capacity/high frequency “spine” in the U.S. 41 corridor will attract non-riders due to the new transit investment in improved facilities, increases in span-of-service, increases in frequency (at the FTA standard for Small Start projects) and an overall more attractive service.

### **Goals of the Alternatives Analysis Project**

The dominant goal of SCAT’s Alternatives Analysis is to significantly expand the role and contribution of public transit in the Sarasota region. There are a number of dimensions of this goal; they are listed below.

**Operational Efficiency** – A major goal of this project is to reduce bus system delays due to traffic congestion, as well as ensure a higher degree of on-time performance. These two efforts together should allow SCAT to operate its service plans with more efficiency by providing better transit service to its riders.

**Increase Ridership** – An improvement in on-time performance, together with faster travel times, would be expected to produce higher ridership over time. This would produce the following benefits:

- Higher revenues;
- More efficient service/higher fare box recovery;
- Fewer one-person trips made by automobile.

**Bypass Congestion** – The proposed capital improvements effectively bypasses the most significant road congestion in the Sarasota region and gains a permanent improvement in operations relative to the roadway.

**Improve Connectivity** – The proposed capital improvements and the draft service concepts together envisage a network composed of a mix of branching and express services that connect to each other at key intersection points. Most riders will experience a more direct transit trip, faster travel times, reduced transfer wait time and a more comfortable and safe place to make the transfer.

**Reduce Trip Travel Time** – The proposed infrastructure and draft service plans are intended to significantly reduce transit trip times for a broad range of current and future transit riders as a result of several kinds of improvements:

- More direct routes;
- Reduced impact from road congestion – higher operating speeds;
- More frequent service – less transfer wait time;
- Greater connectivity – more travel options for riders;
- Major reduction in system headways – to less than 20 minutes.

**Support Transit-Oriented Land Uses** – Recent residential development in downtown Sarasota has been proceeding at a high level which is unusual for a medium sized city. Literally, dozens of mid and high-rise buildings are either complete or under construction currently. In addition, small scale, very urban housing forms, such as row housing have been developed and are prevalent in many areas of Sarasota. It is the goal of this project to support these and other planned urban infill developments.

**Promote New TOD** – It is the goal of the project to open up areas adjacent to Downtown for intensive development. The City of Sarasota has wished to extend the intensity of downtown development north through the Rosemary District, but has been prevented from doing so because of a lack of concurrency between the proposed scale of development and the capacity of the existing roadway network to support such intensity. One very important goal of this Small Starts project is to create such capacity both through the provision of high quality transit services for new trips and through trip diversion of some existing trips onto the transit system.

Parallel to this goal is the related goal of supporting redevelopment and reinvestment in the New Town District north of Downtown. A number of major residential “smart growth” projects are being planned for this zone. SCAT has been actively working with developers – who see improved transit service as a main ingredient to the success of these projects.

## ***Alternatives Analysis***

SCAT proposes an AA process designed to measure a range of likely alternatives against a predetermined set of objectives. These objectives include:

- **Operating efficiency** – What impact does the preferred alternative have in terms of operating efficiency, understood as likely on-time performance and number of buses needed to operate routes operating in the study corridor;
- **Projected ridership** – The number of existing riders in the corridor and new riders to the system that will be expected to ride the new service;
- **Congestion impacts** – To what extent does the preferred alternative allow transit vehicles to bypass road construction? Does the alternative lead to any reduction in automotive travel?
- **System connectivity** – How does each alternative compare for connecting to the larger bus system. Specifically, how many destinations can be reached from any point in the system with one transfer?
- **Time savings** – To what extent does the alternative reduce total travel time in the corridor? To what extent is travel time reduced for a likely set of trip pairs?
- **Support for existing land uses** – How well does the alternative support existing transit-friendly land uses? How many trips are generated or attracted along both the capital investment and the surrounding corridors that will feed into the study corridor?
- **Support for future TOD** – To what extent does the alternative support new Transit Oriented Development (TOD)? To what extent can it provide the concurrency necessary to support designation of the Rosemary District as a transit corridor?

- **Capital and operating costs/subsidies** – What are the costs associated with each alternative, both in terms of operating commitments and capital outlays?
- **Attractiveness to existing and potential riders** – The input of stakeholder groups and representatives of the public will also be considered in terms of their reaction to different alternatives.

The proposed AA will generate a set of alternatives that will likely include some version of the following:

- A no-build or baseline alternative;
- A minimal capital investment alternative that relies primarily on transit-priority techniques such as signal priority;
- A partial capital investment alternative that adds a reduced capital component to the project in the form of queue jump lanes ; and
- The current proposal, that includes the creation of fixed guideway for a significant length of the corridor.

The AA will also consider the optimal network configurations associated with each alternative.

### ***Adopted Regional Policies and Plans***

The U.S. 41 corridor was the subject of a long-range transit plan commissioned by the Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which adopted a plan based on the creation of high capacity/high frequency services on dedicated travel lanes along the U.S. 41 highway. The Sarasota North South BRT Project is a refinement of this vision, and is currently examining alternative alignments and infrastructure in order to support an efficient and effective rapid transit service for the Sarasota region.

There have been a number of other policies and plans that have been completed by the various governmental agencies in the Sarasota region that have relevant findings to the North South Alternatives Analysis project. These studies have been completed by:

- City and County of Sarasota;
- Sarasota-Manatee MPO;
- Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority; and
- FDOT.

A number of the plans and reports put forth by these agencies are reviewed below.

### **Strategic Regional Transit Needs Assessment**

#### **FDOT April 2007**

The Strategic Regional Transit Needs Assessment (SRTNA) was prepared by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). The purpose of the SRTNA study was to enable the Department to effectively prioritize and fund regional transit infrastructure and operations in the West Central Florida region. The SRTNA West Central Florida region includes eight counties that are a part of FDOT districts seven and one:

- Citrus;
- Hernando;
- Pasco;
- Hillsborough;
- Pinellas;
- Polk;

- Manatee; and
- Sarasota.

The SRTNA fulfills FDOT's desire to create a policy initiative which allows the flexible pursuit of regional projects that meet the needs of the West Central Florida region as it grows and changes. As part of this project, the Department explored the effect of sustained growth and land use policies on the demand for transit services.

This document described each of the identified public transportation technologies and operational techniques, including:

- Operating characteristics;
- Equipment characteristics;
- Required rights-of-way;
- Ranges of operating and capital costs;
- Characteristics of stations for each mode; and
- Ranges of demand typically required to support each of the identified technologies.

Research of national best practices for TOD density thresholds was conducted to define station/stop area types in the 2050 Transit Scenario. TOD definitions also encompassed what, where, and how TOD should be designed. The most common theme of a TOD includes concentrated development into areas of higher density generally within a quarter-mile radius (five minute walk) from a transit station/stop. The SRTNA study defined this radius as the station/stop influence area. Within this radius a mix of several different land uses which encourage walking, transportation alternatives to the vehicle, and a mix of housing choices should be implemented. The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) defines TOD as a "...compact, mixed use development near new or existing public transportation infrastructure which serves housing, transportation, and neighborhood goals. Its pedestrian-oriented design encourages residents and workers to drive their cars less and ride mass transit more." National TOD definitions vary greatly on what types of land use and density are required to be successful; stating that land use and employment densities within a TOD are as varied as the geographic areas they serve. The National Transportation Research Board has recognized several important and influential case studies in its *TCRP Report 102, Transit-Oriented Development in the United States: Experiences Challenges, and Prospects (2004)*. These case studies encompass several varied metropolitan areas such as Boston, New Jersey, Miami-Dade County, Dallas, and Portland, Oregon where TOD has been incorporated with some success. Lessons from these metropolitan areas can be extrapolated and applied to the SRTNA study area regardless of their geographic or population size.

The West Central Florida region has been identified by the Center for Transit Oriented Development (CTOD) report *Hidden in Plain Sight: Capturing the Demand for Housing near Transit* (September 2004) as a metro area with significant emerging TOD markets and is described as, "...metro areas that are likely to emerge as significant new markets for housing in transit zones... in these fast-growing metro areas, most of which lie in the Sun Belt, existing and future transit zones have the potential to accommodate anywhere from 15 percent to nearly 25 percent of the household growth projected between now and 2025. Though the change in these regions is small in absolute terms, given their size, the amount of new TOD housing has the potential to significantly shape development patterns and increase transit usage."

The following twelve principles were used to guide the creation of SRTNA TOD strategies and 2050 Transit Scenario:

- Increased mobility choices (walking and bicycling as well as transit);
- Increased transit ridership;

- Building and spaces that are human scaled;
- Good transit connections to the rest of the region;
- Reduced dependence on auto use;
- Varying densities and housing stock;
- Focus density in centers;
- Emphasize the re-use of underdeveloped and underutilized sites before the development of greenfields and open space;
- Focus on reducing large open parking lots for clustered hidden parking facilities;
- Promote joint commercial uses and employment centers;
- Sufficient retail development (quantity, quality, and diversity) to satisfy the basic daily needs of residents and employees working in the area, and
- Ability to live, work, and shop within the same neighborhood.

### **Performance Criteria**

The SRTNA travel demand modeling process used the newly calibrated WCFRPM travel demand model to produce a significant volume of quantitative data, including ridership projections, for each proposed transit connection across three land use scenarios. To organize this data, several quantitative measures of performance criteria were developed. Qualitative characteristics are also important to the success of each individual transit connection and these assessments were organized into separate performance criteria and measures. These varied performance criteria compare each proposed transit connection's ability to achieve the goals of the SRTNA study. Performance levels were determined through the use of a scoring methodology that ranked transit connections within each criteria measure. Transit connections that consistently scored high across each performance measure have the potential for recommendation. As a result, these connections were considered for further analysis and potential implementation. Because the SRTNA study is a system planning-level study, it did not use capital or operating cost as criteria to determine need.

