

# The Need for Regional Transportation Governance in Tampa Bay

Prepared by the Eno Center for Transportation for the Tampa Bay Partnership

January 2017

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this white paper is to help leaders in Tampa Bay understand how moving to a regional structure for transportation planning, operations and decision-making is key to developing a regional transportation system – and why a regional transportation system is one of the foundations of a strong economy for future generations. Effective transportation systems enable workers to reach employment, move citizens to and from areas of service and opportunity, and facilitate global trade and the shipping of products between producers and consumers. In these ways, transportation exerts a clear impact on economic growth.

The current county-based transportation decision-making structure in Tampa Bay was originally designed in 1970. But much has changed since then – and current data reinforces the need for a fresh approach:

- The population of the four-county region has grown from 1.1 million to 2.9 million and this fact, in itself, supports the need for reform.
- Roughly 20 percent of workers—nearly a quarter million people—in the metropolitan area commute to jobs outside their county of residence. Even more commute across municipal boundaries.
- Out of the nation’s top metropolitan areas, only the Atlanta region saw a greater increase, since 1970, in the share of poor residents residing in suburbs. These neighborhoods tend to have the least access to transit services though the residents may be most dependent on it.
- In relative terms to the largest 20 metropolitan areas in the United States, Tampa Bay ranks 19<sup>th</sup> in terms of transit supply.

While state Departments of Transportation build and manage the national Interstate Highway System, and cities and counties provide for local priorities and needs, the nation’s 409 metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are tasked with providing the *regional* view that enables surface transportation projects to be planned and delivered at the right scale. Because transportation, by nature, should operate so widely over each region it cannot be dealt with effectively by individual governments acting separately. Of the largest 20 metropolitan areas in the United States, only two lack a regional MPO structure: Tampa Bay and South Florida. Stronger metropolitan planning and capital programming entities and/or processes across jurisdictional and modal lines are essential prerequisites to making better decisions on the investment of scarce public resources.

This paper recommends that the region's leaders seek to consolidate the multiple MPOs into one regional MPO. This consolidation will involve a deliberate process during which key decisions will have to be made, including, but not limited to: the number of counties that will be represented in the new MPO; the governance structure of the new MPO, i.e. who and how many people will serve on the board; and creation of advisory committees to ensure input from local governments, citizens and other constituencies.

Beyond the obvious benefits from taking the *regional view*, research shows that regional MPOs offer other advantages, including:

- Improved communication with community stakeholders and elected officials by serving as a convener and consensus-builder;
- Sustained regional governance and decision-making;
- Improved forecasting and planning due to access to better data and technology;
- More efficient operations through economies of scale and consolidation of duplicative efforts.

The region's transit authorities are county-based as well and, as a result, minimal transit operates across borders. For this reason, out of the top 100 metropolitan areas in the United States, Tampa Bay ranks 77<sup>th</sup> in terms of access to jobs by transit.

This paper recommends that the region's leaders seek to create a regional governance structure for the operation of transit agencies in the Tampa-St. Petersburg Urbanized Area, which includes the counties of Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco. A governance structure that should be considered strongly is an *umbrella or coordinating agency*, in the form of a Regional Transit Authority, under which the county-based authorities and/or agencies would function. And, to facilitate development of even more regional transit, this new regional authority would be enabled to create inter-local agreements with transit agencies in the neighboring counties of the Tampa Bay region.

The data for Tampa Bay, and best practices from across the nation, make a compelling case that it's time for Tampa Bay to move from its localized and county-based structures to regional transportation planning, operations and decision-making. To secure a strong economic future, it's essential that the leaders of Tampa Bay recognize how important this change is, and take clear and certain steps to adapt to the best regional transportation governance practices that have been widely adopted across the nation.

## I. OVERVIEW

Today, our nation and our economy are driven by metropolitan areas. These complex regions of interwoven cities and suburbs are home to more than eight in ten Americans and jobs.<sup>1</sup> They are global economic centers, major trade hubs, and highly productive centers that concentrate and

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<sup>1</sup> See: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Metropolitan Area Employment and Unemployment Summary," Table 1. Civilian Labor Force and Unemployment by State and Metropolitan Area, December 2016.

strengthen the assets that drive our economy, grow the skills and incomes of our workers, and contribute to our environmental sustainability. Tampa Bay is one of those metros. With nearly 3 million residents it is the 18<sup>th</sup> largest in the country, bigger than Denver, Charlotte, or Orlando. It ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> in terms of number of jobs, and makes up 17 percent of Florida’s total gross domestic product.

Although public policies focused on housing and environment clearly shape how places grow and develop, transportation planning and investments are just as important.<sup>2</sup> However, today a daunting set of transportation challenges is threatening to undermine metropolitan areas’ competitive edge in the global economy. These concerns—crumbling infrastructure, growing distances between jobs and workers, lack of proper investment, and increasing congestion— will likely place greater emphasis on transportation governance and the ways regions make decisions about their priorities.

However, in some places, including Tampa Bay, transportation planning remains hyper-localized with spot improvements made to ameliorate specific problems. For their part, metropolitan transportation plans are often just aggregations of local projects. That is why metropolitan leaders from coast to coast are largely calling for models for decision-making that reflect the regional nature of their economies.

The purpose of this white paper is to illustrate the urgent need for leaders in metropolitan Tampa Bay to put forth a strategic—yet grounded and pragmatic—approach to planning regional transportation supportive of both economic development and modern urban planning. The effort must focus on the unique challenges in the region with respect to two distinct, but tightly related, county-based transportation efforts: 1) the metropolitan planning organizations (MPO) that map out the short and long term transportation priorities for the region, and 2) the local public transit authorities that operate bus, streetcar, paratransit and other services. This paper does not offer precise recommendations but, rather, guiding principles and an economic case for regional decision makers to consider as they investigate regionalized transportation governance structures.

