

**MODAL
DEVELOPMENT**



**PUBLIC
TRANSIT**

State Transit Strategy

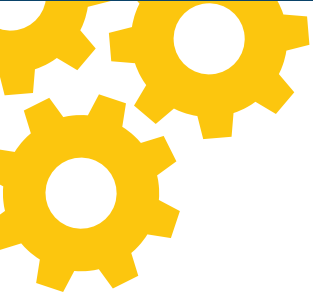
*Adapting to Changing
Customer Mobility Needs*

Executive Summary

April 2023



PREFACE



Over the past decade, transit agencies have faced the challenge of declining bus ridership and the impacts of emerging mobility solutions like transportation network companies and micro-mobility. In response, transit agencies have sought to optimize their networks, build new partnerships, and leverage new technologies to enhance the customer experience.

In 2019, ridership appeared to be stabilizing and even increasing slightly due to these efforts. Then, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in precipitous declines in ridership across the nation. Many agencies in Florida saw ridership drop by more than 60%. Over the past two years, transit agency budgets have been stabilized by an influx of federal funding and some have managed to recover their ridership to nearly 80% of pre-COVID levels.

As we look to the future, transportation innovations like automated vehicles, electric vehicles, urban air mobility and the development of private intercity rail will continue to force us to reconsider how we move people and goods within and between our communities. Given the state of the industry and with an eye to the future, the Department is rethinking how we support transit in the State of Florida. The Department is proud to release the first State Transit Strategy as it will shape our future investments and partnerships with transit providers.





Public transit is a **vital service that Florida’s residents and visitors depend on to **live, work, learn, and play.****

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) acknowledges its role in providing support to enhance public transit by developing and investing in strategies that promote efficient, equitable, and sustainable mobility.

In partnership with public transportation providers, FDOT strives to provide Floridians with reliable, safe, and cost-effective transit options. Congestion, changing travel patterns, and technology improvements are all driving forces in the effort to redefine the Department’s approach to supporting a public transportation system that is attuned to customer mobility needs. Through the State Transit Strategy Initiative, FDOT seeks to enhance program areas and strengthen partnerships in order to improve mobility in our urban and rural communities while continuing to preserve the quality of our environment.

Why Transit? Why Now?


Public transit is the fundamental element of an efficient transportation network and serves as the lifeblood for those who depend on it for mobility and to access life sustaining activities.

It provides economic benefits to a community through:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| safer travel | improved commuter productivity | decreased roadway congestion | increased economic activity | enhanced nearby real estate value | connecting workforce with local businesses to support job growth and opportunity |


For public transportation to achieve these benefits and continue sustaining the growth of a community, it is necessary to understand the various trends and issues that affect its current performance so that transit providers can design and operate their services effectively.

**FIXED ROUTE
TRANSIT RIDERSHIP**

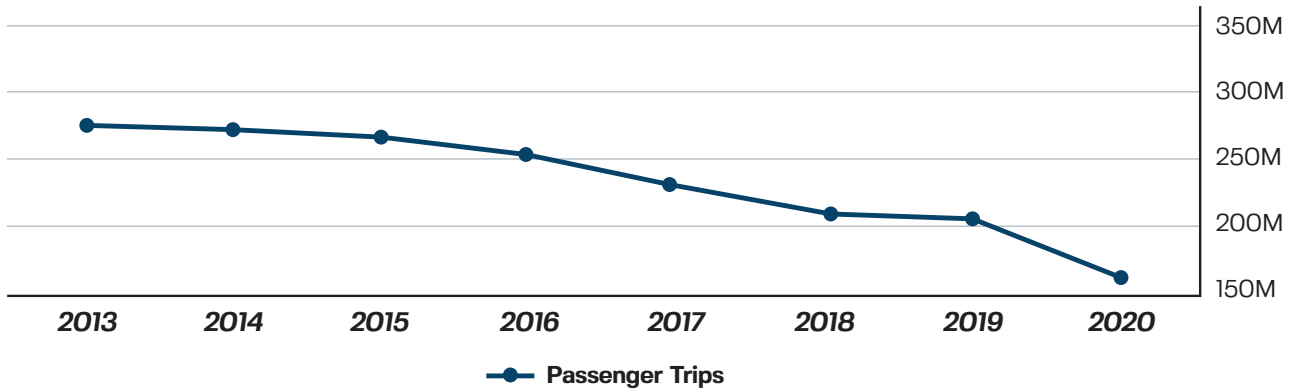


44%





decline in Florida in the 7-year period from 2013 to 2020



Downward trend
exacerbated by
COVID-19 pandemic



New Opportunities

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |
| <i>New Technology and Business Models</i> | <i>New Partnership Opportunities</i> | <i>Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) Funding</i> | <i>Changing Travel Patterns</i> |

