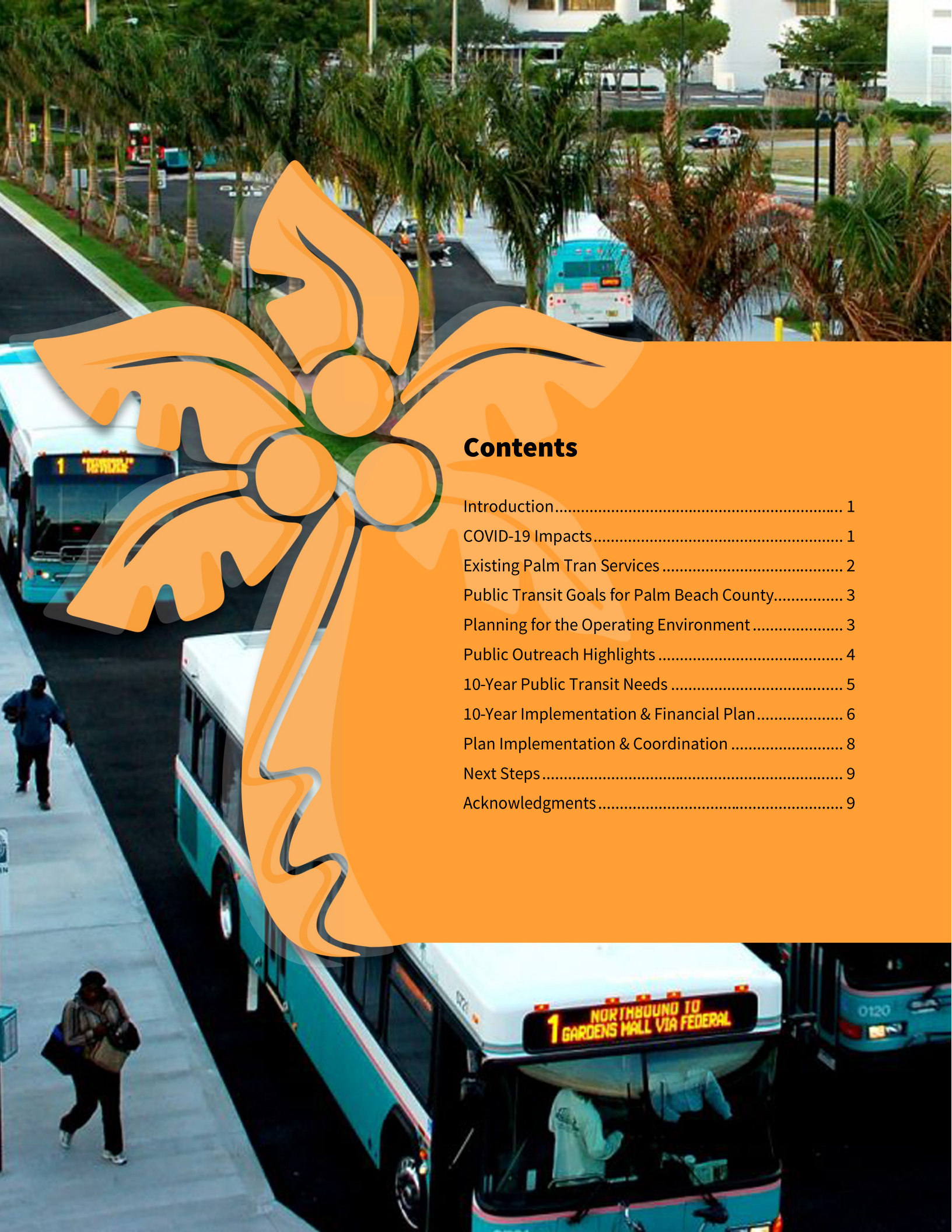




Palm Tran
Accelerate 2031
10-Year Transit Development Plan
Executive Summary

November 2021





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1 NORTHBOUND TO GARDENS MALL VIA FEDERAL

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 (dial-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.

“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*

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.



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



\$2.00 per trip
5.9 million passengers in FY 2021

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.

Connection (Paratransit)



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

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.

Go Glades



\$2.00 per trip
~ 84,000 passengers
(April 2020 to August 2021)

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.

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.