When this paper refers to the “Tampa Bay metro” it is synonymous with the federal Office of Management and Budget’s definition of the “Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL Metropolitan Statistical Area.” This definition includes Hernando, Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas Counties and the principal cities of Tampa, St. Petersburg, Clearwater, and Largo. This is important because the counties included have a “high degree of social and economic integration” which is primarily measured by how people commute to work.<sup>3</sup> The interplay between transportation and the economy literally defines the metropolitan area. Occasionally, this paper will refer to a Tampa Bay region, composed of the Tampa Bay metro and its tangent Metropolitan Statistical Areas: Homosassa Springs (Citrus County), Lakeland-Winter Haven (Polk County), and North Port-Sarasota-Bradenton (Manatee and Sarasota Counties).

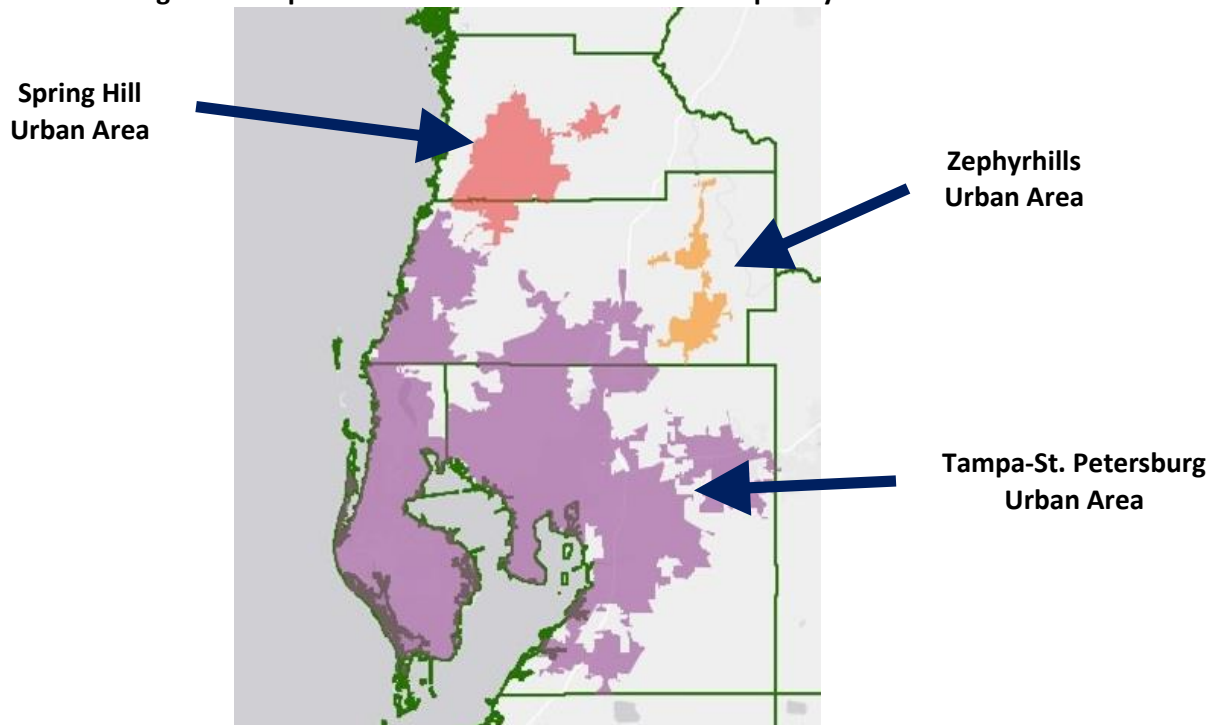
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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on how transportation shapes physical growth in regions, see: Edwin S. Mills and others, *Sources of Metropolitan Growth*, Transaction Publishers, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Office of Management and Budget, “Revised Delineations of Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Micropolitan Statistical Areas, and Combined Statistical Areas, and Guidance on Uses of the Delineations of These Areas,” OMB BULLETIN NO. 15-01, July 15, 2015.

The U.S. Census Bureau also classifies places as “urban areas.” These comprise relatively-dense contiguous communities and neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup> The Tampa Bay metro has three of these areas: Tampa-St. Petersburg, Spring Hill, and Zephyrhills. The Tampa-St. Petersburg urban area has nearly 2.5 million people and covers all of Pinellas County, the western edge of Pasco County, and broad swaths of Hillsborough County. Most of the Spring Hill urban area (formerly known as the Brooksville urban area) is in Hernando County but part crosses over the border into Pasco. The entirety of the Zephyrhills urban area is contained in eastern Pasco County. (See Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1: Map of the Three Urban Areas in the Tampa Bay Metro**



Illustrating the problem with fragmentation, the Tampa-St. Petersburg urban area is currently served by three different MPOs (Forward Pinellas, Pasco MPO, Hillsborough County MPO) and three transit agencies (Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority, Pasco County Public Transportation, and Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority.) In recent years, the MPOs serving the three central counties of the Tampa Bay metro have met as the Tampa Bay Transportation Management Area (TMA) Leadership Group, serving as an advisory body to their respective “home” MPOs. While the TMA provides an opportunity for convention and discussion, it has little influence and authority in the transportation planning process. These *metropolitan* organizations and transit providers operate on a decidedly *non-metropolitan* level.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed definition see: U.S. Census Bureau, “2010 Census Urban and Rural Classification and Urban Area Criteria,” 2011.