Each transit connection in the system was tested through the travel demand model to determine its potential ridership and used to compare the effectiveness of each against other regional connections. To make this comparison, data output from the model was organized into two performance criteria: ridership projections and service area characteristics. Measurements for each criterion were designed to create a balanced system that did not favor any particular location or type of transit investment (urban/suburban, bus/rail, etc.). Several model runs were conducted over the course of the study. Interim model runs were conducted to determine if stations needed to be added, removed, or relocated. These interim model runs also determined if adjustments to model alignments were needed to increase the system's potential effectiveness.

### **Ridership Projections**

The ridership projections were examined through several measurements:

- projected passenger boardings;
- number of projected passenger miles traveled; and
- average passengers per mile.

Projected passenger boardings are equal to the total number of passengers who board the service at all stations per transit connection during an average one-day period (24 hours). Projected passenger miles traveled is equal to the total number of miles traveled by all passengers using an individual transit connection during the same average day or 24-hour period. This measure balances long trips made by fewer passengers with many shorter trips. Both of these measurements are used during the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) New Starts application process. The third ridership measure, average passengers per mile, identified shorter

connections which serve a higher average number of passengers to offset the inherently higher total number of boardings or passenger miles produced by longer transit connections.

### **Recommended Transit Connections**

Using the measurements for each criterion, comparative analyses of individual transit connections were conducted to determine which connections performed well. Connections which met the goals and objectives of the SRTNA study and the criteria measures were given the highest scores and one of four possible designations: favorable, opportunity, priority, and recommended transit connections. The scoring methodology and definition of all four designations are described in detail below. It is important to note that all the connections analyzed are to be considered valuable transportation projects, although they may not warrant transit service that serves a regional travel market.

### **Conclusion: Recommended Transit Connections**

The recommended transit connections were chosen given each connection's ability to perform across quantitative and qualitative assessments. These recommended connections provide a comprehensive regional transit network which warrants further analysis, including corridor feasibility studies, alternatives analysis, environmental clearance and preliminary engineering, and project development. Recommended connections were chosen from the designated priority transit connections. These recommended transit connections consistently scored high among all performance criteria measures, however, a few modifications were made to develop a complete and comprehensive regional transit system which met the goals and objectives set forth by the SRTNA project and opens opportunities to further examine logical termini. These recommended connections are as follows:

- East – St. Petersburg to Gateway, Westshore, Tampa, Lakeland and points east;
- South – St. Petersburg to Bradenton and Sarasota;
- North (East) – Tampa to USF, East Pasco County, and Brooksville;
- North (Central) – Westshore to NW Hillsborough County, Central Pasco County, and Brooksville; and
- North (West) – Pinellas Core (St. Petersburg/Gateway) to North Pinellas and New Port Richey.

These projects are the 5 highest recommended transit priority corridors in the 8 counties that comprise the West Central Florida region. The second project on this list (South – St. Petersburg to Bradenton and Sarasota – shown as the blue corridor in **Figure A1**) is the corridor that begins in St. Petersburg to the north of Sarasota and ends at the southern end of Sarasota County. As the second highest recommended project in the region, the South – St. Petersburg to Bradenton and Sarasota project is the basis for the Sarasota North South BRT project.

## **Public Transportation Systems Analysis**

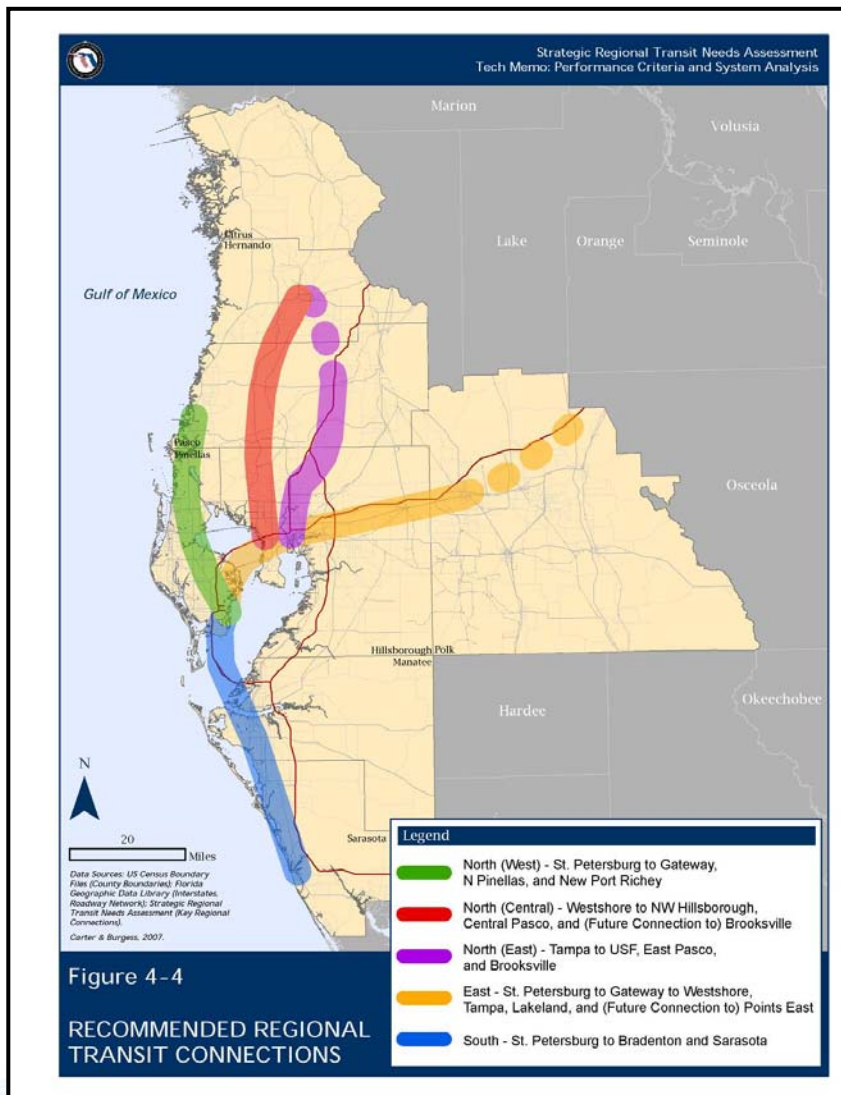
### **Sarasota-Manatee MPO**

#### **April 2002**

The Public Transportation Systems Analysis project (PTSA) was a year-long planning process developed by the Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and funded by the Florida Department of Transportation. This report presented a list of the recommended public transportation system improvements for the Sarasota-Manatee region. The recommendations included in this system plan are based on a combination of technical analysis (market assessment and alternatives evaluation), interviews and meetings with key community representatives, such as employers, economic development specialists and social service agencies, and results of several public workshops.

The PTSA presents a long-range strategic vision for how the area’s future public transportation system should be structured to best meet identified needs in a cost-effective manner. The analysis and recommendations in this document serve as the Transit Element of the MPO’s 2025 Long Range Transportation Plan, and reflect the community’s mobility needs, land use/redevelopment plans and economic objectives. This report presents details of the recommended public transportation system plan, including an estimate of costs, potential revenue sources, an implementation plan, and a recommended organizational framework. A Steering Committee guided the work effort for the PTSA. A 16-member committee met regularly throughout the study to guide technical and policy analyses prepared by the consultant, and included representation from the MPO, its technical and citizen advisory committees and other stakeholder groups. Meetings were open to the public and often included citizens and others interested in the study. The objective of the PTSA is to identify a strategy to help the Sarasota/Manatee region achieve a more balanced transportation system in the future, one that offers a greater variety of travel options to help reduce the need for the billion-dollar backlog of unfunded road construction projects identified in the MPO’s adopted 2025 Long Range Transportation Plan and support community development plans. The premise behind a more balanced transportation system is that an integrated and complementary set of transit strategies can satisfy the area’s mobility and jobs access needs through more efficient and equitable use of public resources.

**Figure A1**  
**SRTNA Recommended Transit Connections**



Public transportation, including vanpool, ridesharing and other demand management strategies, serves multiple markets. In the Sarasota/Manatee region, those markets include regular scheduled service for the urbanized area and services to increase the number of persons who can enter high concentration areas, such as downtowns, where roadway and parking space is limited. There is a strong relationship between transit service and parking requirements. As transit service is introduced to meet mobility needs in compact downtown areas, the opportunity for redevelopment and a more livable pedestrian with mixed land uses is greatly enhanced by reductions in the amount of space given to roadways and parking. Public transportation in its various forms has been marginalized for many years in this region. The transit systems in the two counties have historically operated largely independently from each other, and currently provide substantially different service levels within their respective counties. Existing transit service also provides limited opportunity for inter-county travel.

To encourage a reasonable shift in travel mode share toward public transportation, the area's future transit system should offer more competitive travel times along major corridors linking centers of activity. Central to the report's recommendations is the concept that a family of public transportation strategies – from greatly improved fixed route bus service to ridesharing, vanpool programs, technology and development of transfer stations that are supported by transit oriented land uses. Service should be tailored to local conditions, with smaller vehicles and flexible routing in low-density suburban areas, and more direct, frequent service on major roads. The system plan recommendations are not presented as a single package that must be accepted in total. Rather, there is a building level of investment in public transportation that first introduces inter-county bus service, and then adds more elements over time. Initial investments for local agencies are relatively modest.

Among the transit alternatives evaluated for the PTSA, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is recommended as an economically feasible long-term public transportation strategy for the Sarasota/Manatee region. This alternative provides the most cost-effective approach to meeting the region's future mobility needs and supporting community development objectives. BRT operates on a dedicated lane for buses (and other high occupancy vehicles such as carpools) with signal system priority features and signature buses that look dramatically different from typical transit vehicles. The initial BRT service should operate in the U.S. 41 corridor between Ellenton and Sarasota Square Mall. The BRT corridor should be supported by an interconnecting grid of higher frequency, linear bus routes serving major arterial roads throughout the two counties.