Source: Florida Transit Handbooks (2014, 2015) and Florida Transit Information and Performance Handbooks (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)

Work Group Charge

A working group was assembled to address Florida’s changing transit needs. The working group was charged with developing a strategy plan to:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Frame FDOT’s transit vision and policy position | 2 Evaluate resource needs and organizational structure |
| 3 Develop partnership and funding strategies | 4 Identify potential investment opportunities |



Strategy Questions

Five fundamental questions guided the development of Florida’s transit strategy:



- 1** Given the challenges and opportunities facing Florida’s transit agencies, what might FDOT do differently moving forward?
- 2** What capital and operational models should FDOT support that are best suited for multimodal integration?
- 3** What are some of the transit expertise and organizational needs at the Central Office and District Office levels?
- 4** How should FDOT approach partnership opportunities and funding moving forward?
- 5** What investment opportunities should FDOT consider pursuing given the current funding environment?

Vision Statement



The Public Transit Office is committed to proactively developing and delivering a public transportation system attuned to customer mobility needs in practical, yet innovative ways.

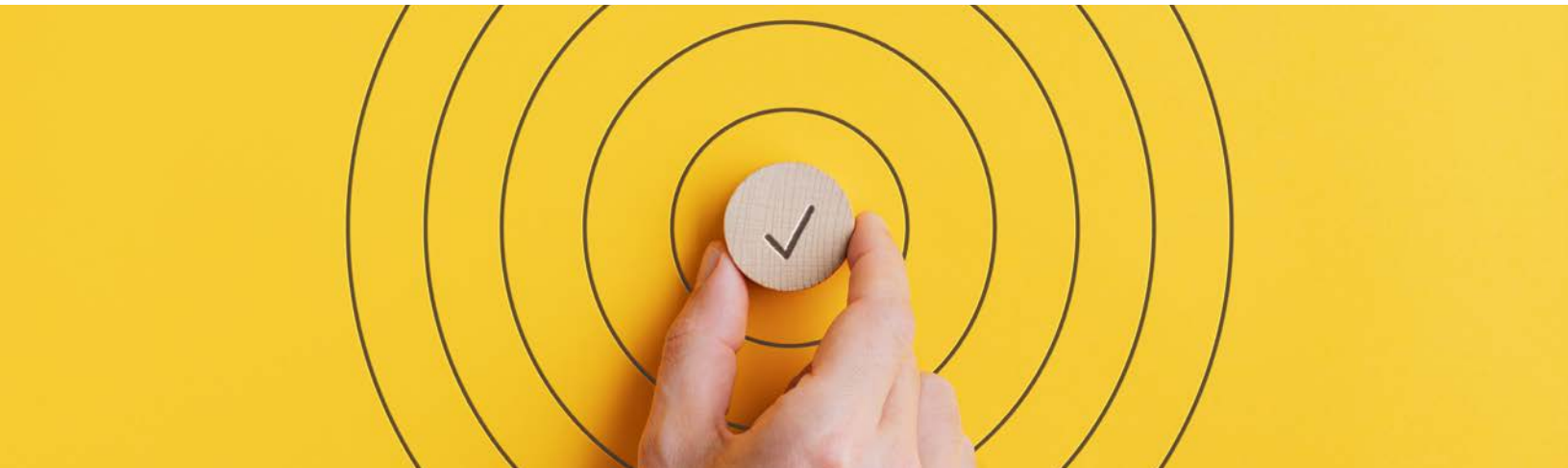


The public transit system can include:

- ▶ A network of premium transit routes, fixed route bus systems, and paratransit systems integrated with other modes of transportation moving people rapidly within heavily populated metropolitan areas.
- ▶ Coordinated paratransit and mobility services providing rural areas with transportation access, quality service, and efficient connections to regional and urban facilities.
- ▶ Intercity bus services integrated with urban and regional transit services, effectively addressing intercity travel needs throughout the state.



