Palm Tran
Accelerate 2031
10-Year Transit Development Plan
Executive Summary

November 2021
Contents

Introduction.............................................................. 1
COVID-19 Impacts...................................................... 1
Existing Palm Tran Services........................................ 2
Public Transit Goals for Palm Beach County............... 3
Planning for the Operating Environment...................... 3
Public Outreach Highlights........................................ 4
10-Year Public Transit Needs ...................................... 5
10-Year Implementation & Financial Plan ..................... 6
Plan Implementation & Coordination............................ 8
Next Steps................................................................. 9
Acknowledgments..................................................... 9
Introduction

Palm Tran has served as the major public transit provider in Palm Beach County since 1971. Today, Palm Tran’s fixed bus routes operate from Jupiter to Boca Raton and from West Palm Beach to the Glades via 32 local fixed bus routes, and connect to regional transit services throughout South Florida. Through its Connection program, Palm Tran provides door-to-door paratransit services for eligible persons. In 2018, Palm Tran began operating Go Glades to provide localized on-demand (dia-a-ride) services in the western areas of the county adjacent to Lake Okeechobee.

Under the direction of the Board of County Commissioners, Palm Tran worked with residents and stakeholders to prepare a major update of its Transit Development Plan (TDP), known as Accelerate 2031. According to Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) Rule 14-73.001 – Public Transportation (commonly referred to as “the TDP Rule”), “The TDP shall be the applicant’s planning, development and operational guidance document to be used in developing the Transportation Improvement Program and the [Florida Department of Transportation’s] Five-Year Work Program.” In addition, projects identified in the TDP will be incorporated into the Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (MPO) Long Range Transportation Plan. The Palm Beach Transportation Planning Agency (TPA) is the designated MPO for the Palm Beach County urbanized area.

COVID-19 Impacts

The ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020 has touched nearly every aspect of life. Public health and safety concerns driven by the pandemic have dramatically changed travel behavior. For Palm Tran, the pandemic had a significant impact on ridership, service delivery, and administrative processes. There are strong indications that the rebound from this pandemic will be gradual and, therefore, long-term implications for public transit are considered and addressed in this TDP.

HIGHLIGHTS OF PALM TRAN’S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Operational Changes

• Revised services to balance passenger demand with personnel availability.
• Rear door boarding.
• Suspended fare collection (Mar 23-Aug 15, 2020).
• Limited maximum capacity to 20 passengers per bus.
• Implemented “pass-up” management plan using Connection vehicles.
• Go Glades became dial-a-ride service.

Onboard Improvements

• Created “operator office doors” with heavy-duty glass shield.
• Installed new wheelchair securement system that does not require operator assistance.
• Installed a new UV light system to sanitize the air.
• Installed signs to encourage social distancing and safe seating configuration.

Health Safety Protocols

• Face mask required per federal rules.
• Hand sanitizer provided on all buses.
• Enhanced cleaning routine.
• Public education campaign.

“Palm Tran has enjoyed some tremendous accomplishments over the past few years. From implementing innovative policies to protect riders and staff from COVID-19 to giving back to and deepening our presence in the Palm Beach County community, Palm Tran has demonstrated its commitment to providing access to opportunity for everyone; safely, efficiently, and courteously.”

~Clinton Forbes, Palm Tran Executive Director
Existing Palm Tran Services

Palm Tran currently provides three types of public transit services: fixed route bus, paratransit (Connection), and Go Glades dial-a-ride service in the Belle Glade, Pahokee, and South Bay areas of the county. A brief summary of each of these services is provided below. Current fare and ridership information is also provided. Each service offers discounted fares for qualifying passengers, such as students, adults age 65 years or older, Medicare recipients, veterans with a VA card, and persons with disabilities.

Fixed Route Bus

The fixed route system includes 32 routes that serve nearly 3,000 bus stops and 17 park-and-ride locations. Palm Tran's main hub is the West Palm Beach Intermodal Transit Center, at which riders can transfer between nine Palm Tran routes and other services including Tri-Rail, Amtrak, Greyhound, and the West Palm Beach Trolley. Other major transfer locations include: the Mall at Wellington Green, West Palm Beach VA Medical Center, Boca Town Center Mall, and The Gardens Mall. Connections to the neighboring counties (Broward and Martin) are provided along with service to all six Tri-Rail stations and the West Palm Beach Brightline station.