<sup>5</sup> A small portion of the Crystal River urban area extends into northern Pasco County. A small portion of the Lakeland urban area extends into eastern Hillsborough County. These smaller urban areas would need to be accounted for in any potential consolidation effort.

At a larger geographic scale, there have been attempts to engage in meaningful planning beyond the boundaries of a particular county. In 2009, the Florida legislature created the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority (TBARTA) in order to develop a Regional Transportation Master Plan for the seven county region.<sup>6</sup> TBARTA is funded through FDOT and contributions from participating county governments, and benefits from the (to date, unused) authority to issue bonds. While TBARTA appears to have played a helpful role in the metropolitan planning process, it has focused the bulk of its limited resources on commuter services, regional visioning, and building awareness of the need for a regional approach to transportation.

Six MPOs in the greater Tampa Bay region do regularly engage to discuss and work together on issues that cross MPO boundaries, most prominently through the Tampa Bay Regional Transportation Authority (TBARTA) MPO's Chairs Coordinating Council (CCC). (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: TBARTA MPOs CCC Participating Agencies**



*Source: Florida Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council*

The organization serves as the necessary forum for the MPOs to work together on two federally-required regional documents: the Congestion Management Process; and air quality conformity analysis. However, the CCC is not funded beyond minimal resources for staffing and relies on member MPOs to provide meeting space and in limited circumstances funding to hire consultants for projects. As a result the CCC, like the TMA, is another example of well-intentioned, but ultimately less impactful, regional planning and decision-making.

Overall the transportation planning and transit structures are fragmented with governance structures provided largely at the county level. This approach is out-of-step with how people and goods move throughout a region and results in too many local projects competing for too little money. It also runs directly counter to federal and state efforts to encourage better metropolitan thinking and action, as described in Section IV.

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<sup>6</sup> TBARTA covers Pinellas, Hillsborough, Pasco, Hernando, Manatee, Sarasota and Citrus Counties.

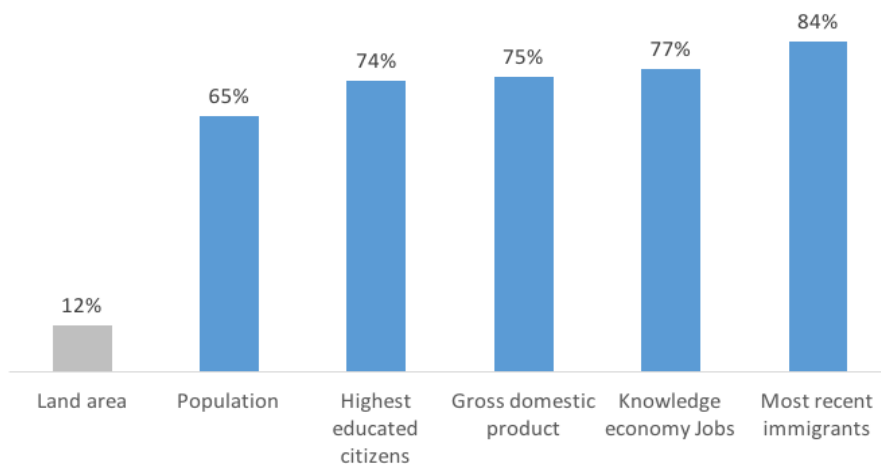
## II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION AND THE ECONOMY

Metropolitan areas matter. They are the engines of the new global economy. Supplier networks and customer relationships are regional rather than local in nature. Labor markets and commuting patterns cross jurisdictional and state lines. Firms make decisions on location and expansion based on regional advantages and amenities, particularly seaports and airports, as well as roads and railroads.<sup>7</sup> Metropolitan areas are where most Americans live, work, and produce the majority of the nation’s economic output. The services and revenues they generate drive state economies. When metropolitan America thrives, the nation thrives.<sup>8</sup>

A parallel development to the emergence of these large, densely populated metropolitan areas is the evolution of the American economy into a series of clusters—networks of firms that engage in the production of similar and related products and services. And firms within these clusters crave proximity through connectivity—to qualified workers, to specialized legal and financial services that often require face-to-face interaction, to infrastructure that enables the mobility of people and goods, and to other firms so that ideas and innovations can be rapidly shared. Density, mobility and access (the essence of urban and metropolitan places) matter even more in the new economy than they did in the industrial economy.

To further the case for the importance of these metropolitan regions, the top 100 metropolitan areas alone claim only 12 percent of our land mass but harbor more than 65 percent of our population, 74 percent of our most educated citizens, 77 percent of our knowledge economy jobs, and 84 percent of our most recent immigrants. They also generate 75 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product.<sup>9</sup> (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3: The 100 Largest Metropolitan Areas’ Share of U.S. Total, Select Categories**



Source: Brookings Institution

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Paul Rodrigue, *The Geography of Transport Systems*, Hofstra University, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive analysis with evidence about why metros matter, see: Alan Berube, “MetroNation: How U.S. Metropolitan Areas Fuel American Prosperity,” Brookings, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Data from the Brookings Institution’s Metropolitan Policy Program.