For example, a portion of the recommended BRT system, therefore, may operate on a parallel facility such as Old Bradenton Road, Cocoanut Avenue or the CSX rail line, which are within the U.S. 41 corridor. Fixed route bus service on major corridors – arterial roads like Fruitville Road, Manatee Avenue and Bee Ridge Road – is recommended for operation seven days per week, with longer spans of service (such as from 5:30 AM to 10 PM), greater service frequency and stronger interconnections with other routes and travel modes. A key element of the recommended system plan is to provide strong intermodal linkages in downtown areas, redevelopment districts and other logical pedestrian-oriented areas where buses, bicycles, automobile parking, ferries/water taxis and other modes can connect for maximum system efficiency and effectiveness.

### **System Plan Elements**

The guiding principles for the MPO's transit system plan were:

- Address existing and future traffic congestion “choke points” by providing expanded mobility options within constrained road segments, such as bridges and downtowns;
- Support economic development, jobs access and center-city redevelopment by reducing parking needs through direct, convenient and fully accessible transit services linking residential areas to employment destinations, and

- Integrate public transportation with land use through development of livable community centers that support transit, walking and bicycling, and help reduce air pollution.

Each of those principles entail development of a complementary set of public transportation services and policies, ranging from improved coordination of the Transportation Disadvantaged program, development of commute options like ridesharing and vanpools, and supporting strategies addressing parking, land use/design and traveler information. The corridor that runs generally along U.S. 41 and U.S. 301 between Ellenton, through downtown Bradenton and downtown Sarasota, to the Sarasota Memorial Hospital and South Gate Plaza shopping center, serves as the backbone of region's future public transportation system. This corridor is currently the economic and civic heart of the Sarasota/Manatee region, and is expected to contain more than 100,000 jobs in the future. Traffic congestion is projected to significantly worsen on roads within this corridor or on major roads leading into this corridor, such as S.R. 64, S.R. 70, University Parkway and Fruitville Road.

### **Bus Rapid Transit**

The framework for the system plan is built around a core investment in Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) operating in the U.S. 41 corridor linking Ellenton and Palmetto with Bradenton, the airport area, downtown Sarasota, Sarasota Memorial Hospital and the Sarasota Square Mall. This system would entail use of a single lane of roadway designed exclusively for use by transit and other high occupancy vehicles with supporting transit infrastructure, such as shelters, sidewalks and pedestrian amenities, and information kiosks to display bus arrival times and connecting routes.

At selected locations along the route, a bus pullout lane that would enable northbound and southbound vehicles to pass would augment the single lane for transit vehicles. Such locations should occur at key stops where adjacent land use provides a destination or useful transfer opportunity. Transit service for the BRT mode is recommended to operate for long service periods into the evening at 15-20 minute frequency. Service during peak rush hours would be more frequent than during the off-peak period. This span of service would support work trips as well as those related to entertainment (e.g. theater, dining, etc.). If service proves successful within this primary corridor, expansion of the BRT south from Sarasota Square Mall to downtown Venice is recommended. Bus Rapid Transit is also recommended for an east-west corridor linking the rapidly growing eastern edge of the urbanized area along I-75 with the employment, recreation and commercial areas to the west. The service could operate on either University Parkway or Fruitville Road, as both corridors include heavily-traveled six-lane arterial roads that connect higher density residential and employment centers. Furthermore, Amtrak has identified the Fruitville Road area for a future high-speed rail station, although the actual station location could be somewhere between Fruitville Road and University Parkway. Fruitville Road is the stronger transit corridor given its direct access to downtown, redevelopment potential and density/intensity and proximity of adjacent land uses. University Parkway lacks transit-supportive land uses, but is the major future east-west commuting route, and links the emerging employment center of Lakewood Ranch with the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport and surrounding industrial and institutional land uses. Whereas on Fruitville Road transit would need to make frequent stops, University Parkway has relatively few transit-oriented land uses and the service would benefit from the faster speeds and fewer stops offered by Bus Rapid Transit.

BRT is a cost-effective alternative to Light Rail Transit and other forms of fixed guideway investments. Development of the BRT system within the U.S. 41 northern corridor is expected to be considerably less expensive than development of a fixed guideway system, even if such a system operated on existing CSX rail tracks. A well-designed BRT system with attractive signature buses and street amenities offers nearly all the competitive advantages of light rail at a fraction of the cost. Given the employment densities of the Sarasota/Manatee region, Light Rail Transit is not feasible within the study's 25-year time frame; however, a successful BRT application could lead to future conversion to Light Rail Transit.

## **City of Sarasota Comprehensive Plan**

### **City of Sarasota**

**January 2008**

The purpose of the Transportation Chapter of the City of Sarasota Comprehensive Plan is to provide direction for the City's transportation system in a way that sustains the City's natural, aesthetic, social and economic resources. The foundations for this Chapter are Sarasota's Strategic Plan and Florida Statutory requirements.

The intent of the Transportation Plan is to provide the optimum infrastructure within a financially feasible framework. The availability of resources may cause more of the City's resources to be directed toward modes of transportation other than the automobile since transit, pedestrian and bicycle improvements are often more financially feasible than automobile capacity improvements.

Protecting neighborhoods is a major objective of the Transportation Plan. Several action strategies, which deal with traffic calming and neighborhood involvement in transportation projects, are directed toward this end. Keeping through traffic out of neighborhoods, however, can result in increased congestion (i.e. lower levels-of-service) on thoroughfares. In the future, the City will strive to create "complete" or "liveable" streets that are carefully designed to serve the diverse needs of pedestrians, cyclists and automobiles.

Providing infrastructure for the efficient movement of people and materials is crucial to the economic sustainability of the City. In the future, businesses that locate in the City will benefit if their employees can utilize public transit to get to work. Businesses may be asked to contribute to the City's intermodal transportation system to operate successfully in the City.

The City of Sarasota, as an employer, seeks to become an example of forward-thinking commuter alternatives for its employees. The City will continue to investigate multimodal options for City employee transportation and parking as well as other benefits related to multimodal transportation use by City staff.

### **Multimodal Transportation**

The City shall continue to support and promote multiple modes of transportation with other units of local government and the private sector, including handicapped-accessible public transit, bicycle lanes, and pedestrian pathways to all existing and proposed major trip generators. A number of Action Strategies were developed and they are described below.

### **Transportation System Management**

The City shall use appropriate Transportation Systems Management (TSM) strategies to improve system efficiency and enhance safety. These include but are not limited to:

- Access management;
- Congestion management;
- Parking policies which discourage driving alone;
- Site development;
- Designs which foster transit usage and pedestrian accessibility;
- Employer sponsored programs to encourage carpooling, vanpooling, bicycling and transit usage;
- Installation of on-road bicycle lanes and bicycle parking and storage facilities;
- Intersection re-designs;
- Signal inter-connects;
- Bicycle lanes and/or wide curb lanes;
- Bus pull in/pull out areas; where demand is deemed safe and necessary to retain LOS;

- Pedestrian countdown signals.

### **Transportation Demand Management Mitigation (TDM) Credits**

The City will consider developing, in the City's Zoning Code, a mitigation bonus schedule for transit-oriented development, mixed-use development, home-occupation-related development that reduce single-occupant automobile trips.

### **Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT)**

The City shall, in conjunction with Sarasota County, support SCAT in continuing to provide bus service at a level that meets Sarasota County's adopted level of service. The City also proposed to work with and support SCAT in its efforts to seek federal "Small Starts" funding for transit as well as in other future planning and improvements.

## **County of Sarasota Comprehensive Plan – Transportation Element**

**Sarasota County, Florida**

**June 2006**

### **Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT)**

In 2004, SCAT celebrated its 25th year of operation. Sarasota County began operating service through SCAT on April 9, 1979, having acquired the Cities Transit system, a private bus system, which had experienced a decline in the quality of service and loss of patronage due to economic problems. The Sarasota County Comprehensive Plan recognizes the contribution SCAT provides with its service in furthering the goals of the City and County toward meeting their goals and objectives. It addresses public transit's role and potential to maintain and enhance Sarasota County's urban character.

Public transit systems are an integral part of the total surface transportation system. Traditional fixed route transit is only one component of the total public transportation system, which also includes door-to-door service, taxis, limousines, car pools, van pools, and a wide variety of ride sharing alternatives. These systems, sometimes referred to as paratransit systems, can serve important functions including service to the transportation disadvantaged, providing linkages to other travel modes, and relieving traffic congestion and parking problems.

Existing and projected intermodal deficiencies and needs, as well as projected transportation system levels of service and system needs based on the Future Land Use Map, are analyzed in both the Sarasota County 1994 Transit Development Plan (TDP) and the Year 2025 Financially Feasible Transportation Plan (February 2001). The Sarasota County Transit Development Plan (TDP), updated annually, discusses the need for improvements to service days, service times, service frequencies, bus purchase needs, annual hours of service, and other needs. The 5-Year Capital and Operating Plan, contained in the TDP is supported by current revenue and is identified in the 5-Year Capital Improvement Program.

The Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization 2025 Financially Feasible Transportation Plan states that long-range transportation planning within the context of Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) is an iterative process, and the analysis procedures used in the preparation of the Plan for Sarasota County were designed to permit consideration of both multimodal and roadway staging alternatives. The overall process recognized that this study evaluation was an update of the presently adopted Year 2020 Plan, which contained both roadway and bus transit elements. With an updated 2020 Transportation Plan presently in place and guiding local and state decisions relative to transportation improvements, the entire plan development process focused on defining the shortfalls in the current plan for provision of acceptable

levels of service for the anticipated 2025 land use and socioeconomic conditions. Based on the parallel conduct of comprehensive plan update by Sarasota County, the forecasts prepared as part of those efforts were directly incorporated into the transportation system planning process. Though not required by TEA-21, the Sarasota/Manatee MPO prepared a 2025 Needs Plan that incorporated both roadway and transit elements. This step was useful as the basis for guiding subsequent technical committee, citizen committee, and MPO decisions relative to preparation of 2025 financially feasible transportation alternatives using the interim socioeconomic data forecasts for Sarasota County. These forecasts had been prepared in cooperation with the Sarasota County Planning and Development Service Business Center in advance of this Plan update effort for the purpose of the upcoming Comprehensive Plan and the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) updates, thereby enabling evaluation of interim travel demands by ten year time increments from 1995-2025. With the adopted 2020 Plan and the available socioeconomic/land use forecasts in place, the overall 2025 LRTP process consisted of the following steps:

- Evaluate the adopted 2020 multimodal plan for year 2025 travel needs and update as necessary;
- Examine year 2005 multimodal travel demands to define deficiencies within the current (2000-2005) surface transportation improvements programmed to be committed as part of the current MPO Transportation Improvement Program. Resulting "staging" alternatives could then be prepared from the 2025 Needs Plan for implementation during the 2001 to 2010 time period;
- Examine year 2010 multimodal travel demands for each Year 2000 alternative to define deficiencies within the "suggested" 2010 surface transportation improvements potentially programmed during Stage 2 (2001-2010). Resulting Stage 3 alternatives could then be prepared from the 2020 Needs Plan for implementation during the 2010 to 2020 time period;
- Examine the financial attainability of the overall preferred staging program and any "unresolved" transportation deficiencies remaining for 2025 conditions.

