

## **Water Taxi Exploration**

On January 15, 2009, the Tampa Downtown Partnership hosted a public meeting to present the design and action plan for the “Water Taxi” transit project. The Urban Charrette was the consultant commissioned and funded by the Tampa Downtown Partnership to provide viable alternatives and design concepts for Water Transit in Downtown Tampa. They introduced the “HYDRO”, a water taxi service.

## **Water Taxi Charrette Report**

The Urban Charrette presented their findings for creating a “HYDRO”. The report’s Vision Statement called for a celebration of Tampa’s waterfront with an enjoyable transit experience connecting the City’s natural and urban environments. The presentation included: Case studies, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis, and dock locations. The case studies compared were Chicago Water Taxi and Fort Lauderdale River Taxi.

The SWOT analysis considered:

1. Strengths: No right-of-way purchase necessary, supports tourism/industry/hotels, existing entertainment attractions along the waterway, quick build-out, leasable component, low cost convenient transportation, good for the environment.
2. Weaknesses: Requires monetary subsidy, funding, public outreach, and ineffective marketing.
3. Opportunities: Support from downtown business community, connects to Hillsborough Area Regional Transit (HART)/Tampa Electric Company (TECO) streetcar/In-town Trolley, educational (Estuary), public/private partnership, connectivity with Regional Water Ferry service planned by Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority (TBARTA), and supported by Board of County Commissioners (BOCC).
4. Threats: Lack of ridership, liability/insurance, downtown urban development population, funding/support, and economic downturn.

The proposed HYDRO routes are strategically located to connect with HART transit stop Routes 14, 15, and 30. The main stops include:

1. Phase I Dock Stops: Columbus Drive (connect with HART route 15), Curtis Hixon Park, MacDill Park, Tampa Convention Center, Tampa General Hospital, and Cotanchobee Park.
2. Phase II Dock Stops: The Heights, Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, Bayshore, Davis Island, and Harbour Island.
3. Marion Transit Center: Town ‘N Country (Route 30).

The local commuting system is designed for residents and visitors with potential service for tours and charters during off-peak times. The project connects existing transportation systems and potential regional ferry system making it implementable in Phases.

Mrs. Saul-Sena, City of Tampa Councilwoman, applauded the efforts and proposed for the project to be included in the Economic Stimulus Package list if it meets the federal requirements. Mr. John Moors, Administrator of Convention Services and Tourism, spoke in favor of the project and asked what governmental agency is taking the lead for this project. Mr. John Barry, General Manager of Tampa Water Shuttle and White Lightning Jet Boat Tours, described his current Water Taxi operations and enthusiastically invited everyone for a relaxing lunch tour to experience the Tampa Bay waterway. Ned Baier, Hillsborough County Representative, described the effort of TBARTA planning Regional Water Ferry Service in the TBARTA Master Plan and the support of the BOCC in seeking federal funds for the Regional Water Ferry Service.