$2.00 per trip
5.9 million passengers in FY 2021

Connection (Paratransit)

Connection provides paratransit service for eligible individuals unable to ride the fixed route bus. Three types of services are provided by Connection:

- Complementary paratransit service for persons with disabilities;
- Transportation disadvantaged service for customers who live more than 3/4-mile from a fixed route and have other qualifying conditions (e.g., physical or mental disability, income status, or age); and
- Division of Senior Services service for persons age 60 or older to transport them to senior centers and meal sites on weekdays.

$3.50 per trip
(Senior Services trips are free)
665,610 passengers in FY 2021

Go Glades

Palm Tran began operating the Go Glades service in December 2018 as a pilot program in partnership with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). The service was designed as an on-demand circulator-type service with smaller vehicles to respond to the specific needs of the more rural, low-density areas of western Palm Beach along Lake Okeechobee. To better meet the needs of the areas served, Go Glades service was transformed into dial-a-ride service in April 2020 and now operates anywhere within the Belle Glade, Pahokee, and South Bay service areas based solely on demand from scheduled rider trips. Go Glades service is available to the public and requires no eligibility application process.

$2.00 per trip
~ 84,000 passengers
(April 2020 to August 2021)
Public Transit Goals for Palm Beach County

**PALM TRAN MISSION**

To provide access to opportunity for everyone; safely, efficiently, and courteously.

**PALM TRAN VISION**

To be the premier transportation choice in Palm Beach County.

**Goal 1:** Provide a system of coordinated, customer-based services to maximize the efficiency, responsiveness, and reach of the Palm Tran system.

**Goal 2:** Deliver safe, reliable, accessible, and environmentally-friendly transit service.

**Goal 3:** Provide user-friendly and innovative services that connect communities.

**Goal 4:** Continue to promote the visibility and public image of Palm Tran and its services.

**Goal 5:** Maximize Palm Tran resources.

Planning for the Operating Environment

Transit systems function best when the local and regional factors that impact the agency’s ability to provide service daily, effectively, and efficiently can be identified and understood. In developing the strategic vision for Palm Beach County, the *Accelerate 2031* process included a careful assessment of the existing and anticipated future operating environment.

- **Improve frequency, rider experience & travel times**
  - Core network improvements
  - Bus stop improvements
  - Transit Signal Priority

- **Continued growth & aging population**
  - Higher demand for paratransit
  - Core network improvements

- **Telecommuting**
  - Focus resources on core network and where services are heavily utilized

- **Loss of revenue & higher labor costs**
  - Dedicated funding source

- **Rebuild ridership post-COVID**
  - Core network improvements
  - Transit marketing & education campaign
  - Park-and-ride study
  - Bus stop improvements

- **Government Policy**
  - Core network improvements
  - Transit marketing & education campaign
  - Park-and-ride study
  - Bus stop improvements

- **Technology/Innovation**
  - Continue upgrades & improve rider experience

- **Land Use**
  - Redevelopment & suburban pattern
    - Core network improvements in highest-density areas
    - Challenge to Palm Tran providing efficient & attractive services

- **Organizational Assessment**
  - Generally consistent with peer organizations.
  - No recommended changes.

*Palm Tran TDP | Executive Summary*
Public Outreach Highlights

Public input was critical to identifying transit needs and developing the 10-year plan. Extensive and diverse public involvement was achieved throughout the plan development process, despite the challenges associated with the pandemic. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, nearly all public outreach activities were conducted virtually.

12,000+ people were engaged through the Accelerate 2031 public outreach process.

For those activities where Palm Tran use was queried, over 80% of the participants identified as current riders.

WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

More than 85% have used Palm Tran services before.

62% DON'T HAVE A CAR
12% TO SAVE MONEY
9% BUS IS SAFER

More than 40% used Palm Tran services “frequently or daily” prior to the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in March of 2020.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

More than 73% “DEFINITELY AGREED” with the statement that transit would become more important in the next 10 years because of worsening traffic congestion caused by new residents.

70% “DEFINITELY AGREED” that transit will be more important because the aging adult population will need more choices.

Transit Needs Survey Results 750+ Survey Responses

Top 3 reasons people DO ride Palm Tran:

62% DON'T HAVE A CAR
37% SAFER
9% BUS IS SAFER

Top 3 reasons people DO NOT ride Palm Tran:

40% BUS STOPS ARE FAR
40% SAFER THAN DRIVING
37% DON'T HAVE A CAR

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

Nearly two-thirds “definitely agreed” that they would support a local transit funding source if everyone helped contribute, like tourists and visitors, instead of only local residents and property owners.