### **2025 Transit Needs Plan**

The 2025 Transit Needs Plan acknowledges the need for a seamless network between Sarasota and Manatee County and builds upon the transit improvements recommended in the MCAT and SCAT Transit Development Plans. To this base condition, transit service was added to better serve the constrained facilities in both counties. New services connecting the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport with St. Armands Circle and Longboat Key, as well as direct service along the constrained U.S. 41 corridor between downtown Sarasota and Bradenton were also added. Also included was a new express bus corridor from Venice north to downtown Bradenton. Eleven park-n-ride lots currently under long range MPO consideration were also incorporated into the transit network. New transit service areas were identified for areas of future development where roadways and transit routes do not currently exist. These enhancements and new routes were incorporated into the travel forecast model structure and tested under optimum service conditions to evaluate the maximum ridership potential of the overall transit system under Year 2025 conditions.

### **City of Sarasota Strategic Plan 2006-2010**

#### **City of Sarasota January 2008**

The Transportation Chapter of this plan considers the physical and spatial needs of a City that is over 100 years of age and which is home to approximately 55,000 year-round inhabitants. The City contains over 500 miles of roadway under the jurisdiction of the Florida Department of Transportation, Sarasota County and the City. The City participates in the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) with other municipalities in Sarasota and Manatee counties. Twenty-three bus routes of various frequencies and spans-of-service are operated and managed by Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) operate within the City of Sarasota.

The Inventory and Analysis of the Transportation Chapter is the data and information that underlies the City’s policies for maintaining and improving the City’s transportation infrastructure. A major issue, as identified by the Evaluation and Appraisal Report, is Transportation Mobility in the Downtown Environment. The City of Sarasota must make a policy decision regarding the Transportation Concurrency Exception Area and implementation of the Downtown Sarasota Mobility Study and Downtown Parking Master Plan.

Many roadways in the City of Sarasota are currently failing to meet their adopted level of service. A total of 195 roadway segments in the City were analyzed by a consultant. Eighty three of those segments were not meeting their adopted level of service standard in 2006. In fact, 28 roadway segments are now operating at Level of Service “F” which means forced flow, and long, unpredictable stopped delays. A complex analysis has illustrated what most residents already know—that sometimes, in about half of the places, traffic can be really bad in Sarasota. The question for the City’s long range plan was: What can the City of Sarasota do about it? An analysis of the problem concluded with the submission of a list of “committed improvements” that were intended to help the transportation situation to improve in some areas in the years 2006-2010. For instance, the improved conditions (from LOS “F” to LOS “D”) on U.S.-41 from Gulfstream Avenue to U.S.-301 from 2006 to 2010 are due to the intersection improvement of adding a third eastbound-to-southbound right-turn lane at the U.S.- 41/U.S.-301 intersection; but this improvement is not sufficient to accommodate 2015 and 2020 projected traffic volumes, hence, more improvements are needed for this roadway section in 2015 and 2020. In addition to the committed improvements, more roadway improvements are recommended and the most important are summarized in the table below for all analysis scenarios.

**Table A1  
2006 - 2020 Recommended Roadway Improvements  
Recommended Improvements**

On	From	To	2006	2010	2015	2020
University Parkway	U.S.-41	Old Bradenton Road		4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes
U.S.-41	University Parkway	Myrtle Street	4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes
U.S.-41	10th Street	Gulfstream Avenue	4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes
U.S.-41	Gulfstream Avenue	Ringling Boulevard			4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes
U.S.-41	Ringling Boulevard	Orange Avenue			4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes
U.S.-41	U.S.-301	Bee Ridge Road	6-8 lanes	6-8 lanes	6-8 lanes	6-8 lanes
U.S.-301	17th Street	U.S.-41	4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes	4-6 lanes
17th Street	Tuttle Avenue	Beneva Road				4-6 lanes
Fruitville Road	Shade Avenue	Tuttle Avenue		6-8 lanes	6-8 lanes	6-8 lanes
Fruitville Road	Tuttle Avenue	Lockwood Ridge Road				6-8 lanes
Fruitville Road	Lockwood Ridge Road	Beneva Road	6-8 lanes	6-8 lanes	6-8 lanes	6-8 lanes
Bahia Vista Street	U.S.-41	Shade Avenue				2-4 lanes
Bahia Vista Street	Shade Avenue	Tuttle Avenue	2-4 lanes	2-4 lanes	2-4 lanes	2-4 lanes
Lockwood Ridge Road	17th Street	12th Street		2-4 lanes	2-4 lanes	2-4 lanes
Orange Avenue	Fruitville Road	U.S.-41	2-4 lanes	2-4 lanes	2-4 lanes	2-4 lanes
Ringling Causeway	Sunset Drive	U.S.-41				4-6 lanes
Siesta Drive	Osprey Avenue	U.S.-41		2-4 lanes	2-4 lanes	2-4 lanes

These recommended roadway and intersection improvements outlined in **Table A1**, are an effort to resolve the City’s transportation problems by managing and improving capacity whenever possible. The benefits of this approach to the problem are increased automobile capacity, faster traveling times, easier access by the

traveling public and a concrete list of improvements to be implemented via the City's Capital Improvements Chapter. Another benefit is the Proportionate Fair Share program created in 2006 by Florida Senate Bill 360 which allows new development to contribute monetarily to portions of the improvements from which they stand to benefit. As noted in the Summary of the Comprehensive Plan Update Study,

*“The committed improvements will result in better operating conditions on the roadway sections affected, but will not correct all identified deficiencies. As forecast in this update analysis, without additional improvements more roadway sections can be expected to become deficient as future analysis horizon expands. Thus, to better accommodate the existing and future traffic demands, more improvements would be needed beyond those committed. However, more transportation system supply does not necessarily mean better transportation service depending on whether or not the improvements are appropriately planned and implemented.”*

The first recommendation in the summary section of the Comprehensive Plan Update Study, 2006 identifies an alternative to traditional concurrency analysis for the City.

### **Multi-Modal Transportation**

The first, and most important, recommendation that came out of the Sarasota City Plan Update Study 2006 was the following:

- *“The City should clearly define its mobility goals in different areas of the City and adopt and finance this vision as a part of its upcoming Comprehensive Plan update. The vision should address auto, truck, public transportation, bicycle, and walkway mobility; and the interfaces between those modes, particularly in the more congested downtown area.”*

Automobile mobility has been thoroughly discussed under Level of Service and Concurrency System. In fact, the City's concurrency management system and Traffic Analysis Program were created to deal *only* with automobile mobility and traffic congestion. The City's vision in the 1998 Plan only dealt with the automobile mode of transportation. Consideration of Transit, Bicycle and Pedestrian travel, was limited.

The emphasis on automobile mobility has created a situation where City residents have come to expect only minimal delays due traffic congestion. That expectation and the City's ability to meet it may be nearing an end. Increasing development, lack of available urban land to build more roadways, global warming, and an increased desire for “sustainable” development, have caused cities all over the world to take a closer look at their transportation systems. Urban areas, like the City of Sarasota, are ideal places to start implementing multi-modal transportation planning. Level of service does not apply only to automobiles but bicycles, pedestrians, scooters and transit. Development impact will not be analyzed by the number of automobile trips generated and attracted but by proximity to transit stops, bicycle trails and schools. The City of Sarasota continues to cope with issues such as pollution, congestion, traffic safety, accessibility, and economic growth. Increasing population is generating extra demand for quality public spaces and recreation opportunities. A renewed emphasis on security and the costs of dealing with the emerging epidemics of obesity and physical inactivity are stretching limited resources even further. Solutions to these challenges are equally diverse and complex. A well-developed multimodal transportation system addresses these challenges and contributes to many of the solutions necessary to improve the quality of life the City. "Modal split" is the division of travel into the various transportation modes. Transportation modes include walking, bicycling, transit, vanpool and single-occupant vehicle.

Transit Oriented Development is a particular category of New Urbanism and Smart Growth. The City of Sarasota embraced the concepts of New Urbanism when it adopted the Downtown Master Plan in 2001. TOD supports and is supported by most of the previously discussed TDM strategies, such as Commuter Trip Reduction, Public Transit Improvements, Nonmotorized Transportation, Traffic Calming, Vanpooling, and

Carsharing. Transit Oriented Development (TOD) refers to the creation of mixed use centers designed to maximize access by transit and alternative transportation, and with other features to encourage transit ridership. A TOD neighborhood has a center with a rail or bus station, surrounded by relatively high-density development, with progressively lower-density spreading outwards. For example, the neighborhood center may have a transit station and a few multi-story commercial and residential buildings surrounded by several blocks of townhouses and small-lot single-family residential, and larger-lot single-family housing farther away. TOD neighborhoods typically have a diameter of one-quarter to one-half mile (stations spaced half to 1 mile apart), which represents pedestrian scale distances. It includes these design features (Morris, 1996):

- The neighborhood is designed for bicycling and walking, with adequate facilities and attractive street conditions;
- Streets have good connectivity and traffic calming features to control vehicle traffic speeds;
- Mixed-use development includes shops, schools and other public services, and a variety of housing types and prices, within each neighborhood;
- Parking Management to reduce the amount of land devoted to parking compared with conventional development, and to take advantage of the parking cost savings associated with reduced automobile use.