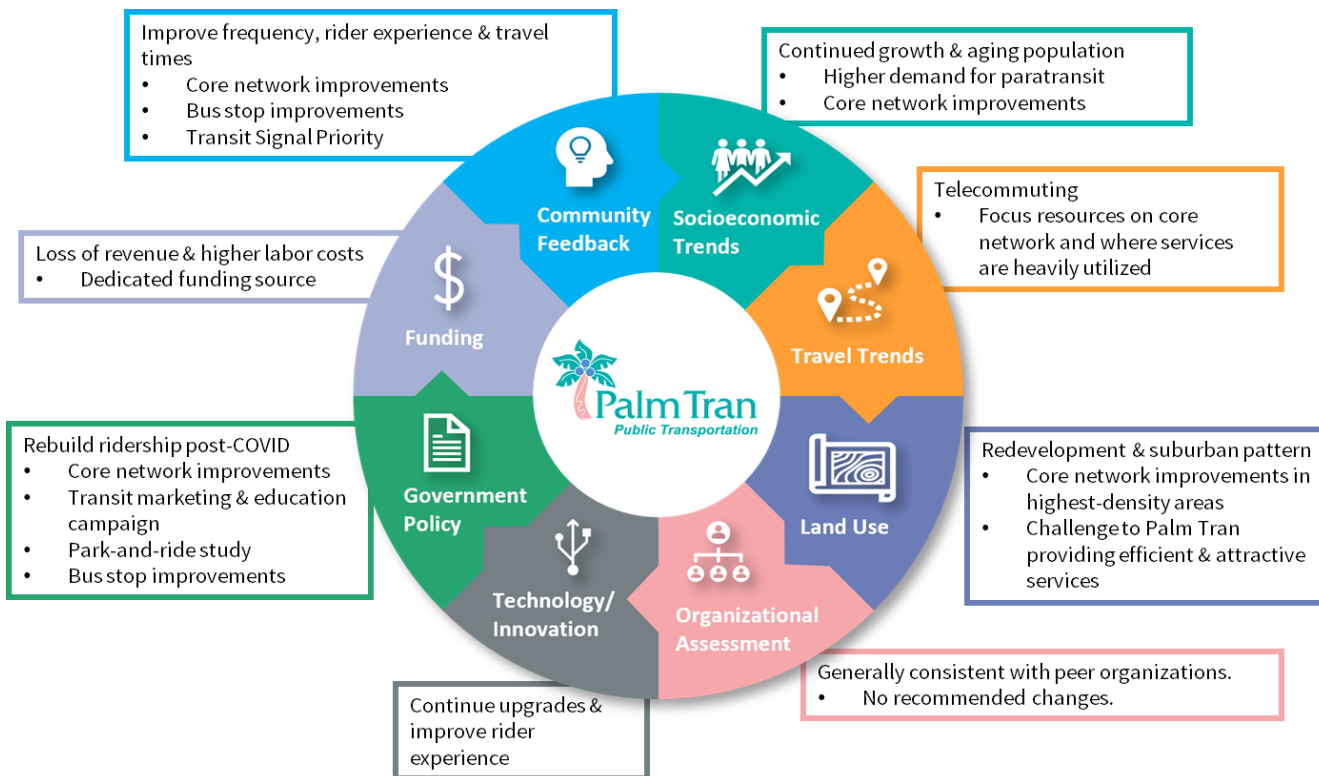
Goal 4: Continue to promote the visibility and public image of Palm Tran and its services.



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.

