

Rail plan leaves many unanswered questions

Our leaders have more questions to answer on the light rail proposal than exactly where the rail line will go. In addition to wanting to know where it is going to go and how long the tax goes, I would like to know how many people they expect to carry and how much it will cost. Randal O'Toole from the Cato Institute in his study on rail transit (March 2010) points out that "the agencies that spend taxpayer dollars building these lines almost invariably call them successful even when they go an average of 40 percent over budget and, in many cases, carry an insignificant number of riders."

What are the long-term costs to this light rail system and what is the plan to fund them? I also would like to know about plans to connect this to Pinellas and other counties. I think a western central Florida ridership study is needed to determine the numbers and costs within the region (to include Orlando) to make this work.

Further in the *Times* article, HART board chairman Ron Govin's quote that "we'll be able to double the number of buses on the road" also raises questions: What are bus ridership, route coverage and costs now, and why aren't buses being better used in the interim? Why won't more buses without light rail work? Buses can be a flexible, responsive and immediate answer at a much lower investment/cost: no land rights, construction and extra infrastructure needed. Where is the data to show why buses won't meet the need now but double the number of buses is needed with light rail?

Why are we jumping so quickly to raise taxes with so many unanswered questions? We are in a recession. Every penny is precious and funds spent on rail and transit take money away from something else. I would like more answers to these questions and others on light rail before stepping into the voting booth in November.

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