The City of Sarasota is working to create TOD's. Sarasota County Area Transit is seeking federal "Small Starts" transit funding from the Federal Government in order to create a Bus Rapid Transit system that may include a fixed guideway system. The Small Starts program requires identification and creation of "supportive land uses" similar to the TOD's described above around the proposed location of proposed transit improvements.

#### *Multimodal Transportation Districts*

Another development, especially here in Florida, is the Multimodal Transportation District or MMTD. In 1999, the Florida legislature amended the Growth Management Act to allow creation of multimodal transportation districts (MMTDs). (Florida Statutes, Chapter 163.3180). MMTDs allow transportation concurrency to be advanced through the development of a high quality multimodal environment, rather than the typical approach involving road widening for automobile capacity.

#### **Mass Transit – Existing Service**

All regular local transit service in the City of Sarasota is provided by SCAT, the Sarasota County Area Transit, which is operated by Sarasota County Government. Sarasota County inaugurated SCAT on April 9, 1979, having acquired the Cities Transit system, a private bus system, which had experienced a decline in the quality of service and loss of patronage due to economic problems. Since its initiation in 1979, the SCAT bus system has been guided by a series of five - year transit development programs contained in the annually updated Sarasota County Transit Development Plan. Most routes originate in downtown Sarasota at the main transfer point at 1<sup>st</sup> Street and Lemon Avenue, and terminate outside the City limits. All routes operate six days a week from approximately 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. Twenty-five (25) buses are utilized daily, with 15 spares available. The buses range in size from a 22-passenger Champion mini-bus to a 45-passenger GMC TDH coach. Operations supervisors assign buses to routes according to peak hour demand. At this time, all SCAT buses meet the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

After nearly 10 years of planning and preparation, in March 2005, SCAT opened the Sarasota Downtown Intermodal Transfer Station. In 1995, SCAT was notified that it would receive \$1.35 million in Florida Intermodal Development Program funds for design and land acquisition of an intermodal terminal to be located near SCAT's existing Downtown Sarasota transfer terminal. The grant was later increased to include an additional \$1.5 million for the construction of a new terminal. SCAT annually reports ridership data to the federal National Transit Data. SCAT buses providing the daily fixed route service are wheelchair lift

equipped. Boardings on buses using these lifts have risen steadily since the lifts were first placed in service in 1991.

### **Intermodal Connections**

In addition to its fixed-route bus service, SCAT also provides direct connections to many other transportation modes within Sarasota County. The SCAT bus meets the Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT) bus at the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport on an hourly basis to provide an intercommunity transfer option, thus expanding the travel potential of passengers on both transit systems. SCAT passengers can also transfer to the MCAT bus at the Goodwill on 301 Boulevard north of Tallevast Road. In 2005, SCAT and MCAT initiated coordinated service along U.S. 41 between the City of Sarasota downtown transfer station and Palmetto in Manatee County.

The SCAT bus system currently provides direct service to the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport, and to the Greyhound bus terminals in the City. It is a one block walk from a SCAT routes to the AMTRAK bus providing a direct connection to the AMTRAK train station in Tampa via the AMTRAK bus from the SCAT main transfer point at First Street & Lemon Avenue.

### **Existing Modal Split and Vehicle Occupancy Rates**

Despite the increase in public transportation ridership from the mid-1980's, data as recent as the 2000 Census confirm that the principal mode of transportation within Sarasota County is the private automobile. Of the 132,765 workers in Sarasota County in 2000, 4.7 percent worked at home and did not need transportation to work; 11.8 percent carpooled, 80.8 percent drove alone to work, and only 0.8 percent used public transit, and 0.8 percent found other means to get to work. With an average travel time of 21.8 minutes for Sarasota County, there does not appear to be a significant advantage for the single-occupant motorist to voluntarily switch to transit. However, this single-occupant automobile scenario shifts in time, with conditions in 2020-2025 sufficient to warrant a greater share of total transportation needs moving to public bus transit. This is confirmed by the Sarasota/Manatee MPO data regarding multi-modal alternatives to the private automobile. The popularity of the private automobile as the primary transportation mode in Sarasota County is maintained by several factors including: low density residential development; an affluent population; a large white-collar work force; and, the dispersion of trip attractors and generators throughout the urbanized portion of the County and outside the area served by public transit. These factors, combined with the fairly low number of "transit dependent" riders (those who do not have access to an automobile) compared to "choice" riders (who have access to an automobile), have resulted in fairly modest public transit participation.

### **Service Development Factors**

Development of an efficient and effective public transit system requires the coordination of route design and service levels with the demographic, geographic, and economic characteristics of a particular area. Two major gaps exist in SCAT service span. There is no public transit service provided after 6:30 PM and there is no Sunday transit service. The two rider groups divide on their preferences, with the transit dependent group favoring Sunday service (This fact will change in 2008). The important motivation for this preference is feeling "shut in" on Sunday. Choice riders, to a greater extent, want evening service. Many work or would like to work during these hours and cannot use the transit service for those trips.

The Sarasota County Transit Development Plan (TDP) identifies service improvements that increase the frequency of bus service, improve shuttle service, modify fixed route service for paratransit service, and add new service coverage to some of the newly developed areas of urban concentration are considered with the annual updates of the TDP. With this proposed service expansion, SCAT will require expansion of the existing fleet to an active fleet size of more than 50 buses. This assumes that the shuttle and paratransit projects that involve other agencies or other jurisdictions are implemented. All 1970's era buses have been

replaced, although some of the 1991 series Orion buses will need to be replaced by the end of the planning period. To keep its fleet up to date SCAT has acquired many new buses. The County has now committed to purchasing diesel hybrid buses only as part of its “green” commitment. The bus purchases are anticipated to be funded primarily with Federal Section 9 capital funds, with a possibility that some of the shuttle buses could be purchased with flexible funds from the federal highway program. SCAT will continue to place shelters, benches and signs to support its transit service. In addition, SCAT plans to place bicycle racks on all fixed route buses SCAT also contracts with Senior Friendship Centers (SFC) to provide demand-responsive trips to the handicapped elderly who are unable to use conventional mass transit. SFC runs door-to-door, rather than on a fixed route, in compliance with ADA regulations. SFC is responsible for all “transportation disadvantaged” trips. Besides the SCAT-sponsored trips, SFC transports the clients of numerous social service agencies under separate contracts. The Sarasota County comprehensive plan states that SCAT will maintain its current level of services, as measured by vehicle revenue hours, at 1995 levels. In 2007, ridership on three key Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) bus routes has increased significantly – from 21 to 68 percent – with the implementation of service enhancements in recent months.

Overall SCAT ridership rose to 1.9 million passengers in fiscal year 2006, a 3.8 percent increase over the previous year. It was the highest recorded annual ridership since 1999 when the number of passengers fell dramatically after SCAT increased the fare from 25 cents to 50 cents.

Route 18 (Longboat Key) Route 99 (Palmetto/Sarasota) and Route 17 (Tamiami Trail) have undergone major frequency or route changes in recent months as part of the larger SCAT push to improve service and convenience throughout the bus system and attract more riders.

Two of the route enhancements have a direct connection with transit partner Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT) and were implemented Dec. 11, 2006, as part of the county’s continuing effort to provide efficient bus service to the region. Route 18 changes resulted in a 68 percent increase in average daily riders from the first full week in January 2007 to the same period the year before, from 205 to 344 daily passengers. The route was extended to Coquina Beach in Manatee County to close the gap and connect with MCAT. Comparing figures for the same period in January, Route 99 had a 21 percent increase in average daily riders, from 1,309 to 1,602. The frequency of SCAT service on the route was changed from 60 minutes to 30 minutes, the same frequency as MCAT service on that route. Route 17 recorded a 31 percent increase in average daily riders, from 809 to 1,062 passengers, during October-December 2006 compared to the same period the year before. The route was altered and the frequency of the bus service, from 60 to 30 minutes, was improved Sept. 30, 2006.

### **Future System Needs**

Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) submitted application to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for funding a federal Small Starts program Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project. SCAT submitted the project with the aim of fulfilling a broad range of adopted policies and goals of SCAT, Sarasota County, the City of Sarasota, and the Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

The SCAT North South Bus Rapid Transit Corridor project would improve the functioning of transit services in the core areas of Sarasota County through the development of exclusive guideways and a reworking of services to create a more effective, focused, and efficient transit system capable of playing an increased role in the Sarasota region. The corridor identified for the Small Starts Project is, in broad terms, the US-41 (Tamiami Trail) corridor, from the Manatee County border in the north, south to Bee Ridge Road. This corridor passes through, or by, most of the densest land uses in the region, as well as some of the most congested road conditions in the County/ the City.

### **System Consolidation**

The first phase of SCAT's strategy calls for improvements in transit service design and the investment in upgrading routes in key corridors. SCAT is now well into this phase, having restructured routes and added service to key routes. In March 2007, SCAT was nearing 75% completion of the planned route expansions. SCAT is currently planning additional phases of the effort, including improvements in service span for key routes to better match employment shifts and the introduction of Sunday services. SCAT will implement the service hour expansions, including peak hour services, new Sunday and evening service, beginning in 2008. Initial data suggests that the route enhancements and expansions have resulted in a significant increase in ridership.

### **Transit Corridors**

As part of the route enhancements, the City of Sarasota will support provision of transit infrastructure by requiring new development in identified "transit corridors" to provide pads and shelter easements for transit passengers. These identified corridors represent the major north-south, east-west routes through the City. They are also aligned with increased residential density and commercial development that could generate future transit trips.

The City recognizes that there may be situations in which it is not possible for a development along a transit corridor to meet these requirements. The policy provides exemptions for small developments (less than ½ acre in size) and for developments that can show they are within 250 feet of an existing bus shelter on the same side of the street. Additional language concerning transit corridor requirements will be created in the zoning code and in the new code sections related to Transit Oriented Development.