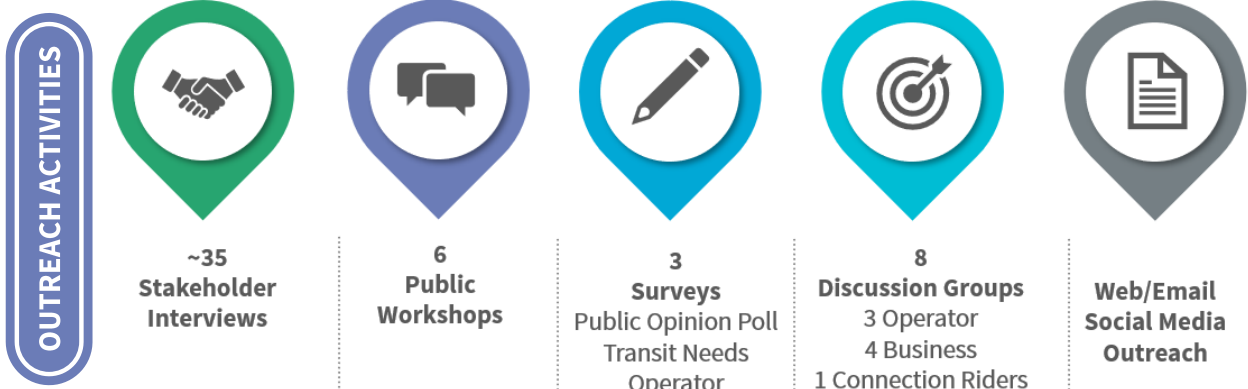


Public Outreach Highlights

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.



Transit Needs Survey Results 750+ Survey Responses

WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

More than 85% have used Palm Tran services before.

86% YES, 14% NO

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

FREQUENTLY OR DAILY	OCCASIONALLY (1-3 round trips per week)	INFREQUENTLY
43%	23%	34%

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%

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.

Top 3 reasons people DO ride Palm Tran:

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

Top 3 reasons people DO NOT ride Palm Tran:

- 48% TIME, IT TAKES LONGER THAN DRIVING
- 40% THERE ARE NO BUS STOPS NEAR ME
- 37% DIFFICULT TO GET TO THE BUS STOP

Top 3 things that would cause people to ride Palm Tran more often:

- 60% MORE FREQUENCY (EVERY 15-30 MINUTES)
- 58% MORE REGIONAL EXPRESS OR COMMUTER ROUTES
- 55% MORE WEEKEND SERVICE



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

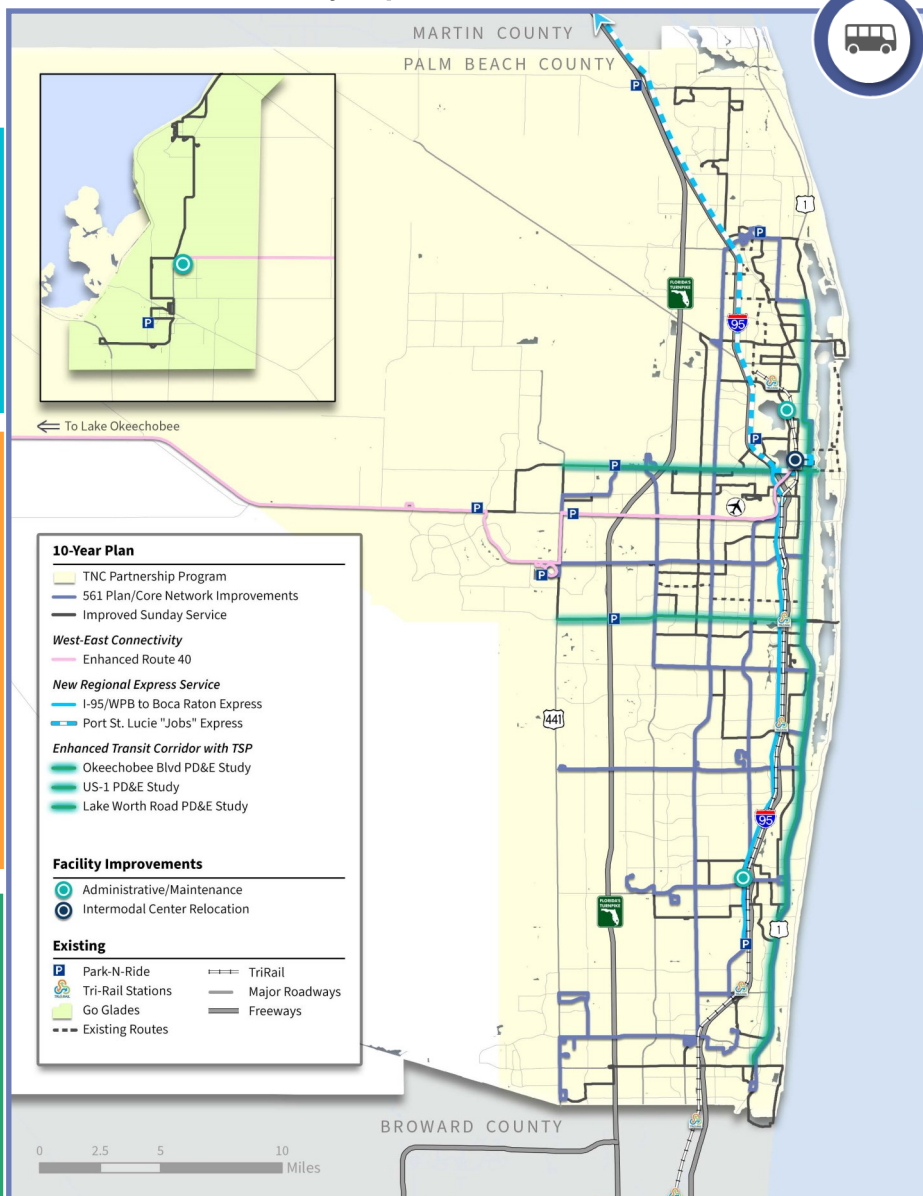
- Transit Signal Priority
- Fare Technology Interoperability
- Electrification
- Bus Stop Technology Improvements
- Wi-Fi Enabled Fleet