Public Transit Office Goals



1

Make transit more attractive to riders, collaborate with stakeholders to develop strategies for reducing traffic congestion and travel delays, and develop seamless connections when a one-seat ride is not an efficient option. Essential to this effort are strategies and public outreach to define and develop programs that will meet customer needs.

2

Expand travel choices in rural areas beyond the traditional medical and senior transportation markets.

3

Support a comprehensive and coordinated policy to guide the state's public transportation funding. Funding priority will be given to those projects that reflect a customer driven, multimodal approach to providing improved access. Reduce the number of program silos and increase funding flexibility.

4

Ensure all public transportation services include safety/risk management components in their operational plans.

Guiding Principles



**Maximize
Return on
Investment**



**Change
Travel
Behavior**



**Enhance
Mobility and
Access**



**Improve,
Manage, and
Innovate**



**Strengthen
Environmental
Sustainability**



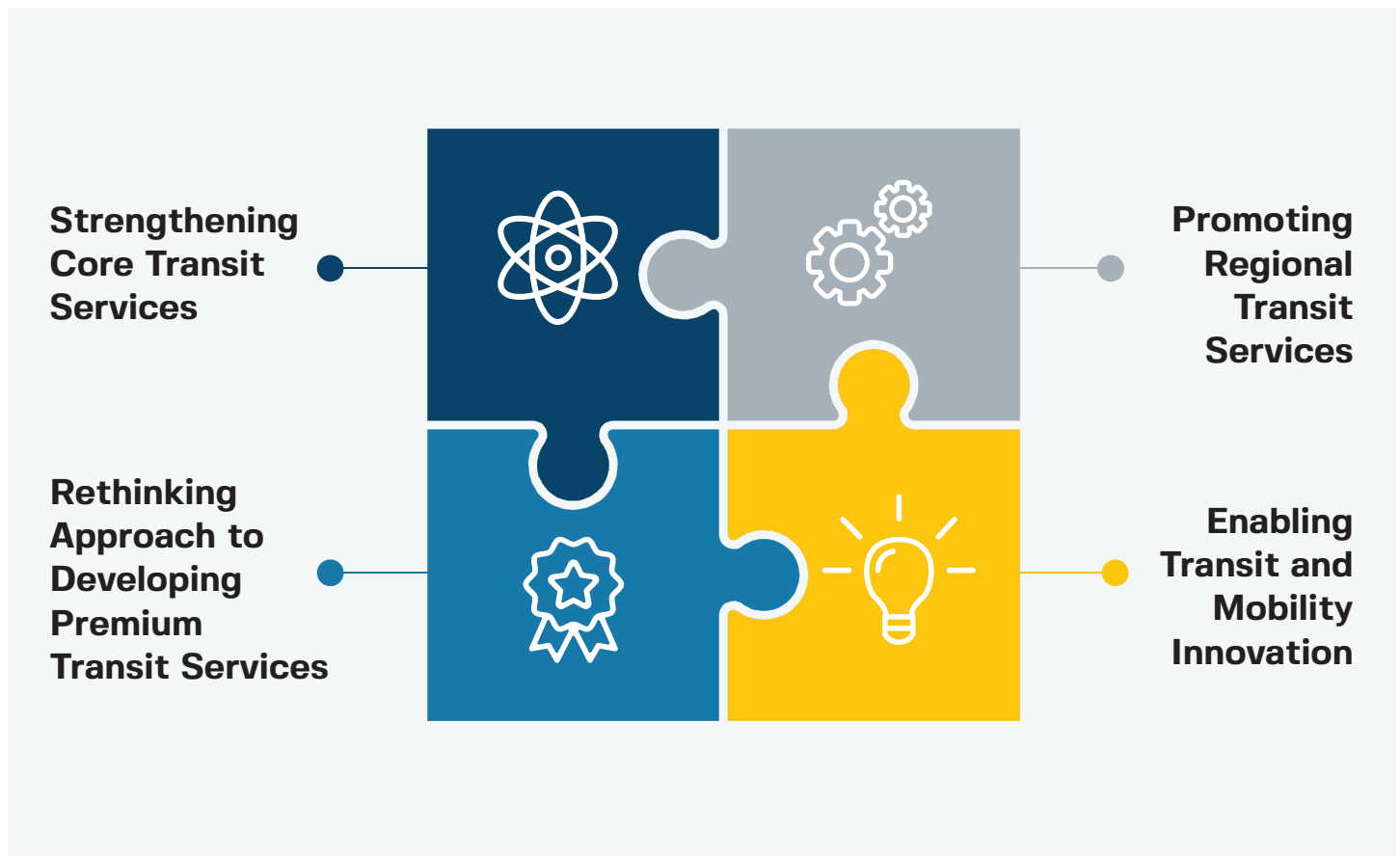
**Boost
Economic
Development**



**Expand
Awareness,
Safety, and
Communication**

KEY THEMES

Four high level themes have emerged during the strategic development process:



1

Strengthening Core Transit Services

Core transit services provided by FDOT’s partners are essential to the great majority of transit users in Florida. Strengthening the quality of the core system statewide requires the Department to gain a more comprehensive understanding of transit riders’ needs, travel patterns and behaviors through acquiring and assessing travel data including customer feedback. Through this initiative, transit users and stakeholders have conveyed their need for more reliable service, greater service frequency, better traveler information systems and additional amenities. The Department is committed to working with our partners to optimize the existing transit systems to best meet customer needs, support resiliency efforts, and ensure all riders have equitable transportation options. In high-growth urbanized areas that means identifying and assisting with the development of transit corridors that provide higher frequency, easily accessible, quality service that serves the core ridership base while attracting new riders. In rural areas, transit systems seek to expand their services to connect transit-dependent individuals with a wider variety of life-sustaining services and destinations. By focusing on the allocation of resources, the Department can help broaden and coordinate transit services to improve service quality and reduce trip costs. FDOT seeks to develop new partnerships between public agencies, private organizations, and other stakeholders, as well as implement alternate transportation services, such as mobility on demand service, to fill service gaps and improve efficiency. By improving core service, transit systems will enhance the customer experience and grow transit usage over time.



2

Rethinking Approach to Developing Premium Transit Services

Population growth and tourism will continue to stress Florida's transportation network, particularly within and between metropolitan city centers and surrounding suburban areas. Constrained corridors in dense urban areas make highway widening a less practical option to relieve traffic congestion. Creating more high-capacity premium transit corridors can enhance mobility by efficiently moving large numbers of people to accommodate the continuing growth in Florida's high density urbanized areas. Florida has relied significantly on Federal Transit Administration (FTA) project support through their Capital Investment Grant (CIG) Program (New Starts/Small Starts), matched with local and state capital funds, to develop needed rail transit and BRT systems. In addition to pursuing these limited CIG opportunities, the Department will expand upon traditional resources and demonstrate increased funding flexibility to address needs beyond the capabilities of these programs. The State New Starts Transit Program (NSTP) will be refocused to offer paths to project funding outside of the CIG program, allowing local agencies to advance worthy projects with these State capital funds, Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) funding, local revenues, and new federal formula and discretionary program funds made available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Additionally, using flexibility within the District Dedicated Revenue program to support operations upon project startup will be important to achieve local government consensus and create the pipeline of premium transit projects urgently needed to improve mobility and avoid further congesting our urban transportation network.



3

Promoting Regional Transit Services

The Department seeks to enhance regional transit efforts by facilitating and supporting opportunities for collaboration amongst transit providers, local governments, transportation authorities, planning organizations, and other stakeholders. Customer travel needs are not confined to jurisdictional boundaries, therefore improving connections between intersecting origins and destinations will require partnerships to be strengthened between these entities. Regionalism connects rural areas to urban areas using a variety of methods that are unique to each service area. Some of these efforts may include developing additional park-and-ride and shared-ride infrastructure, establishing mobility hubs, developing regional routes jointly funded by participating agencies, and co-locating intercity bus terminals with intermodal centers that connect riders with new and existing transit services. Implementing regional transit can close service gaps in rural areas and improve transit efficiency through the sharing of resources, such as bus stops, fleet vehicles, and/or facilities, that can reduce operating costs and help providers function as a complete transit network. The Department recognizes that substantial investments in plans supported by regional collaboration will result in a more efficient use of resources and will contribute to resolving current industry challenges. For this strategy to succeed, the transit providers and stakeholders must be willing to invest in this shared vision.