### **Efficiency Investments**

The second phase of SCAT's strategy calls for capital investment in guideways and transit priority techniques including the implementation of a bus rapid transit system (BRT) in order to create a sustainable competitive advantage for transit services, better target the core of the region, with its transit-friendly land uses, and significantly improve the operating characteristics of the system through increased reliability and decreased trip times. The Small Starts Project is a major element of this phase.

### **System Expansion**

The third phase of SCAT's strategy follows the development of an efficient core, by systematically looking at tying more distant locations into the core to create an effective and efficient regional transit system. This phase is also designed to support the County's adopted 2050 land use strategy, which seeks to develop transit-friendly "villages" and "village centers" in locations throughout the County.

### **Corridor Boundaries**

The boundaries of the U.S.-41 Corridor have been defined as follows. At the north end, the Corridor begins at the Sarasota/Manatee County Line, taking in the passenger facilities of Sarasota/Bradenton International Airport (SRQ). The Westernmost boundary of the Corridor is the Gulf of Mexico/Sarasota Bay. The easternmost boundary in the northern portion of the Corridor is set at the mainline railroad tracks just to the east of U.S. 301 (North Washington Boulevard); at Ringling Boulevard the boundary shifts slightly westward to South School Avenue or the alignment implied by South School Avenue for those blocks where the road does not exist. The southernmost boundary is Glengary Street, just to the south of Bee Ridge Road. All but a small portion of the northern section of the Corridor is within the limits of the City of Sarasota. The Corridor was the subject of a long-range transit plan commissioned by the Sarasota- Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which adopted a plan based on the creation of BRT services on dedicated travel lanes along the US-41 highway. The SCAT Small Starts Project is a refinement of this vision, and as such is

looking at alternative alignments and infrastructure in order to support an efficient and effective rapid transit service for the Sarasota region.

### **Land Use and Transportation Concurrency**

The City of Sarasota tends to suffer from some traffic congestion in the downtown area and is seeking mobility strategies supporting redevelopment plans and downtown improvements, such as the proposed Rosemary district land use amendment. In response, the City is initiating an urban mobility study examining a Multi-Modal district to replace the City's existing Transportation Concurrency Exception Area (TCEA) to support changes in land uses. The Multi-Modal district study is anticipated to start at the end of this year for the area primarily within the City's Downtown Community Redevelopment Area from approximately 10th Street on the north; Mound Street (U.S.-41) on the south; Bayfront Drive (U.S.-41) on the west; and School Avenue on the east. The study will focus on access to and travel within the downtown area, carefully considering the larger regional context concerning principal arterial roads and bridges serving the City. SCAT is requesting that the City readjust the study area limits extending south of downtown Sarasota to the Sarasota Memorial Hospital and north of 10<sup>th</sup> Street to 17th Street. Extending the study area will allow for evaluation of land use changes such as higher density residential and mixed-use development adjacent to the BRT corridor. SCAT is seeking land use changes for the BRT, consistent with the City's proposed comprehensive plan action strategy supporting Transit Oriented Development (TOD's) and exploring a Transit Overlay District in the Downtown area. For example, TOD overlay districts in adjacent to the BRT corridor north of 10th Street to 17th Street and south of Mound Street, in areas such as the Mid-Town shopping center at U.S.-41 and Bahia Vista. The City of Sarasota has made a commitment to exploring these possible TOD's in conjunction its multimodal study and the Small Starts application.

## **Sarasota-Manatee MPO Long Range Transportation Plan**

### **Sarasota-Manatee 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan**

**February 2006**

#### **Development of Goals and Objectives**

Development of the goals and objectives for the 2030 LRTP started with a review of the goals and objectives established in the 2025 LRTP. However, based on the public input from the focus groups and first workshop, it was determined that rather than refining the existing goals, for this LRTP update a new set of goals and objectives should be developed to better capture emerging issues related to land use, context-sensitive transportation solutions and a desire for increased transit as expressed through the MPO's 2002 Public Transportation Systems Analysis. Thus, a set of 2030 guiding principles in the form of goals and objectives were developed for review and refinement by the MPO's LRTP Steering Committee, the Technical Advisory Committee and Citizens Advisory Committee. The new goals and objectives were again compared with the 2025 LRTP goals and objectives, and modified slightly based on committee input to reflect the need for a heightened emphasis on regional planning and coordination, the importance of land use in shaping the future transportation system, and establishing a stronger linkage between public involvement activities and plan outcomes. The goals and objectives were endorsed by the MPO on February 28, 2005, to guide the development of this plan, and are presented below:

#### **2030 LRTP Goal Statement**

Develop and maintain a balanced multimodal transportation system in Sarasota and Manatee Counties that improves mobility and accessibility for all users, preserves the environment, enhances community character and supports the region's economic vitality.

## Supporting Goal Statements and Policy Objectives

### Provide Mobility on Area Roadways and Enhance Intermodal Connectivity

- Maintain and improve the level of service of roadways included on the Strategic Intermodal System and Joint Regional Multi-modal Transportation System for Charlotte, Manatee and Sarasota Counties;
- Enhance regional connectivity through continued development of the state highway system;
- Increase street connectivity and promote proper spacing of roadways to balance transportation demand and preserve mobility of regionally significant facilities;
- Achieve and maintain an acceptable level of service on area roadways, as established by the Florida Department of Transportation and local government comprehensive plans;
- Ensure the safe accommodation of motorized and non-motorized traffic on area roadways while reducing vehicle crash rates;
- Maintain and improve efficient access to regional passenger and freight intermodal hubs;
- Maintain and improve operating conditions on emergency evacuation routes, and enhance emergency access to I-75 and other regional facilities;

### Strengthen the Multimodal Transportation System

- Increase transit attractiveness and competitiveness in congested or constrained corridors through reduced travel times, increased frequency and provision of transit infrastructure that expands available options;
- Establish and strengthen regional transit connections between public transportation providers and logical origins and destinations in adjacent counties;
- Extend the coverage of the public transportation system to areas with supportive land use patterns and population or employment characteristics;
- Improve inter- and intra-county access to destinations for people who are transportation disadvantaged;
- Increase bicycle and pedestrian travel throughout the Sarasota-Manatee area for commuting to employment and school sites as well as for shopping and recreational purposes;
- Improve pedestrian safety through intersection design, visibility and provision of accessible pedestrian facilities;
- Create an interconnected regional network of on-road bicycle facilities and/or trails that link existing and emerging community focal points;
- Increase use of vanpools and carpools to improve regional mobility and manage demand on congested and constrained corridors;
- Promote non-motorized travel and transit use by incorporating livable street design and context sensitive design into the development of transportation facilities and corridors;
- Improve competitiveness of freight movement for shipping and rail;

### Multimodal Transportation System

Public transportation in the Sarasota/Manatee region has become increasingly more important as the population grows and density increases through growth, redevelopment and infill. Regional interconnectedness and the lack of affordable housing have also necessitated that traditional riders such as the elderly, the disabled, and those on limited incomes, need transit to take them further in the region. The 2005 Transit Quality of Service Evaluation rated various aspects of the existing bus service for the region. The report found that bus frequencies were low, as no routes had headways of greater than 60 minutes, with the exception of a portion of U.S. 41. The hours of operation were also limited, with no route operating before 7 AM or past 7 PM, precluding many potential riders who work at hospitals, restaurants and hotels from using the system. Many transit route travel times compare poorly to the same trip taken in a car. While coverage is

fairly reasonable, those three factors combine to keep ridership low, making operating the buses more expensive.

In discussions with the public during the development of the 2030 LRTP, the need for good public transit surfaced repeatedly from traditional transit riders as well as economic development officials and others. The population of both counties is aging and a growing number of residents are dependent on public transit.

The public raised several issues related to transit, including suggestions on how ridership can be improved. The biggest suggestion was to increase frequencies to more often than one hour. One citizen summarized it this way: “People will not support transit if the transfer points and number of buses are too infrequent and inflexible. People here feel sorry for transit users.” Nevertheless, a number of residents have no choice but to take transit. Members of the public also suggested more shelters and increased service to the islands where the service jobs are located. A primary barrier to transit connectivity is the lack of service connections across the Sarasota/Manatee county line. Both transit agencies have begun to work to address this issue and have started intercounty bus service along U.S. 41 that links Palmetto with downtown Sarasota. The MPO also commissioned a regional transit study in 2004 assessing the merits of merging and/or increasing cooperation between the two transit agencies. As the growth in North Port, Venice and Charlotte County continues, travel interactions between those areas will likely warrant additional intercounty transit service connections, particularly to employment, medical and shopping opportunities.

### **Transit Oriented Development Scenario**

Land development changes are needed to make more effective use of public transportation, walking and bicycling as strategies to improve mobility for more people. This scenario creates more compact corridors and activity centers with a mix of higher housing, retail and office development densities in close proximity to existing transit lines so that service levels can be substantially improved. The focus is on creating interconnected, diverse and walkable places to reduce sprawl and automobile use.

The results of the land use scenarios were: Despite adding more than 200,000 people and nearly 100,000 jobs, the more compact Transit-Oriented Land Use Scenario showed reduced Vehicle Miles of Travel and lower Vehicle Hours of Travel than the Trend Scenario. In other words, by encouraging more compact, mixed use development patterns in areas where there is a high level of accessibility created by a strong network of streets, local governments can reduce trip lengths, lower the amount of delay due to congestion, and better implement livable transportation solutions. The established western areas of both counties, with the exception of the linear beach communities and at key bridge crossings of the Manatee River, enjoy relatively little traffic congestion because of multiple interconnecting streets. For the low growth scenario, the analysis showed that even if local governments reduced the number of households by 100,000 from the Trend Scenario, significant congestion levels would continue, primarily because there is a lack of network in the rapidly growing eastern areas that forces traffic to funnel onto a limited number of roadways. The High Growth Scenario indicated that adding significant capacity through planned transportation projects would not be sufficient to maintain level of service on critical state roads like U.S. 41, I-75, S.R. 64 and the Englewood Interstate Connector system. Thus, the primary issue facing the high growth parts of the region is a lack of network connectivity and places that function as destinations for a wide range of trip-making purposes. The scenario analysis revealed that meeting the MPO area’s transportation needs requires both a land use and transportation strategy that will create more accessible places through connectivity of streets, shared paths and transit routes. Such a strategy will help develop a more balanced transportation system through better jobs-housing relationships designed to reduce Vehicle Miles of Travel, and through creation of a network of travel routes that can reduce the burden on a few critical corridors.