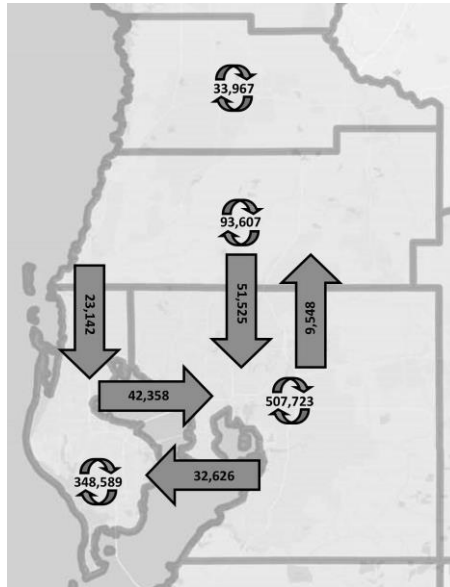
Metropolitan areas also represent the geographic reality of how our labor and housing markets are organized, in that the vast majority of people who live within a given metropolitan area also work there. Nearly 92 percent of workers living the nation’s 100 largest metropolitan areas commuted to jobs within their own metropolitan area. And they frequently cross municipal and county borders within metropolitan areas on their way to work. In the Tampa Bay metropolitan area, roughly 20 percent of workers—nearly a quarter million people—commute to jobs outside their county of residence.<sup>10</sup> (See Table 1 and Figure 4). Even more commute across municipal boundaries.

**Table 1: Residence County to Workplace County Commuting Flows for the Tampa Bay Metropolitan Area**

<b>Residence County</b>	<b>Workplace County</b>	<b>Workers in Commuting Flow</b>
Hillsborough	Hillsborough	507,723
Pinellas	Pinellas	348,589
Pasco	Pasco	93,607
Hernando	Hernando	33,967
<b>Total Intra-County</b>		<b>983,886</b>
<i>Pasco</i>	<i>Hillsborough</i>	<i>51,525</i>
<i>Pinellas</i>	<i>Hillsborough</i>	<i>42,358</i>
<i>Hillsborough</i>	<i>Pinellas</i>	<i>32,626</i>
<i>Pasco</i>	<i>Pinellas</i>	<i>23,142</i>
<i>Hillsborough</i>	<i>Pasco</i>	<i>9,548</i>
<i>Other Inter-County</i>		<i>74,077</i>
<b>Total Inter-County</b>		<b>233,276</b>
<b>Total Commuters</b>		<b>1,217,162</b>

<sup>10</sup> Eno analysis of 5-Year American Community Survey County to County Commuting Flows, U.S. Census Bureau.

**Figure 4: Residence County to Workplace County – Major Commuting Flows for the Tampa Bay Metropolitan Area**



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey

While economic health is clearly important to metropolitan areas, *access* to economic opportunity for all segments of society is equally so. Unfortunately, inequality is a continual problem in metropolitan America. Too many Americans are not only poor but also live in what are neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, which themselves are associated with higher crime rates, worse health outcomes, failing schools, and fewer job opportunities.<sup>11</sup> While most of these high-poverty neighborhoods are still in center cities, the majority of all poor households now live in the suburbs—and those communities tend to not offer the same social services or employment opportunities that previous generations had available in central cities. Since 1970 in the Tampa Bay region, the share of poor residents residing in suburbs increased by 25.2 percent, the second highest increase among major metro areas, and three times the national metro average (see Table 2). In 2012, the region’s 15.1 percent suburban poverty rate was the 22<sup>nd</sup> highest nationally.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Areas of concentrated poverty are those where 40 percent of the population in a Census tract lives below the federal poverty level. Patrick Sharkey, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress Toward Racial Equality*, University of Chicago Press, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone, “The Growth and Spread of Concentrated Poverty, 2000 to 2008-2012,” Brookings Institution, 2014.



**Table 2: Ten Largest Change in the Share of Metro Poor in Suburbs in the Nation's Largest Metropolitan Areas, 1970 to 2012**

Metropolitan Area Name	2012 Suburban Poor Population	Percentage Point Change in Suburban Share 1970-2012
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA	780,843	28.0%
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	319,259	25.2%
New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner, LA	127,429	25.0%
Salt Lake City, UT	106,905	23.7%
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	338,692	23.5%
Baltimore-Towson, MD	155,213	21.7%
St. Louis, MO-IL	304,572	21.6%
Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL-IN-WI	703,472	20.6%
Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, OH	177,718	19.6%
<b>Suburban Total for 95 Largest Metros</b>	<b>16,502,672</b>	<b>8.3%</b>

Source: *Suburban Poverty Data Tables*, Brookings Institution

By enabling workers to reach employment, moving citizens to and from areas of service and opportunity, facilitating global trade, and shipping products between producers and consumers, transportation exerts a clear impact on economic growth. Improving physical access to economic opportunity enhances the efficiency of labor markets, brings public services within reach of all citizens, and generally can improve quality of life.<sup>13</sup> Only 27 percent of all personal trips are social or recreational in nature. Everything else is in some ways related to economic productivity, such as commuting and work related trips (17 percent of all trips), shopping and running errands (45 percent), and trips to school (10 percent).<sup>14</sup>

Since the beginning of the Republic, transportation invention and investment have dictated and influenced the shape and the pace of urban economic development. More often than not, transportation has determined where cities are located and whether and how they grow. This has been true of great port cities, like New York and Tampa, or of rail and air hubs, like Atlanta and Chicago. The performance of a region’s entire and integrated transportation system is critical to its economic, social, and environmental success.

### III. THE CASE FOR REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

The clearest argument for coordinating the design and construction of transportation at the regional level is because so many personal and vehicle movements within each region cross jurisdictional boundaries. In this way, for transportation to facilitate regional economic growth and prosperity, social cohesion, and environmental quality, metropolitan regions must have in place the appropriate decision-making processes. Strong metropolitan planning and capital programming entities and/or processes across jurisdictional and modal lines are essential prerequisites to making better decisions on the investment of scarce public resources. When done

<sup>13</sup> See e.g.: Michael Porter, “Location, Competition, and Economic Development: Local Clusters in a Global Economy,” *Economic Development Quarterly* 14, no. 1 15-34, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> School and church trips are combined. See Federal Highway Administration, “Summary of Travel Trends: National Household Travel Survey,” 2009.

right it allows investment priorities to be established by targeting those projects and programs that bring the greatest economic benefits to the entire region.