64%

Roughly two-thirds thought that more information would help them consider supporting a long-term dedicated funding source for transit in Palm Beach County.

67%
10-Year Public Transit Needs

Transit needs over the next 10 years were identified and categorized as:

- Service
- Technology
- Other Capital/Infrastructure
- Policy/Studies

The service improvements illustrated on the map were developed to meet the diverse mobility needs throughout Palm Beach County. These improvements include changes to existing fixed route services, including increased frequency for Route 40 and creation of a high frequency core network, new regional express bus services, technology-based on-demand services, and enhanced services on the 561 Plan corridors. Not illustrated on the map is Palm Tran’s partnership with Transportation Network Companies (TNCs), such as Uber and Lyft, to supplement service outside of existing service hours (late evening and weekends).

Bulleted lists for each of the other need categories are provided below.

**10-Year Service & Facility Improvements**

- Transit Signal Priority
- Fare Technology Interoperability
- Electrification
- Bus Stop Technology Improvements
- Wi-Fi Enabled Fleet

- Maintenance Facilities Upgrades
- North County Facility Planning & Design Study
- Intermodal Transit Center Relocation
- Bus Stop Infrastructure & Accessibility Improvements
- Park-and-Ride Facility Study
- Fleet Replacement & Acquisition Program

**School Coordination Feasibility Study**
- Connection Facility Assessment Study
- FY 2027-2036 TDP
- Infrastructure & Equipment for Continued COVID-19 Safety
10-Year Implementation & Financial Plan

This section summarizes the 10-year implementation plan and associated operating and capital costs. Transit improvements included in the TDP may be advanced or delayed as funding circumstances change over time. All costs are in 2022 dollars.

### SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Improvements</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
<th>Annual Operating $</th>
<th>Total Capital $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Route 40 Frequency Improvements</td>
<td>2023-2031</td>
<td>$515,351</td>
<td>$1,711,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Service Improvements</td>
<td>2023-2031</td>
<td>$1,501,291</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>561 Plan/Core Network – Route 1</td>
<td>2023-2031</td>
<td>$1,756,619</td>
<td>$3,423,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>561 Plan/Core Network – Route 43</td>
<td>2023-2031</td>
<td>$1,863,234</td>
<td>$1,141,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>561 Plan/Core Network – Route 3</td>
<td>2024-2031</td>
<td>$3,113,338</td>
<td>$4,564,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>561 Plan/Core Network – Route 2</td>
<td>2025-2031</td>
<td>$2,832,257</td>
<td>$5,134,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>561 Plan/Core Network – Route 62</td>
<td>2026-2031</td>
<td>$1,831,648</td>
<td>$1,141,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>561 Plan/Core Network – Route 46</td>
<td>2027-2031</td>
<td>$1,008,571</td>
<td>$1,141,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>561 Plan/Core Network – Route 73</td>
<td>2027-2031</td>
<td>$2,363,361</td>
<td>$3,423,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>561 Plan/Core Network – Route 81</td>
<td>2028-2031</td>
<td>$2,149,766</td>
<td>$2,852,998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>561 Plan/Core Network – Route 91</td>
<td>2028-2031</td>
<td>$304,249</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spare Buses for Service Improvements</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td></td>
<td>$5,705,197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### OTHER CAPITAL/INFRASTRUCTURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
<th>Total $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North County Facility Electrical Upgrades</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>$700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Facility Parking Lot Restoration</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>$2,100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus Stop Improvements (Programmed in TIP)</td>
<td>2022, 2024</td>
<td>$3,780,655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>561 Plan Corridors – Enhanced Transit Shelters</td>
<td>2022-2026</td>
<td>$14,553,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleet Replacement Program – Fixed Route</td>
<td>2022-2028</td>
<td>$67,321,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleet Replacement Program – Connection</td>
<td>2022-2031</td>
<td>$36,052,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South/North/West Facility Maintenance Upgrades</td>
<td>2023-2026</td>
<td>$9,014,663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Tran Bus Stop Shelter Program</td>
<td>2023-2031</td>
<td>$7,650,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Facility Planning &amp; Design Study</td>
<td>2027-2028</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** $146,172,038