The challenge for the MPO and its member local governments is that the High Growth and Trend Scenarios are the most likely outcomes of current planning and growth management policies. While several local governments are planning for highly accessible mixed-use centers, the majority of projected new development

is expected to occur in places with limited network, relatively far from existing and emerging job centers. Unless changes occur in eastern and northern Manatee County, and North Port, to create a more accessible development pattern, traffic congestion levels will grow far beyond the local, regional or state governments' ability to fund needed improvements. The MPO Board took no official action on the scenarios, but they were used to guide development of the Needs Assessment.

### **Roadway Systems Plan**

The goal of the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan is to “Develop and maintain a balanced multimodal transportation system in Sarasota and Manatee Counties that improves mobility and accessibility for all users, preserves the environment, enhances community character and supports the region’s economic vitality.” In creating the 2030 Needs Assessment, the roadway system projects were developed as part of a coherent multimodal system to reflect the following guiding principals endorsed by the Sarasota/Manatee MPO:

- Provide mobility on area roadways and enhance intermodal connectivity;
- Strengthen the multimodal transportation system;
- Coordinate land use and protect the environment;
- Enhance system management and operations;
- Ensure financial feasibility of the transportation system, and
- Involve the public in the transportation decision-making process.

### **U.S. 41 Widening**

Completing the six lane construction of U.S. 41 south of S.R. 72 and through the Englewood/North Port Area is a critical need for the region’s most commercial corridor. Adding the six lanes of capacity will improve traffic flow and provide more opportunities to incorporate transit infrastructure into the road right-of-way.

### **Downtown and Middle Sarasota**

The City of Sarasota already has a strong central grid network and a rapidly redeveloping urban center. Both the Downtown and Middle Sarasota Mobility Districts have similar transportation issues in that they are dealing with increased north-south traffic, more automobile trips destined for the islands, and an increase in commuters from the urban fringe. Because many of the congested roadways are constrained, establishing better connections and improving public transit are preferable to widening roads in the districts. There is also a strong desire to make the downtown and central urban areas more walkable and friendly to pedestrians and bicycles, precluding widened roadways. A strategy that emphasizes proximity rather than speed when delivering accessibility is more appropriate for these mobility districts. Roads in these districts will thus remain largely unchanged in the densest portion of the urban core, while those that surround this area be improved to encourage through traffic to circumvent the downtown. To better improve north-south connections in Sarasota, U.S. 41 will be widened in the south portion of the city up to Clark Road. However, to divert some of this traffic, McIntosh Road will also be widened to four lanes from U.S. 41 almost to Clark Road as well as along sections just east of downtown. Palmer Ranch Parkway will be extended to provide the connection from Honore Avenue to a widened Gantt Road. There are few routes east of downtown that carry north south traffic besides I-75 and Honore Avenue. Over the next few years both of these roadways will become significantly congested due to regional commuting patterns and increased development. To prevent this, Honore Avenue will be widened to four lanes along the majority of the road. In addition, Cattleman Road, which closely parallels I-75, will also be widened to four lanes through Sarasota. Additional connections will be made to extend the road north to DeSoto Road and reconnect with Honore Avenue. This will create a corridor that will make it unnecessary for a number of north-south trips to be taken on I-75 or Honore Avenue. An improved Cattleman Road will also connect into Deer Hollow, which will be widened to four lanes, and also into an improved 17<sup>th</sup> Street. For better east-west connections, Cattleman will connect to

an extended DeSoto Road for better east-west connections. DeSoto will be extended east to connect with Cattleman Road.

### **Transit System Plan**

The PTSA established a strategic vision and implementation action steps for the MPO as a complement to the 2025 Long Range Transportation Plan. The PTSA outlined a service expansion framework for creating a more viable public transportation system to attract new riders to both counties' transit systems, while improving system efficiency and effectiveness for current riders and major employers. Since the adoption of the PTSA, the MPO and both county transit systems have continued working to implement the study's recommendations, including creation of a new interlined service along the U.S. 41 corridor that connects Palmetto and Bradenton in Manatee County with downtown Sarasota. The new service, which began operations in early 2005, eliminated a transfer between systems at the Sarasota- Bradenton International Airport, helping to reduce delays and improve travel time. In addition, during 2004 the MPO and both counties formally considered options and implementation steps to merge the two county-based transit systems into a single regional public transportation agency. This was also a recommendation of the PTSA, primarily as a means of obtaining a dedicated funding source to achieve the ultimate service objectives outlined in the MPO's long range transit plan. Although system consolidation is not currently planned, the MPO and both counties agreed to continue focusing on improving the regional, or inter-county aspects of transit service, and to monitor progress for joint service development, enhancing operating protocols, more efficient marketing and effective promotion.

This 2030 Needs Assessment for public transportation builds upon the adopted PTSA and subsequent planning and service development initiatives that have been undertaken through the leadership of the MPO's Public Transportation Task Force. It reflects the growth and redevelopment context described previously, as well as the roadway needs assessment in light of constrained roads and levels of projected traffic congestion. The 2030 Public Transportation System Plan, which forms the transit element of the 2030 Needs Assessment. Planned service improvements can be generally grouped into two broad categories: a) service expansion – adding new service where it does not currently exist; and b) service enhancement – increases frequency, span of service (operating hours) or providing additional transit infrastructure along corridors with existing bus routes. It should be noted that many of these service improvements are tied together, and not all should be done as stand-alone projects.

The need for improved public transportation in Manatee and Sarasota Counties is driven by several factors, but is largely tied to the increasing difficulty to build new or wider roads to accommodate traffic growth in the western, built-up areas. Many roads in the traditional city areas of Bradenton, Sarasota, Venice and on the islands are constrained from widening, and other mobility options must be considered. Other factors influencing the need for transit include:

- As land values rise, commercial redevelopment, infill and higher density housing are making transit more viable in and around the downtowns, and along older urban corridors like U.S. 41, Bee Ridge Road, Fruitville Road and Manatee Avenue;
- Face long, congested commutes and rising gas prices. Accessible transit service can help lower household transportation costs (which often equal 20 percent of household income) and strengthen neighborhoods along the region's urban corridors;
- Job growth in the region is becoming increasingly dispersed as office and commercial development near I-75 interchanges creates potential new markets for transit service in previously un-served areas;
- Energy supplies and prices are increasingly unstable in the world market, placing additional uncertainty and risk on the economy. Investments in transit can help reduce consumption and afford some financial relief to those who make use of it;
- As the two-county region's population rises to one million residents with some 600,000 jobs, the demands for travel, particularly across county lines, will place increasing pressure on the interstate system and regional roadway network. Sarasota and Manatee Counties will need to play a larger role

in cooperation with other West Central Florida agencies and employers to provide travel alternatives like transit, carpool and vanpool programs that improve personal mobility;

- Clustered, mixed-use development is occurring with increasing frequency in the region in an effort to limit environmental impacts, promote pedestrian activity and reduce traffic congestion;
- Accessible transit is liberating for seniors, teenagers and young adults, who may not have access to a car, as well as others who experience mobility limitations in getting to places for work, services or social needs. While Florida's population is aging like the rest of the nation's, economic growth in Sarasota and Manatee Counties is increasing the diversity of the population and fueling more needs to get workers to jobs.

The Public Transportation System Plan envisioned for the 2030 Needs Assessment provides more transit accessibility for area residents and employees, even as growth continues to push both people and jobs north and eastward beyond the traditional transit market areas. In 2000, 304,019 people, or 51 percent of the population in both counties, were within ¼ mile of bus service operating on a fixed route. With the system plan and growth to 2030, that number rises to 579,480 people, or 58 percent of the two counties' population served by transit. The number of employees served in 2000 was 246,714, with that growing to 411,166 in 2030. That represents a change in the percentage of regional employment served by transit from 70 in 2000 to 75 percent by 2030. The following sections presents a summary of the public transportation project needs, grouped into the categories of service expansion, service enhancement and potential water taxi service.

### **Service Expansion**

The overriding objective of the 2030 Public Transportation System Plan is to create more of a grid-like system that expands service coverage along sufficiently developed corridors. Creating more of a linear grid transit system improves travel times along major corridors, enhances accessibility to transit for growing areas in both counties, and enables more convenient transfers to occur between routes running generally north-south and those generally running east-west.

### **Operational Considerations**

The vision and mission of regional transit versus the primary mission of local transit creates a number of operational dilemmas because operators must make trade-offs given limited funding. That trade-offs include:

- The location of routes – Service oriented to a captive market will locate routes in areas with high concentrations of lower income and elderly households. It will also seek to serve as many destinations as possible to maximize accessibility, which results in routes that extend coverage at the expense of convenience. Service oriented to choice riders must be more focused, creating a fundamental difference in the approach to transit routing;
- Span of service – Both captive and choice markets prefer longer service periods, but a longer span of service is more of a necessity for captive riders. Choice riders primarily rely on transit for the morning and evening commute to work. Because they have options beyond commute times, they are more willing to sacrifice a longer span of service in exchange for other service improvements;
- Frequency of service – Not by choice, captive riders arrange their daily schedules according to transit schedules. Because choice riders have options, transit must be readily available, which means headways must decrease. Shifting resources to reduce headways reduces the area served and limits accessibility for captive riders;
- Route operations – Again, choice riders will not choose transit if travel times are considerably slower than by auto, which means routes must avoid traffic congestion and limit stops. This requires routes operating within their own right of way. Developing such a transit guideway is an expensive proposition that will divert resources;
- The “image” of service – Whether right or wrong, many travelers with a choice decide not to use transit because of negative perceptions of transit, such as a lack of cleanliness and comfort. To

overcome this perception, the quality of transit vehicles and stops must be upgraded, and a unique identity created, which will divert resources;

- The context for transit – transit currently operates in a transportation system and urban development pattern that is purposely designed to accommodate automobiles. Buses run on roadways with no different status than cars even though buses are carrying more passengers;
- The areas around bus stops are designed for easy access to parked cars, not stops, so transit riders have to walk further (usually through parking lots) to get to their eventual destinations. Creating a transit context rather than auto context must be the top priority in transit corridors during corridor planning and design and development review in order to make transit a viable option for choice riders.