While state Departments of Transportation build and manage the national Interstate Highway System, and cities and counties provide for local priorities and needs, the nation’s 409 metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are tasked with providing the *regional* view that enables transportation projects to be planned and delivered at the right scale. This is because transportation, by nature, operates widely over each region as a whole and connects across too many localities to be effectively dealt with by individual governments acting separately. Of course local and county governments conduct valuable activities to address neighborhood and community transportation concerns but economy-shaping investments—in freight movement, in public transit, in highways—require cooperative priority-setting and decision making, to deliver the right set of plans and projects at a scale that works. Table 3 shows that most metros similar in size- and competitors for investment and growth – to Tampa Bay have regional MPOs to handle their transportation planning.

**Table 3: Select Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Population Served**

<b>Metro Area</b>	<b>Metropolitan Planning Organization</b>	<b>MPO 2010 Population</b>
San Diego	San Diego Association of Governments	3,095,271
Denver	Denver Regional Council of Governments	2,827,082
Minneapolis-St. Paul	Metropolitan Council	2,849,557
Atlanta	Atlanta Regional Commission	4,819,026
Seattle	Puget Sound Regional Council	3,690,866
Phoenix	Maricopa Association of Governments	4,055,281
Orlando	Metroplan	1,837,385
Tampa Bay*	Multiple	2,609,965
	<i>Hillsborough MPO</i>	<i>1,228,761</i>
	<i>Forward Pinellas</i>	<i>915,810</i>
	<i>Pasco MPO</i>	<i>465,394</i>

*\*Hernando County is part of a multi-county MPO with Citrus County, serving a population of 313,992*

There is ample additional evidence that MPOs with larger geographic footprints are more effective. A comprehensive 2015 study found that officials and staff at large-scale MPOs are better able to connect and network with a range of stakeholders and the general public, as well as with all levels of government (including federal).<sup>15</sup> This is based on a survey of hundreds of MPO leaders across the country. Another study from 2011 found that metropolitan areas with greater formal centralization were more effective in sustaining regional governance capacities than places that

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<sup>15</sup> Christopher J. Koliba and Jack Wayne Meek, “Scale and Intensity of Collaboration as Determinants of Performance Management Polycentric Governance Networks: Evidence from a National Survey of Metropolitan Planning Organizations,” *Policy & Politics*, July 2015.

kept governing structures the same and simply “collaborated.”<sup>16</sup> In 2004, researchers found that the trend toward more decentralized governance, may be “reducing the ability of these regions to remain competitive and generate growth over the long term.”<sup>17</sup>

There are several reasons for this. For one, larger MPOs are better able to assemble data and technology tools to support forecasting efforts and therefore able to conduct more comprehensive metropolitan planning. This was partly the motivation for the creation of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). In 2005, the state created CMAP by merging the operations of the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS) and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC). CMAP now covers seven counties which is similar to the service area of transit providers in the region, and is also similar to the boundaries used to analyze air quality conformity.

Fully regional MPOs are also far better positioned to serve as a convener and consensus builder. Virginia’s Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC) was created following the merger of two regional planning agencies. Doing so allowed it to serve as the platform for a truly regional visioning effort called Envision Hampton Roads.

By having fewer MPOs, there are several economies of scale that could possibly be achieved that reduce the cost of operation. These include but are not limited to better insurance rates, reduction in staff duplication, and fewer executive salaries. In 2002, the Baltimore Metropolitan Council absorbed the Annapolis MPO. This freed the Annapolis region from needing its own office space and technology tools.

In summary, beyond the obvious benefits of taking the regional view and, as a result, making more strategic decisions, regional MPOs offer the following advantages:

- Improved communication with community stakeholders and elected officials by serving as a convener and consensus-builder;
- Sustained regional governance and decision-making;
- Improved forecasting and planning due to access to better data and technology;
- More efficient operations through economies of scale and consolidation of duplicative efforts.

Extant organizational structures are rooted in the demands placed on the MPO by its geographic boundary and the demands of local governments inside the boundary. More succinctly, the boundary drawn around a metropolitan planning area will identify the needs of that area, and prioritize projects that solve for those needs. If the planning area does not include the economic market as a whole, localized issues and needs are more likely to receive attention and the more impactful, regional challenges will fail to be addressed.

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<sup>16</sup> Margaret Weir and others, “Collaboration Is Not Enough: Virtuous Cycles of Reform in Transportation Policy,” *Urban Affairs Review*, 44(4), 2009.

<sup>17</sup> David K. Hamilton and others, “Exploring the Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions of the Governing of Metropolitan Regions,” *Urban Affairs Review*, 40(2), 20014.

This paper recommends that the region’s leaders seek to consolidate the multiple MPOs into one regional MPO. This consolidation will involve a deliberate process during which key decisions will have to be made, including, but not limited to: the number of counties that will be represented in the new MPO; the governance structure of the new MPO, i.e. who and how many people will serve on the board; and creation of advisory committees to ensure input from local governments, citizens and other constituencies.