### PLANS/STUDIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
<th>Total $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection Facility Assessment Study</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School District Coordination Study</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDP Major Update (Fy’s 2027-2036)</td>
<td>2026</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okeechobee Blvd PD&amp;E Study</td>
<td>2027</td>
<td>$66,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US-1 PD&amp;E Study</td>
<td>2029</td>
<td>$3,741,819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Worth Rd PD&amp;E Study</td>
<td>2031</td>
<td>$776,804</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** $6,045,384
Over the next 10 years, implementing the Accelerate 2031 plan is projected to cost $1.445 billion to operate current and enhanced services with anticipated total revenue of $1.317 billion, creating a need of nearly $128 million in additional local funding by FY 2031. Projected capital expenses total $209 million with anticipated total revenue of $190.2 million, creating a need of $18.8 million in additional federal or local funding by FY 2031. This assumes that $57 million of the County’s American Rescue Plan Act funds will be allocated to Palm Tran to establish a Transit Innovation and Ridership Recovery Fund (TIRRF), which will in turn be used to expand existing services and establish new service program areas over the next five years.
Plan Implementation & Coordination

Adopting the Accelerate 2031 plan is the first step in a longer process of bringing the TDP to reality. Key elements of plan implementation are summarized below.

Continue to Engage Regional Partners—Palm Tran’s active coordination with regional partners during development of this plan provides strong foundation for support going forward. Continuing to coordinate with FDOT District Four and the Palm Beach TPA is key to expanding Palm Tran’s service platform so it can be a truly viable and attractive alternative mobility option.

Secure a Dedicated Local Funding Source—Making sure the necessary funding is available each year to maintain and add any new services or facilities programmed in the TDP implementation plan also is key to the success of this plan. The most significant challenge to Palm Tran implementing its 10-year vision is a lack of dedicated local funding to support growth and expansion of Palm Tran’s services. A solid plan for how such funds would be used to expand public transit services, coupled with education of the wide-reaching benefits to the community, is critical to gaining the necessary policy leader, stakeholder, and public support for a long-term dedicated funding source.

Maximize Use of Accelerate 2031 and the Annual Update Process—Use the adopted Accelerate 2031 plan as a tool to justify continued investments in transit services and facilities. Return on investment from the TDP should span at least the next four years, until the next major update.
Continued Community Engagement—During the Accelerate 2031 process, Palm Tran conducted extensive public outreach as part of its public involvement component. The momentum from this effort should be leveraged and expanded to market other planning efforts, such as service initiation efforts, marketing programs and campaigns, and budget plans. A carefully crafted plan to promote the TDP after adoption will improve the likelihood of achieving the implementation plan.

Leverage the Executive Summary a Marketing Tool—The Accelerate 2031 Executive Summary should be used as a promotional tool and an effective medium to continue generating support for the TDP’s recommendations. This user-friendly summary document with key information from the TDP may work better than distributing a large report with technical details when soliciting support from the public and stakeholders.

Coordinate with Other Planning Efforts—The analyses completed during the TDP can be used to help update required plans for ADA access and Title VI service provisions, as the planning effort documents how the system will serve older adults, persons with disabilities, and populations that fall under Title VI protections. The adopted TDP can also be useful for other entities with subsequent planning efforts, such as local comprehensive plans, area redevelopment plans, plans to develop affordable housing, and others. Coordinating the timing of the TDP with ongoing Transit Asset Management Plan requirements should also be considered, as both plans are designed to govern investment strategies based on needs.

Conduct Periodic Efficiency Assessments—Palm Tran’s Route Performance Maximization (RPM) effort produced substantial cost savings that were reinvested back to improve service. Palm Tran should continue to periodically assess its service efficiency in a similar manner at least every five years to maintain operational health.

Next Steps

With the adoption of the Accelerate 2031 plan, Palm Tran has the opportunity to affect positive change for citizens and visitors to Palm Beach County and the greater southeast Florida region. This 10-year plan lays out a strategic public transit vision for where Palm Tran desires to be by 2031. For additional information, please contact:

Anna Bielawska  
Senior Planner/TDP Project Manager  
abielawska@pcbgov.org  
Phone: (561) 841-4263

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the Board of County Commissioners, County Administration staff, and the Accelerate 2031 Steering Committee members for their review and support throughout the development of this TDP.