- 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

	Service Improvements	Year(s)	Annual Operating \$	Total Capital \$
Existing Service Improvements	Route 40 Frequency Improvements	2023-2031	\$ 515,351	\$ 1,711,559
	Sunday Service Improvements	2023-2031	\$ 1,501,291	\$ -
	561 Plan/Core Network – Route 1	2023-2031	\$ 1,756,619	\$ 3,423,118
	561 Plan/Core Network – Route 43	2023-2031	\$ 1,863,234	\$ 1,141,039
	561 Plan/Core Network – Route 3	2024-2031	\$ 3,113,338	\$ 4,564,157
	561 Plan/Core Network – Route 2	2025-2031	\$ 2,832,257	\$ 5,134,677
	561 Plan/Core Network – Route 62	2026-2031	\$ 1,831,648	\$ 1,141,039
	561 Plan/Core Network – Route 46	2027-2031	\$ 1,008,571	\$ 1,711,559
	561 Plan/Core Network – Route 73	2027-2031	\$ 2,363,361	\$ 3,423,118
	561 Plan/Core Network – Route 81	2028-2031	\$ 2,149,766	\$ 2,852,598
	561 Plan/Core Network – Route 91	2028-2031	\$ 304,249	\$ -
	Spare Buses for Service Improvements	Various	\$ -	\$ 5,705,197
Express Bus	Port St. Lucie “Jobs” Express – Phase 1	2022-2025	\$ 183,784	\$ 1,711,559
	Port St. Lucie “Jobs” Express – Phase 2	2025-2026	\$ 367,567	\$ -
	I-95/WPB to Boca Raton Express	2026-2031	\$ 559,122	\$ -
On-Demand Services	TNC Partnership Pilot Program	2022-2031	\$ 165,000	\$ -
	MOD Priority Area 1 (Go Glades)	2022-2031	\$ 2,167,641	\$ -
	MOD Priority Area 2 Pilot	2024-2031	\$ 1,471,725	\$ 990,000
	MOD Priority Area 3 Pilot	2025-2031	\$ 1,471,725	\$ 990,000
	MOD Priority Area 4 Pilot	2026-2031	\$ 1,471,725	\$ 990,000
	MOD Priority Area 5 Pilot	2027-2031	\$ 1,471,725	\$ 990,000
Total \$:			\$ 28,018,348	\$ 36,479,621



OTHER CAPITAL/INFRASTRUCTURE

Description	Year(s)	Total \$
North County Facility Electrical Upgrades	2022	\$ 700,000
North Facility Parking Lot Restoration	2022	\$ 2,100,000
Bus Stop Improvements (Programmed in TIP)	2022, 2024	\$ 3,780,655
561 Plan Corridors – Enhanced Transit Shelters	2022-2026	\$ 14,553,400
Fleet Replacement Program – Fixed Route	2022-2028	\$ 67,321,320
Fleet Replacement Program – Connection	2022-2031	\$ 36,052,000
South/North/West Facility Maintenance Upgrades	2023-2026	\$ 9,014,663
Palm Tran Bus Stop Shelter Program	2023-2031	\$ 7,650,000
North Facility Planning & Design Study	2027-2028	\$ 5,000,000
Total \$:		\$ 146,172,038