#### **IV. EFFORTS TO REFORM METROPOLITAN PLANNING STRUCTURES**

The federal government’s Intermodal Surface transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) first required that MPOs develop long and short-range transportation plans in 1991. The purpose was to aid in the selection of projects by requiring an inclusive and regionally representative process that gave adequate consideration to all modes.<sup>18</sup> However, federal law defers to the states on MPO organizational structure, boundary drawing, and staffing of those agencies.

Florida statute adds a handful of requirements, such as caps on the size of the governing board. Florida law also suggests the composition of the governing board include membership by major transportation providers in the region such as transit operators, toll authorities, airports, and ports. Other than that, MPOs are largely free to set up their organization any way they choose. Neither the federal nor state governments have authority to require changes to internal processes, as long as a regional plan that meets all legal requirements is adopted and the rights of citizens are protected.

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Transportation released a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on MPO Coordination and Planning Area Reform. The rule was specifically intended to “emphasize the importance of applying a regional perspective during the planning process, to ensure that transportation investments reflect the needs and priorities of an entire region.”<sup>19</sup> Reducing fragmentation was cited as being important because regions with different metropolitan transportation planning processes is inefficient and confusing to the general public.

The rule specifically targeted the 35 percent of the nation’s MPOs that share an urban area with another MPO. Tampa Bay is in this group of regions that to date have not fully developed institutions scoped to the regional level and rely instead on county or other sub-regional agencies.

Tampa Bay is not alone in being targeted by the rule. Nationwide, about 140 MPOs – of 409 in total – are affected, particularly in areas with recent high population growth. This is because once-separate urban areas grew together, like in Tampa Bay. The 1970 Census established separate urban areas for the places surrounding the cities St. Petersburg, Clearwater, and Tampa. MPOs were established to plan for each urban area. In the following decades, these urban areas grew toward each other, and added new development in adjacent population centers like Brandon,

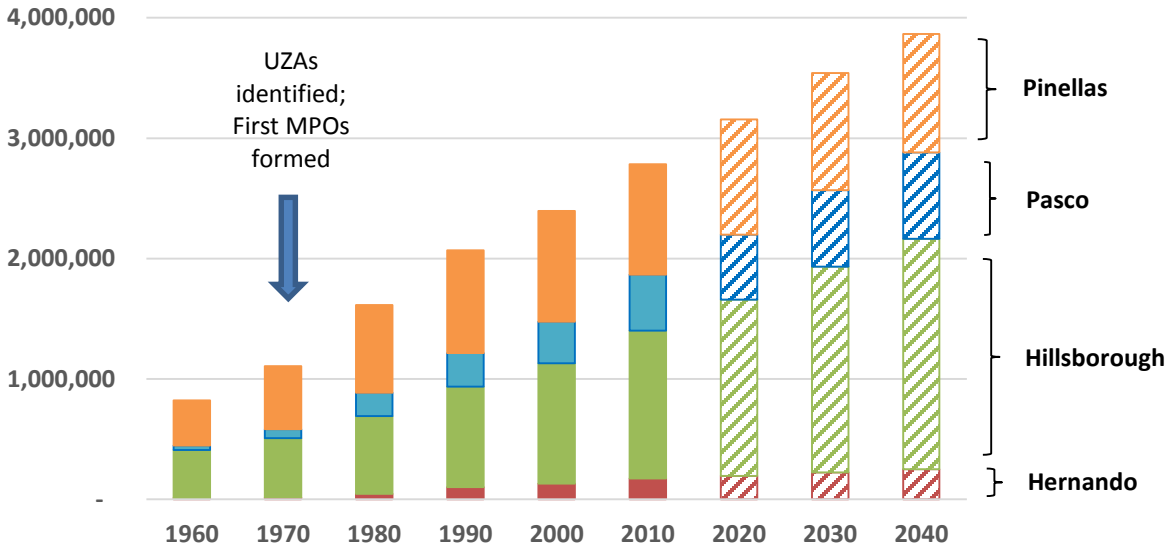
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<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, “A Guide to Metropolitan Transportation Planning Under ISTEA— How the Pieces Fit Together,” FHWA-P.D.-95-031, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> Metropolitan Planning Organization Coordination and Planning Area Reform, 81 FR 41473, June 27, 2016.

New Port Richey, and New Tampa. However, despite the transformations to development and commuting patterns in the Tampa Bay metro (including nearly 200 percent population growth, representing over 2 million residents) the Carter-era MPO boundaries for Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas counties remain unchanged. Figure 5 depicts the historic and projected population for the Tampa Bay Metro.

**Figure 5: Tampa Bay Metropolitan Statistical Area Population - Historic and Projected**



Sources: Historic Data (1960-2010) - Decennial Census; Projected Data (2020-2040) - University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research

The federal rule was made final on December 20, 2016. It continues to require a single set of planning documents, but created a process where existing MPOs and the governor(s) of the state could be exempt themselves from this requirement.<sup>20</sup> Given the political transition in Washington it is unclear whether the final rule will be fully implemented.<sup>21</sup>

Whether or not there is a federal mandate, MPO mergers can happen voluntarily and the Tampa Bay region remains primed for a reevaluation of its regional transportation governance structure. The Tampa Bay TMA, joined by TBARTA and the MPOs CCC representing the larger Tampa Bay region, have approved a scope of work to examine regional transportation planning over the next year – an effort largely prompted by the proposed federal rule. For its part, there is evidence that the state of Florida prefers to see inter-county planning in Tampa Bay and across the state. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) 2060 plan clearly points out that the state has more

<sup>20</sup> The rule’s implementation was postponed until 2024, which is the date when MPOs must redraw their boundaries using information from the 2020 Census. This postponement made the rule easier to approve because it lowered the expected cost of the rule, as MPOs were going to have to reexamine their boundaries at that time anyway. There is also the potential for court challenges under the equal protection clause and civil rights grounds that could overturn the rule. See: Barry Seymour, “Metropolitan Planning: A History of Success, an Uncertain Future?” Eno Center for Transportation, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> During her confirmation hearing, Transportation Secretary-designate Elaine Chao agreed to “take a look” at the MPO rule (among others) in response. Therefore, it is possible that the MPO rule could be replaced with a new rule issued by the U.S. DOT.

