

HART bus service will improve for most riders, but some Hillsborough areas will lose routes altogether



Caitlin Johnston, Times Staff Writer

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RUSKIN — The first public meeting seeking input on Hillsborough County's proposed new bus system made one thing clear: while most riders will see improved service, some pockets of the county will be dropped entirely.

Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority officials explained during a workshop Monday at Hillsborough Community College's Ruskin campus that those who live by popular routes can expect more frequent service following more direct paths.

But for those who live or work in less populated areas — say Ruskin, Apollo Beach, or Sun City Center — catching a bus is going to be more difficult starting in October.

TAMPA BAY TIMES: TRANSIT COVERAGE

Tampa Bay has one of the worst public transit systems in America. Here's why.

Hillsborough transit agency braces for overhaul of bus network, route cuts

The route changes are part of a HART overhaul culling the system's 41 routes to 34. HART officials said this should improve service for about 80-percent of riders.

"If they're on one of the major routes, chances are their service will get better or at least stay the same," said Marco Sandusky, HART's director of government and community relations.

But those who rely on routes with poor ridership might see their route disappear entirely.

That's what's happening in South Hillsborough County, which will lose the 53X — a bus that runs from Kings Point in Sun City Center along U.S. 301 up to Westfield Brandon Mall. Under the proposed 2018 route plan, anywhere south of Boyette Road will be served by a single route that runs along U.S. 41 once every hour on weekdays.

"People living down here who don't have cars are literally trapped down here," said Constance McNair, a HART rider who lives in Brandon. She was one of four people who attended the workshop.

Monday's meeting focused on south Hillsborough, but the same will be true of other parts of the county facing cutbacks, such as East Tampa, Carrollwood and Westchase. Residents in those parts of the county will have the chance to weigh in on the new routes during a series of meetings over the next few weeks.

They'll also be able to click through an **interactive map** that shows them how far they can get on the new system within travel times of 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes and 60 minutes.

The network changes are financially driven, as HART struggles to offer frequent and reliable bus service on a shoe-string budget.

Tampa Bay's transit network is one of the worst in the country, and a *Tampa Bay Times* analysis found that Hillsborough's bus network receives far less funding than its peers nationwide.

As HART faced looming financial constraints, engineers at Tindale Oliver were tasked with designing a new system that would improve commutes for most riders while cutting costs. Previous outreach focused on whether commuters wanted busses that ran more frequently or if they wanted routes that covered more parts of the county and included more stops.



Justin Willits of Tindale Oliver uses an interactive map at a workshop Monday in Ruskin to show how the Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority's new bus route system will affect riders. Users can click a spot on the county map and see how far they can get within a 15-minute ride versus and how-long ride. [CAITLIN JOHNSTON | Times]

"Instead of spreading thin and expanding coverage, they said, 'No, focus on the areas that have high ridership, high density and then have busses that come more often,'" senior project manager Asela Silva said during Monday's presentation.

The revamped 2018 network is the first step in a 10-year plan that aims to build a network centered around the urban core and other key destinations, such as the University of South Florida and Tampa International Airport, Sandusky said.

For instance, the new system combines routes that run close to each other and might be splitting ridership, such as the MetroRapid and Route 2, each which operates along Nebraska Avenue. It also will integrate with other transportation options, like the new people mover that Tampa International is building and USF's Bull Runner bus, instead of duplicating services. Doing so allows HART to increase frequency on its remaining routes, with several increasing to every 15 or 20 minutes.

"Those are the types of savings we found that help us deal with the budget crises and also do a little bit more with less," said Tindale Oliver senior planner Justin Willits.

HART will hold three more workshops over the next month, along with about a dozen other open-house style community meetings. The month-long outreach process will culminate at a July 26 public hearing.

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HART'S NEW BUS ROUTES

More information on the proposed 2018 network can be found [here](#). Users can also use an [interactive map](#) to see how the changes will impact them.

Public Workshops

WHEN: June 27, 6 to 8 p.m. (6:30 p.m. presentation).

WHERE: Corporation to Develop Communities of Tampa, Inc.; 1907 E. Hillsborough Ave., Suite #100

WHEN: July 6, 6 to 8 p.m. (6:30 p.m. presentation).

WHERE: Kate Jackson Community Center, 821 S. Rome Ave

WHEN: July 10, 6 to 8 p.m. (6:30 p.m. presentation).

WHERE: University Area CDC, 14013 North 22nd St.

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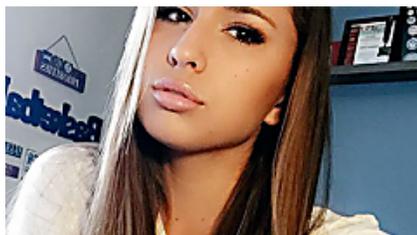
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