

Family Owned Business 47 Years Hurt by Bus Rapid Transit Plan

Letter to Editor, The Gabber Newspaper
Florida Orange Groves Winery, Vincent Shook

Dear Editor:

As a small business owner for 47 years, my family has endured many challenges and attacks directed at the livelihood we work so hard to build and maintain. The most recent and threatening of those challenges is PSTA's plan to confiscate 1/3 of our public roadways for their proposed Bus Rapid Transit System (BRT).

The outside lanes of Pasadena Avenue (along with those on 1st Avenues North and South in St. Petersburg) are to be confiscated for PSTA buses only. At a time when our communities are growing, we need wider lanes and less congestion to move ever more car and truck traffic safely and more efficiently. Through reduced access to, and visibility of most retail businesses located along the proposed corridors, there will also be lost income and lost jobs.

Our family business faces an increased threat due to the proposed **elevated** BRT station to be constructed across the entire front of our commercial property. PSTA's methodology of "designed congestion" (yes, that's a real planning technique) will create more frustration, more congestion, longer commute times, more pollution - and unfortunately, more deaths.

These are studied historical conclusions of similar efforts in Los Angeles and other communities. Those conclusions run similar to most people's common sense. It is far past the time to end the subsidization of government entities whose demand for their services continues to decline. PSTA's ridership numbers have been declining for several years. Reasonable observers of bus ridership suspect actual ridership numbers are far less than are publicly stated. Most observers often see none, one or two riders in many buses as they traverse our roadways.

PSTA's plan is yet another detrimental government taking of property and income belonging to our community and to individual citizens. No honest cost/benefit study would ever endorse the commitment of 1/3 of our roadway resources to the benefit and self-interest of an already heavily subsidized government entity with declining demand.

I suggest an alternative approach. A partnership with our free enterprise system and its entrepreneurs. Let's encourage and partner with the new technologies behind electric vehicles, self-driving cars and vans and the entrepreneurial services of UBER, LYFT, and now FREE Rides like Nickle Rides, Free Beach Rides and Go To in Gulfport.

This approach encompasses a realistic concept of our transportation future and its direction towards convenience, efficiency and speedy travel.

Let's no longer use our tax dollars to subsidize and to duplicate systems (we already have a trolleybus connecting downtown St. Petersburg to the beaches) with demonstrated declining demand. It is past time to step back from this latest bureaucratic effort to create hazardous roadways within our cities in the name of "rapid" bus transit and/or traffic "calming." St. Petersburg alone could most certainly use its PSTA proposed subsidy (many millions of dollars) for its pressing sewage issues.

It is time to abandon this folly. It is time speak up for spending our money and using our resources more reasonably. It is time to do no more harm.

Vincent Shook, Florida Orange Groves Winery

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