MPOs than any other, and a relatively large number of fixed route transit system operators, airports, seaports, and toll authorities.<sup>22</sup> It goes on to say that, to match the regional nature of the state’s economy, “consolidation of transportation entities” is required.

There is no inherently “superior” MPO organizational structure.<sup>23</sup> We believe the best is the one that allows the MPO to perform effective metropolitan planning, achieve regional consensus, and provide efficient stewardship of public funds, particularly internal operating dollars. Given that some MPOs are more than four decades old, it is important to regularly revisit the organizational structure to ensure that the agency is best positioned to meet those objectives.

## V. THE CASE FOR REGIONAL TRANSIT

Similar to the region’s MPOs, the two major transit agencies in Tampa Bay—Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority and the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA)—are county-based. Pasco County’s transportation agency is a county department. As a result, among the 20 largest urban areas in the U.S., Tampa Bay is one of only two that do not have any transit operator capturing the majority of market share.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, among the 20 largest metropolitan areas, Tampa Bay ranks, on a per capita basis, last or next-to-last in the most relevant indicators of transit supply and demand, such as revenue miles, unlinked passenger trips, and passenger miles.<sup>25</sup>

When transit service is fragmented, or not connected seamlessly, the result can be sub-optimal transit service across the region, including burdensome fare penalties and difficulty for commuters when they transfer to other services.

As illustrated in Table 1, about 75,000 commuters flow daily between Pinellas and Hillsborough Counties, but with very few public transit options.<sup>26</sup> Over the past two decades, the PSTA and HART have offered premium, albeit intermittent, weekday bus services across the bridges spanning Tampa Bay.<sup>27</sup> There is also an identified need for improved service across the land border between northern Pinellas and Hillsborough Counties.

One of the best examples of the lack of regional transit service is the fact that on weekends one can see on the HART schedule 14 buses going from Dover, in eastern Hillsborough County, to Downtown Tampa. Meanwhile, there is absolutely no weekend service between Downtown Tampa and St. Petersburg or Clearwater, the other two large cities in Tampa Bay.

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<sup>22</sup> Florida Department of Transportation, “2060 Florida Transportation Plan,” 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander Bond and others, “Staffing and Administrative Capacity of Metropolitan Planning Organizations,” Center for Urban Transportation Research, University of South Florida. Prepared for the Federal Highway Administration, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Global Transit Innovations, “Causes and Consequences of Transit Fragmentation in the San Francisco Bay Area,” University of Minnesota, March 26, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Analysis of 2014 Table 19: Transit Operating Statistics: Service Supplied and Consumed, Federal Transit Administration

<sup>26</sup> Eno analysis of 5-Year American Community Survey County to County Commuting Flows, U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>27</sup> There is currently little or no scheduled public transit service in Pasco County. Demand for service within and into/out of Pasco County is likely similar to the demand found in northern Pinellas/Hillsborough.

It is important to note that the operators in the Tampa Bay region do a relatively good job providing transit service to residential neighborhoods. Sixty-eight percent of working-age residents live in neighborhoods within 3/4ths of a mile of a transit stop. This nearly matches the 69 percent average for the 100 largest metropolitan areas. However, only 16 percent of jobs in the Tampa Bay metro are accessible via a 90-minute transit commute, directly attributable to the lack of inter-jurisdictional connection, itself a by-product of the transit services provided on a county-by-county basis. As a result, the Brookings Institution ranked the Tampa metropolitan area 77 out of 100 for transit job access in 2011.

Fortunately, HART and PSTA have expressed an interest in working more closely together, and consultants have offered advice ranging from establishing inter-local agreements to complete consolidation and/or merger.<sup>28</sup>

This paper recommends that the region's leaders seek to create a regional governance structure for the operation of transit agencies in the Tampa-St. Petersburg Urbanized Area, which includes the counties of Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco. A governance structure that should be considered strongly is an *umbrella or coordinating agency*, in the form of a Regional Transit Authority, under which the county-based authorities and/or agencies would function. And, to facilitate development of even more regional transit, this new regional authority would be enabled to create inter-local agreements with transit agencies in the neighboring counties of the Tampa Bay region.

## VI. EFFORTS TO REFORM TRANSIT GOVERNANCE

Florida law created regional transportation authorities (RTA) in order to spearhead coordination and public transit operation. The South Florida RTA was created to serve as the owner and operator of Tri-Rail. In greater Orlando, the Central Florida RTA was created to serve as the owner/operator of the transit agency known as Lynx. In the panhandle, the Northwest Florida Transportation Corridor Authority was created to provide roadway corridor planning along the coast. The legislature would need to create a regional transportation authority for Tampa Bay, but there is ample precedent for doing so. One idea that merits further investigation: TBARTA has already been enabled by the legislature with most of the functions that a transit agency needs, but it would need to be repurposed and refocused on a specific geographic area and its board governance restructured accordingly.

Across the country, the greatest challenges for transit are often rooted in the governance of—and subsequent interactions between—regional entities. While every region is unique in terms of its history, geographic make-up, and political and legislative constraints, each can learn from the experience of others to improve its transit governance structures in ways that will generate substantial benefits for transit users and for the regional economy as a whole.