Over the last several years, the Sarasota/Manatee MPO has been working with the West Central Florida MPO Chairs Coordinating Committee (CCC) on a Regional Transit Action Plan and other efforts to expand the reach of regional public transportation options. Building upon the coordinated planning between Manatee County and Sarasota County for the new U.S. 41 service, the MPO and Sarasota County are coordinating with the Charlotte County MPO to explore transit service between the two urbanized areas. Regional transit investments recommended in this 2030 Public Transportation System Plan include the following:

- Express bus service in the I-75 corridor. The 2030 Needs Assessment calls for adding two lanes in each direction along I-75 throughout the two counties for special travel markets, which might include through traffic only, transit, high occupancy vehicles during congested commuting times, tolls, trucks, etc. This would connect with special use lanes planned in Hillsborough County. Express bus service using the lanes would have the advantage of bypassing congestion on general purpose lanes to provide competitive travel times with autos. Operating on the planned special use lanes, regional express bus service would essentially provide uncongested travel for riders throughout the urbanized area, with connections to Hillsborough County via I-75 and Pinellas County via I-275. It is assumed the service would initially operate in the morning and afternoon peak periods, roughly from 5:30 AM to 9:30 AM and from 3:30 PM until 7:30 PM. Key service areas would include park and ride lot(s) serving North Port/Venice with limited stops at employment centers at Fruitville Road or University Parkway at I-75, or in downtown Sarasota. Another express route could depart from Fruitville Road/University Parkway with a direct connection to downtown Tampa and Westshore;
- Express bus service between Manatee County and Pinellas County via I-275. Based on interviews with large employers in the jobs-rich mid-Pinellas County office and industrial area, as many as 10 percent of workers live in Manatee County. This service would provide a direct connection between St. Petersburg (likely at the Central Plaza transfer point on U.S. 19 or Williams Park in downtown St. Petersburg) and a new transfer point at Manatee County. Consideration for a location should include U.S. 41 at Moccasin Wallow Road, Palmetto or downtown Bradenton. Although the route would not have exclusive special purpose lanes, a similar span of service is envisioned;
- Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) applications in the U.S. 41/U.S. 301 corridor. The U.S. 41 corridor is the region's best transit market, serving all primary downtown areas of Palmetto, Bradenton, Sarasota, Venice and North Port, redevelopment areas, numerous cultural and educational institutions and providing a rich mix of adjacent residential, commercial and institutional (Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport, Port Manatee, government) land uses. Redevelopment is making it more pedestrian-oriented with transit-supportive development and design. Existing or new bus routes should be augmented with improvements that allow buses to travel faster along the corridor and to add a sense of permanence to the service, which would serve as a catalyst for further redevelopment, such as along North Tamiami Trail in Sarasota or along Tamiami Trail (14th Street) in Bradenton. The improvements can include traffic signal pre-emption and/or prioritization, intersection by-pass lanes (allowing the transit vehicle to move to the front of the queue at a signal) and permanent transit stops. Ultimately, the BRT could run in its own travel lane to bypass traffic congestion. Even if this could only occur for short segments, it could provide an important travel incentive;

The U.S. 41/301 corridor has been highlighted for more detailed study because the exact operating alignment may use other roads, like Cocoanut Avenue or even US 301. As a designated Scenic Highway, BRT service operating in the Tamiami Trail right-of-way will need to be designed to complement strategies in support of that program. Some BRT options may be more viable along some segments than others. For example, one option that should be explored is whether the existing rail line between Clark Road in Sarasota and Northern Manatee County could be developed for BRT dedicated lanes or passenger rail (e.g., light rail). That could be a potentially very expensive proposal, but development of the corridor for some type of premium transit would provide needed mobility while allowing Tamiami Trail (U.S. 41) to have higher frequency bus service without any significant impact to traffic flow.

### **Sarasota County**

Service expansion in Sarasota County is less aggressive than envisioned in Manatee County, primarily because much of the county's population base is reasonably well served by a larger bus fleet and more route miles than currently exist in Manatee. However, with the growth expected in South Sarasota County, particularly North Port, there is a need for expansion of fixed routes to improve mobility on a limited roadway network. Like Manatee, Sarasota County is focusing its expansion plans on creation of a more linear grid network of routes that would reduce travel times for riders and improve route connections at remote transfer points. Most of the new service contemplated for Sarasota County consists of extensions of existing routes, such as extension of service along South Indiana Avenue, with a potential connection to Charlotte County, extending down Placida Road to San Casa to S.R. 776 and back to Placida Road. Other service expansion elements include service extending south along Honore Avenue to Central Sarasota Parkway, with a connection west to the Sarasota Square Mall. Combined with service expansion plans in Manatee, this will provide a continuous north-south transit option from existing and emerging commercial/employment hubs at the mall and new I-75 interchange to Manatee County and in to Bradenton.

A new downtown circulator is envisioned for downtown Sarasota to reflect goals of the Downtown Master Plan and Downtown Mobility Study. This service would cover the core area of the traditional downtown, generally from 10th Street south to U.S. 41, and from School Avenue to Sarasota Bay. The route would serve the city's cultural district, and provide logical connections within the downtown and to adjacent areas, including possible water taxi service. The city is receiving some funding through development exactions to offset anticipated costs for this service, which it hopes to implement by 2010. New SCAT service would extend east along Laurel Road to connect with PGT Industries at I-75. Albee Farm Road would also receive new bus service as an extension of current SCAT operations on Venice Avenue and U.S. 41. In addition, McIntosh Road is envisioned for new service to provide a connection between the existing service on Clark Road (connecting with several industrial parks in the area) and existing service on Webber Street in Sarasota. A combination of new express bus service and an extension of existing service is planned for improved transit linkages in South Sarasota County and North Charlotte County, providing a connection to PGT Industries in the Venice area for employees who live in North Port and Charlotte County. The local and express service would travel from the Charlotte County Airport along U.S. 41 into North Port at Toledo Blade Boulevard, with the express service operating on I-75 to PGT Industries, and the local operating along Price Boulevard, where it would connect with existing SCAT service at Sumter Boulevard. With connections via park and ride lots to new express bus service planned for Charlotte County along SR 776 and U.S. 17, the service extension would provide an effective means of linking middle income households with jobs serving the area's economy. Those route additions would fit well with planned new service to fill out the network in high growth areas along Toledo Blade Boulevard, Price Boulevard and Cranberry Boulevard in North Port, and on North River Road, East Venice Avenue and Center Road. This new service would provide connections to the Taylor Ranch Development of Regional Impact.

### **Service Enhancements**

Service enhancements called for in the Public Transportation System Plan entail higher frequency of service on core routes and major corridors, increasing the span of service to include earlier and later operating hours

on the most productive routes, and adding weekend service to existing routes. Needed service enhancements are listed below:

- U.S. 41 – both counties are working toward obtaining funds to increase service to 30 minute frequency (from one hour currently) in the near term for the most densely developed part of the corridor from Palmetto to at least downtown Sarasota. Given the economic importance of this corridor to the region and its diverse, mixed income character, the 2030 Needs Assessment envisions the entire corridor transitioning to 30 minute headways with a span of service from approximately 5:30 AM until 10 PM;
- Beneva Road in Sarasota County is slated for an increase in service frequency to every 30 minutes between the Sarasota Square Mall and Fruitville Road to enhance the grid network concept;
- Fruitville Road in Sarasota County is the strongest east-west transit market in the region, given its growing residential and employment concentrations at either end. Service improvements to add BRT signal pre-emption or prioritization elements are included in the city's Downtown Master Plan, and land uses along the roadway are generally more transit supportive than in other east-west corridors. Given its regional importance, Fruitville Road bus service should transition to 30 minute frequencies and later evening service until 10 PM. This later service would allow workers on the keys or downtown to better reach their destinations. A logical connection for enhanced service would be to link this route with University Parkway service via Lakewood Ranch Boulevard;
- In Manatee County, bus service enhancements are needed on S.R. 64/Manatee Avenue to improve hourly service frequency to half hour or better frequency. Route 3 provides a continuous, direct link between I-75, downtown Bradenton and Anna Maria Island. The western extent of this corridor, from approximately 75th Street is constrained from adding significantly more roadway capacity. Improvements in this route could help make potential water taxi service more viable as a component of the public transportation network;
- University Parkway is another critical link in the transportation system with a greater need for public transportation. With its designation as part of the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), the roadway is recognized as providing a key link in the regional economic system. The Needs Assessment calls for local express bus service operating during peak commuting periods (AM and PM peak) with limited stops. The express service is intended to provide direct connections between high growth nodes around the I-75 interchange and the airport, as well as the emerging cultural/educational district along the North Tamiami Trail south of the airport. As with service along Fruitville Road and Manatee Avenue, the potential linkage with water taxi service near the Powell Crosley mansion is an attractive option;
- A major service enhancement consideration is the gradual upgrading of transit infrastructure; within both counties. Transit infrastructure includes shelters, benches, enhanced bus stops, transfer stations, Advanced Public Transportation System (APTS) technologies like electronic fare payment systems, and provision of sidewalks and bike facilities connecting to stops. Both SCAT and MCAT are in the process of adding shelters at strategic locations based on available funding. Of primary consideration from the Long Range Transportation Plan perspective, however, is the need for both transit systems to establish dedicated transfer facilities at strategic locations where multiple routes converge. Such facilities need to have a sense of permanence, visual attractiveness and proximity to surrounding land uses to make them effective conduits for increased system patronage. As the two systems continue their evolution to grid-like network with multiple transfer points outside of the traditional downtown hubs, finding suitable transfer locations will become increasingly critical.