4

Enabling Transit and Mobility Innovation

The transit industry is rapidly evolving due to technological advances in the field. These changes create an opportunity to enhance transit services in Florida by implementing innovations that improve system efficiencies, such as real-time trip information and advance/universal fare payment systems. The need for flexibility and convenience in scheduling and delivering transit trips requires a change to the industry's approach to providing traditional services. Alternate transit modes that were once considered competition can be incorporated with existing systems to expand the reach of transit services in the community. The Department is dedicated to facilitating pilot projects that are identified by transit systems as potential methods of expanding and improving the services they provide. These projects may include coordinating with TNCs to assist with first/last mile connections, testing automated and connected vehicle technologies, integrating micromobility/microtransit options, and promoting Mobility as a Service (MaaS) projects that have the ability to meet unique customer needs. In addition to supporting pilot projects, the Department will facilitate the sharing of information and lessons learned to broaden the knowledge base for transit providers statewide so informed decisions can be made about which innovative solutions may be most successful in each service area.

Strategy Recommendations



Urban Transit



Enhance coordination with transit agencies, MPOs, local governments, and other stakeholders through:

- ▶ Providing greater involvement with local planning staff and in plan development
- ▶ Closing connectivity gaps across jurisdictional boundaries and county/jurisdictional level funding silos
- ▶ Coordinating with stakeholders to provide high-capacity and high-frequency service that supports access to critical destinations



Encourage regionalism by:

- ▶ Supporting efforts to increase regional connections
- ▶ Building upon the success of existing regional public transportation projects
- ▶ Evaluating the performance of the current park-and-ride programs
- ▶ Identifying new locations for park-and-ride/shared-ride/mobility hubs through analysis and stakeholder coordination
- ▶ Coordinating with rural public transportation providers to service these park-and-ride facilities/shared-ride/mobility hubs



Include High-Capacity Premium Transit in Integrated Mobility Corridors by:

- ▶ Identifying and funding the development of high-capacity premium transit corridors within Florida's metropolitan areas
- ▶ Better coordinating highway and transit improvements
- ▶ Working with local agencies to develop supportive strategies



Integrate technology and emerging mobility by:

- ▶ Researching new technologies and supporting pilot projects that have research components to ensure sharing of lessons learned and identifying use cases to advance mobility
- ▶ Establishing standards and guidance for emerging technology
- ▶ Removing barriers to support innovative Mobility as a Service (MaaS) projects throughout the state

Strategy Recommendations



Rural Transit



Enhance access to activity centers, facilities and services by:

- ▶ Understanding the needs of rural areas and agencies
- ▶ Coordinating with the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged
- ▶ Developing new partnerships between agencies, private organizations, and other stakeholders
- ▶ Ensuring opportunities for underserved communities/vulnerable populations to access employment, education, and critical services



Encourage regionalism by:

- ▶ Facilitating a regional approach to resource management (shared facilities, fleet, etc.)
- ▶ Assisting with developing interagency partnerships



Expand service levels of rural transit by:

- ▶ Broadening eligibility requirements of state programs to include rural agencies
- ▶ Evaluating alternative service delivery options, including on-demand transit
- ▶ Supporting rural transit system projects and programs

Strategy Recommendations



Intercity Bus



Develop an intercity bus vision by:

- ▶ Defining the role of the Public Transit Office in the provision and support of intercity bus service
- ▶ Determining the impact of changing statutory language to expand opportunities to other providers



Encourage co-location with other modes by:

- ▶ Including intercity bus considerations in the planning for intermodal transfer and park-and-ride facilities
- ▶ Supporting emerging mobility integration for first mile/last mile connectivity



Identify service gaps and opportunities for expanding intercity bus services by:

- ▶ Evaluating intercity movement within the state and identifying needs
- ▶ Coordinating with local agencies, intercity bus providers, and others to develop new service delivery options

Strategy Recommendations

Funding



Continue to utilize state and federal funding sources to support service by:

- ▶ Providing capital and operating assistance for urban public transportation, rural public transportation and intercity bus systems
- ▶ Supporting agencies as they apply for federal discretionary funds
- ▶ Creating a funding toolbox and developing a pipeline of projects to establish demand for FTA Capital Investment Grants and FDOT State New Starts Transit Program funds



Promote funding flexibility by:

- ▶ Taking advantage of flex funding opportunities in federal transportation programs when needed to address local transportation priorities
- ▶ Leveraging opportunities established by current Florida Statutes
- ▶ Expanding the definition of projects eligible for different funding programs to include additional types of public transportation projects



Pursue additional funding sources by:

- ▶ Leveraging additional formula funds through IIJA funding to enhance existing transit services
- ▶ Pursuing discretionary federal funding for premium transit projects
- ▶ Assisting local governments in developing funding strategies to support high-capacity and premium transit projects
- ▶ Exploring expansion of the use of toll revenues collected on managed lanes projects to support the capital needs and operation of express bus services
- ▶ Creating new funding opportunities to support rural providers (Example - create rural funding at the state level by providing a state match to 5311 grant funds)



Strategy Recommendations

Organizational Needs



Develop resources at a statewide, regional (multi-District), and District level by:

- ▶ Identifying training opportunities to help transit staff enhance their subject matter expertise in all phases of project lifecycle and emerging technology/mobility
- ▶ Helping FDOT staff outside of the transit programs to better understand the Department's transit functions and processes, and identifying opportunities for collaboration
- ▶ Working together with other offices on joint highway/rail/transit programs and projects
- ▶ Utilizing consultant and university program support to expand FDOT's expertise and pool of multi-disciplinary resources



Align the organizational structure of the Public Transit Office with the new mobility vision by:

- ▶ Enhancing coordination with passenger rail efforts to ensure first and last mile connections and an integrated statewide network
- ▶ Considering the need for seamless connections with other modes, such as bicycle/pedestrian and emerging modes like TNCs
- ▶ Evaluating and enhancing existing position descriptions
- ▶ Identifying the need for additional positions at a statewide, regional (multi-District) and/or District level

Core Functions

FDOT, in conjunction with public and private partners, supports and enhances public transportation systems in the state to assure their continued and increased availability to meet current and future urban, rural, and intercity mobility needs. The following core functions of the FDOT Public Transit Office will accomplish this objective:

CURRENT:

ENHANCE TRADITIONAL FUNCTIONS TO MEET NEW MOBILITY NEEDS

- ▶ Federal and state transit funding programs
- ▶ Vehicle, technology, and contract management
- ▶ State oversight program
- ▶ Training and technical support
- ▶ Comprehensive planning and research

FUTURE:

GUIDE PARTNER AGENCY INITIATIVES BY ESTABLISHING A STATEWIDE SYSTEM VISION

- ▶ Develop a process in order to identify statewide needs, gaps, opportunities, and priorities consistent with the goals of the Florida Transportation Plan and federal policy emphasis areas (examples – equity, sustainability, resiliency, etc.)
- ▶ Work with the transit agencies to develop and maintain a list of meritorious projects that can be considered for various funding opportunities

FUTURE:

INTEGRATE TECHNOLOGY AND EMERGING MOBILITY OPPORTUNITIES

- ▶ Enable technology and emerging mobility projects in partnership with the agencies
- ▶ Provide technology planning, procurement, and deployment support
- ▶ Research new technologies and support pilot projects
- ▶ Develop new standards, guidance, and performance measures

FUTURE:

STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- ▶ Fortify existing relationships at the federal, state, regional, and local levels
- ▶ Forge new partnerships with emerging mobility providers
- ▶ Assist in the development and implementation of marketing and passenger information programs for public transit and intercity bus services
- ▶ Develop and maintain a communication plan to engage all stakeholders including the system users and general public, understand evolving customer needs, boost system ridership, and garner support for public transportation



With the unique needs and operating environment of each district, each of these functions will be tailored to the areas where they are deployed to provide flexibility.

Strategy Recommendations

Outreach/Partnerships



Align the statewide transit vision with partner initiatives by:

- ▶ Conducting stakeholder and public outreach to understand existing and potential customer needs and partner agency initiatives
- ▶ Working with Florida’s urban and rural transit agencies, the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, Florida Public Transportation Association (FPTA), and other stakeholders to support projects that implement the Department’s statewide vision
- ▶ Forging new partnerships with emerging mobility providers



Work with partners to support and expand transit service by:

- ▶ Joining with local government and regional transit agencies in pursuing federal discretionary grants
- ▶ Involving developers and local governments in the development and support of TOD and value capture programs
- ▶ Helping to fund major transit capital facility projects such as operations and maintenance facilities and transit terminals
- ▶ Removing regulatory barriers to partnering with emerging mobility providers

ACTION PLAN

Near-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations can be implemented within 1 year, 2 to 3 years, and 3 to 5 years, respectively. Although some of the mid-term and long-term recommendations can be initiated now, full implementation will require 2 to 5 years.

| Near-Term | Mid-Term | Long-Term |
|-----------|----------|-----------|
|-----------|----------|-----------|