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<sup>28</sup> Anne Lindberg, "PSTA, HART Take Steps to Formal Working Partnership," SaintPetersBlog, January 4, 2017.

The governance options range from structured collaboration through formal agreements to consolidation of all transportation and planning functions into a single one-stop agency. In between these two extremes, there are options that might make sense for Tampa Bay.

In particular, we point to the possibility of creating *an umbrella or coordinating agency*, under which the county-based authorities and/or agencies would function. Several regions have created or designated an umbrella or oversight agency that works to coordinate efforts of the multijurisdictional system. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) in the San Francisco Bay Area is one example of a coordinating agency does a good job linking together the transit systems of 26 different operators. MTC distributes capital funding, manages the Clipper Card fare system, and serves to moderate between all of the agencies.<sup>29</sup>

Tampa Bay leaders should carefully consider the case of Chicago where the three transit operators (the Chicago Transit Authority, Metra, and Pace Suburban Bus Service) are all under the umbrella of the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). RTA distributes funding to each agency but has limited political or statutory power and, as a result, allocates available revenues based on outdated formulas. For the RTA to use its funding authority to effectively push the individual agencies toward regional goals, it needs much greater authority than it currently enjoys.<sup>30</sup>

Regardless of the specific governance solution, there are several important ideas that stakeholders in the Tampa Bay Region should consider when considering reforms to the regional transit governance.<sup>31</sup>

***Access to an independent source of funding benefits transit planning and operations.*** Many regions in the U.S. have strong agencies with their own sources of dedicated funding. Toll revenue is one example of a dedicated source. A dedicated source of funding can help give agencies some of the necessary independence to make wise investment decisions.

***Regions need a performance-based capital planning system.*** Capital planning decisions are always going to be influenced by political considerations, which can challenge sound, long-term decision-making. These can be mitigated, to a degree, by introducing regional goals along with performance measures for evaluating progress toward the goals. The MTC in San Francisco controls the purse strings and prioritizes projects and investments based on a quantitative analysis of benefits and costs.

***Board representation and selection is critical.*** Some regions are plagued by unbalanced representation which often leads to poor decision-making, typically in favor of overrepresented localities. Regions need to develop ways to ensure that board representation better reflects the

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Cabanatuan, "Seamless Bay Area Transit System Proposed to Attract New Riders," *SFGate*, March 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Olaf Merk, "Metropolitan Governance of Transport and Land Use in Chicago," Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> For an extensive analysis of transit governance see: The Eno Center for Transportation and TransitCenter, "Getting to the Route of +It: The Role of Governance in Regional Transit," 2014.



geographic distribution of transit users, and is dynamic enough to change over time as the region's transit needs change.

***Consolidation typically provides policy and service benefits.*** Not all regions can create a single unified organization, nor would this necessarily be desirable, especially in larger states with multiple metropolitan areas. On the other hand, in some regions the fragmentation and redundancy caused by multiple agencies creates undue challenges and some consolidation, or increased collaboration, would be an improvement.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Some urban thinkers and policymakers have long recognized that so many of our country's challenges (transportation, environment, poverty, crime) cross the borders of political jurisdictions. As such, they can only be addressed meaningfully on a regional or metropolitan level; individual communities are generally too small and do not have the scope or scale to deal with these well-entrenched issues effectively. That message is starting to resonate as many metropolitan areas have begun the difficult process of reassessing transportation plans.

The Tampa Bay region needs to reform its transportation governance in response to these trends. While local and state leaders have worked to tackle transportation fragmentation in the region—most notably by creating TBARTA in 2007—planning and transit service continue to be provided largely at the county level. This approach is out-of-step with how people and goods move throughout a region and results in too many local projects competing for too little money. It also runs directly counter to federal and state efforts to encourage thinking and action on a regional scale.

For the Tampa Bay region there are a range of potential options. With strong state encouragement, the region should voluntarily merge its county-based MPO structure to a single independent organization not housed by a single local government. A less satisfying response may be to promote stronger coordination among MPOs within common urbanized areas or reflecting broader economic relationships, such as building on existing MPO alliances. But any activity aimed at strengthening regional coordination should be considered only an interim step toward full consolidation.

The region should also consider governance reforms for its two main transit systems – HART and PSTA – and Pasco County Public Transportation. While current efforts to partner formally and pursue joint procurement opportunities should continue, the region must also plan for a formal regional structure. Doing so would result in a seamless transit service in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties where the vast majority of regional riders are already located. While it is possible to dissolve both agencies and reconstitute them as a single organization with a single governing board and staff, the region should also consider using TBARTA as the regional transit operator, as it may provide a readymade opportunity to create seamless and coordinated transit service throughout the metropolitan area.

Whatever the solution, it needs to be a locally-driven and informed by a rigorous and independent examination of the situation in the region today. The Tampa Bay region has all the tools to transform its transportation system into one that functions in a way that matches the other significant assets it already has by acting with purpose and clarity. It is also fortunate that civic, corporate, and political leadership at all levels seems to be aligning around a set of bold ideas. This presents a generational opportunity for real change. The region should not miss out on that opportunity.

*This white paper was prepared by staff at the Eno Center for Transportation for the Tampa Bay Partnership. The primary authors are Robert Puentes, Alexander Bond, Paul Lewis, and Emil Frankel.*

### **About Eno**

*The Eno Center for Transportation is an independent, non-partisan think-tank that promotes policy innovation and leads professional development in the transportation industry. As part of its mission, Eno seeks continuous improvement in transportation and its public and private leadership in order to increase the system's mobility, safety, and sustainability.*

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