PLANS/STUDIES

Description	Year(s)	Total \$
Connection Facility Assessment Study	2022	\$ 100,000
School District Coordination Study	2022	\$ 60,000
TDP Major Update (FYs 2027-2036)	2026	\$ 400,000
Okeechobee Blvd PD&E Study	2027	\$ 66,760
US-1 PD&E Study	2029	\$ 3,741,819
Lake Worth Rd PD&E Study	2031	\$ 776,804
Total \$:		\$ 6,045,384



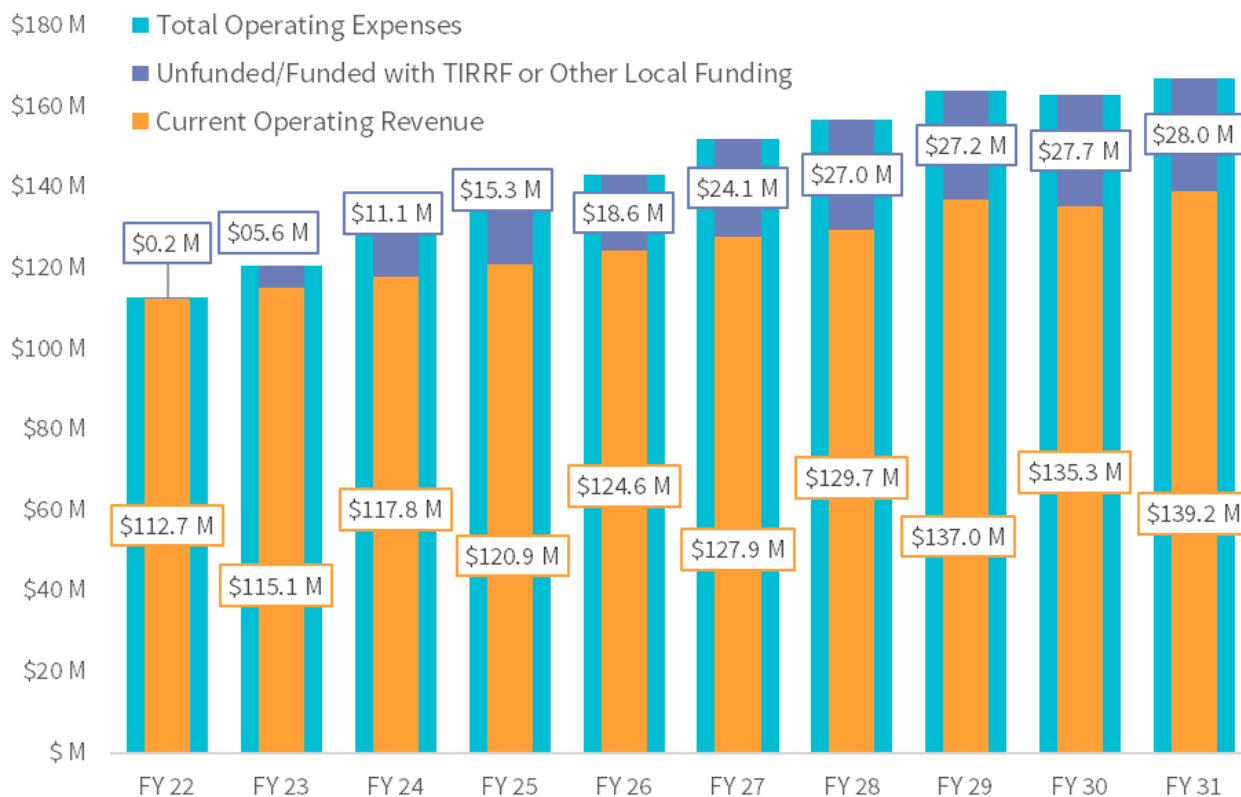


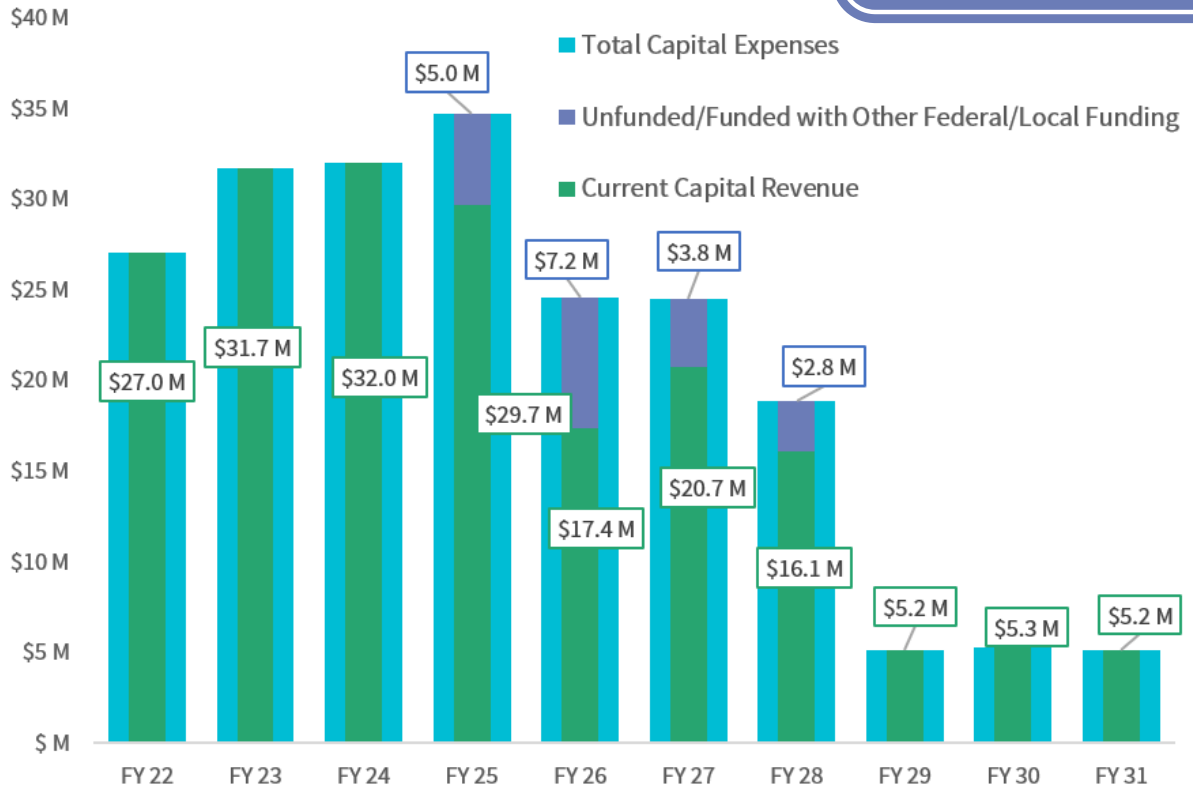
TECHNOLOGY

Description	Year(s)*	Annual Operating \$	Total Capital \$
Bus Radio System Upgrades	2022	\$ -	\$ 975,000
Fleet Software/Hardware Upgrades	2022	\$ -	\$ 1,000,000
Enterprise Asset Management Software	2022	\$ -	\$ 1,300,000
Electrification Master Plan	2022	\$ -	\$ 500,000
Transit Signal Priority – US-1	2023	\$ -	\$ 2,000,000
Bus Stop Real Time Arrival Signage	2023-2031	\$ -	\$ 1,350,000
Electric Vehicles / Charging Stations	2024-2025	\$ -	\$ 9,336,388
Wi-Fi Enabled Fleet (Average Annual \$)	2024-2031	\$ 225,630	\$ -
Transit Signal Priority – Okeechobee Blvd/SR-7	2024	\$ -	\$ 1,000,000
Transit Signal Priority – Lake Worth Rd/SR-7	2027	\$ -	\$ 1,000,000
Total \$:		\$ 225,630	\$ 18,461,388

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.

10-YEAR OPERATING PLAN





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:

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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.



Prepared by:



With support from
Quest Corporation of
America, Vanasse Hangen
Brustlin, Inc. (VHB), and
Florida Opinion Research.



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