Addressing Organizational Needs

- Align the organizational structure of the Public Transit Office with the new mobility vision and rebrand the office
- Develop transit resources at a statewide, regional (multi-District), and District level
- Work with the Office of Environmental Management, Office of Design, and other offices to better incorporate transit into project development, design, and other practices and standards



Enhancing Partnerships and Outreach

- Develop a communication plan to engage all stakeholders, including the system users and general public, with the end goal of garnering support for public transportation
- Conduct stakeholder and public outreach to understand evolving customer needs, learn about partner agency initiatives, and inform them of FDOT's transit strategy and new opportunities
- Forge new partnerships with emerging mobility providers - identify partners, discuss collaboration opportunities, and enable implementation of innovative mobility projects (including pilot projects)
- Develop outreach efforts and build partnerships with Chambers of Commerce, Visitor and Convention agencies, Enterprise Florida, and other potential partners with vested interest in enhancing mobility
- Strengthen partnerships with local and regional planning agencies to support TOD efforts



Advancing Projects and Funding

- Develop a comprehensive and coordinated framework considering all funding options in order to guide the state's public transportation investments. Funding priority will be given to those projects that reflect a customer driven, multimodal approach to providing improved access. Reduce the number of program silos and increase funding flexibility
- Dedicate funding from the Corridor Development program for High-Capacity Transit Corridors
- Develop formal program procedures and establish a state funded path for premium transit projects through the State New Starts Transit Program
- Develop guidance to allow Districts to allocate up to 15% of their annual District Dedicated Revenue (DDR) funds for premium transit operating costs
- Coordinate with the SIS program regarding funding flexibility for premium transit projects

ACTION PLAN

Near-Term

Mid-Term

Long-Term

- Work with transit agencies to develop a list of premium transit projects for various funding opportunities
- Develop strategies with stakeholders to submit competitive applications for discretionary federal funding opportunities included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)
- Evaluate creating new funding opportunities to support rural providers, such as a rural block grant or match to FTA rural transit funding programs



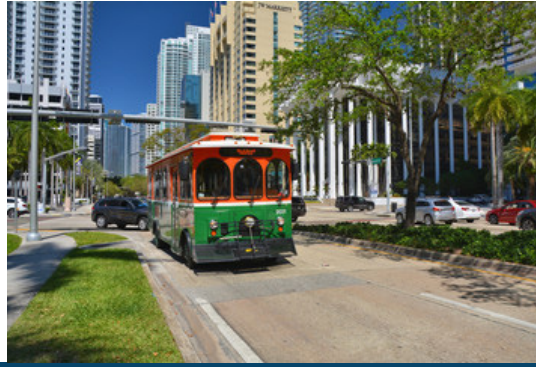
Guiding Research and Planning

- Utilize the state transit strategy to meet the requirements of F.S. 341.041 (1) by identifying statewide needs, gaps, opportunities, and priorities consistent with the goals of the Florida Transportation Plan and federal policy emphasis areas, and to guide partner agency efforts
- Monitor transit service performance, create new performance measures in coordination with the Forecasting and Trends Office (FTO) and Florida Transportation Commission (FTC) that incorporate emerging trends and reflect evolving customer needs, and establish statewide performance targets
- Work with agencies to ensure they have general transit feed specifications (GTFS) data available to assist app developers with establishing programs that help customers to plan the entirety of their trip, make payments, etc. Also, consider developing compatibility requirements for app developers for universal fare payments
- Update Transit Technology Primer to include new mobility options and make it an easily accessible web-based tool
- Create Mobility Data Collaborative to enable data sharing with transit agencies and emerging mobility partners – work with the FTO, the Traffic Engineering and Operations (TEO) office, and the Transportation Data and Analytics (TDA) office
- Develop policy for selecting and prioritizing research projects



Enhancing Grants and Operations

- Identify obstacles related to current and future funding categories
- Review and streamline funding programs, expand eligibility and flexibility, add language to the grant program procedures to address state priorities, emphasis areas, new project types, etc.
- Establish safety standards for microtransit vehicles
- Establish preventative maintenance standards for equipment used specifically for public transit mobility programs
- Establish a baseline to set a performance standard for Corrective Action Plans
- Develop maintenance services purchasing contract for sub-recipients



The FDOT Public Transit Office is poised to initiate the implementation of these strategies in order to adapt practices and serve changing customer mobility needs in practical, yet innovative ways.





**STRATEGIC
DEVELOPMENT**



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