



# florida public transportation association

DECEMBER 2004



## “From The Capitol”

By: Wes Watson

I hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter. A goodly part of it is dedicated to the hurricane season just survived and the part that our states' public transit systems played in it.

We just completed our General Membership Meeting and Awards Event – which was in place of our cancelled Annual Conference in West Palm Beach. The November 7&8 event was a great success. Attendance was nearly double what we expected – 140 for the awards luncheon! Twenty seven vendors participated and exhibited as well. What was more unexpected is that we actually about broke even financially while not charging registration fees to transit, DOT, or CUTR personnel. This was also thanks to the generosity of some of our Business Class members who provided sponsorships, and especially Gillig Corporation who sponsored a major part of the luncheon itself. All sponsors are listed elsewhere.

### **Political Season Begins**

The Legislature met on November 16<sup>th</sup> for its Organizational Session. It will be very busy in '05 trying to meet the budgetary cost of the hurricanes which had to have had an impact on the state's tax intake. Several transportation initiatives are on the docket as well in which Transit has an interest.

One, is by the Floridians for Better Transportation to increases in "fees", not

*Continued on page 5*

## Hurricane Charley

### A LeeTran Perspective

Hurricane Charley forever changed the way southwest Floridians view their home, their community and their safety. The last major hurricane to hit us was Donna in 1960, 44 long years ago, when the area population was 80,246. When Charley roared through last August, the population totaled over 840,000 people. Roughly ¾ of a million SW Florida residents had not experienced a major hurricane since moving into the area.



Pre-Charley, no one in our area thought twice about hurricanes. They were something that happened to other parts of Florida, but never here. People would go to great lengths to explain how the geography, prevailing winds, gulf currents and a myriad of other things worked in such a way that SW Florida wouldn't be hit by a hurricane.

Charley completely altered our psyche. That is what catastrophic hurricanes do to those who have stood in their paths.

On Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, we were hunkered down in our homes, watching in shock as Charley went from a Category 2 to a Category 4 strength storm in a little over an hour. Less than two hours later, Lee County was just 30 miles South of the eye of the storm. By evening, it was all over, and we tentatively stepped out of our homes to see the damage.

*Continued on page 2*

## New HART Director Ray Miller

After an extensive, nationwide search that drew top transit candidates from all over the country, The Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority's Board of Directors has offered the Executive Director position to Mr. Raymond Miller. A majority vote by the Board secured the selection for Mr. Miller, currently Executive Director of the Delaware Transit Corporation. Mr. Miller brings 25 years of mass-transit

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## Hurricane Charley

*Continued from page 1*

That was the day we lost the sense of safety that we had for all those long years.

Now we all know first hand the devastating and lasting effects a major hurricane has on a community. However, another thing that damaging hurricanes bring is opportunity. When thrown into a major disaster, we have an opportunity to come together with other people and find solutions to the problems that we face. This happened in our community at every level. Neighbors helping neighbors cover holes in their roofs, patching holes where windows once were, clearing trees or grilling everything that was in their freezer and passing out food to the neighborhood. Restaurants donated food, which would have spoiled, to emergency workers and

volunteers. And agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, worked feverishly to do whatever they could to help the overall effort. We all felt a camaraderie, a common purpose; we felt like a true community, and it felt good.

LeeTran was right there from the beginning doing anything we could for the community. We started by sending drivers and vehicles out Thursday morning to help with the evacuation of the disabled community, and by implementing 4 fixed evacuation routes to deliver people to shelters that afternoon. That evening buses were sent to evacuate workers from South Seas Resort at the tip end of Captiva Island, a barrier island that was hit extremely hard.

LeeTran cranked up emergency transportation operations Saturday morning. Our back-up generators kept us up and running throughout the ordeal when most of the county was still without

power. LeeTran opened our fueling facilities to other agencies helping in the clean up and recovery efforts. We were one of the few facilities in the area that could actually pump gas. Our operating personnel came from the many Lee Tran employees who came into the office because they couldn't see sitting around in their homes with no electricity. Some came in looking for the simple things, a cup of coffee, some ice or just some good cold AC. Many wanted to come in and get to work doing whatever they could to help. We began shuttling evacuees to and from shelters. We evacuated hundreds of people from damaged buildings and relocated them to shelters. Some shelters were closing and the evacuees needed to be transferred, others we took back to their homes. We even delivered cots, oxygen tanks and other medical necessities to the shelter housing people with special needs. We delivered 300 meals to people on Ft. Myers Beach, which was hit so badly that the town remained closed for four days to anyone not on the island, even residents. Our Operations Manager, Dorothy Nelson, drove the area FEMA coordinator around for two days to assess the damage throughout the county, checking on shelter facilities, damage to structures, roadways, flooding, etc. We provided shuttle service for emergency workers and volunteers to the northern end of Pine Island, which felt the heaviest blow from the storm. LeeTran set up a phone bank in our offices for our non-emergency transportation provider. They operated out of LeeTran offices for four days because they had no power or phones at their offices.

LeeTran provided essential transportation services whenever and wherever we were asked. It was all coordinated through our Emergency Operations Center where we had staff around the clock. And, in the end, I think we opened a lot of people's eyes throughout the community to what public transportation can and does provide to its community.

Yes, Charlie was a devastating event. And it certainly altered our false sense of safety. But it also served as a catalyst to bring our LeeTran family, our area neighborhoods and the people who makeup our community closer together. And, we can only hope the feeling of coming together will last longer than the destruction.

## From the Chair... By Jeff Logan

### Random Thoughts

*(What, you expected something else from me?)*

Thanks to all for the warm (but noisy) welcome as the FPTA Chairman for 2005. I really am from Scottish lineage and was truly impressed by the Bagpipe entrance. Hard to top for my departure next year but I will think of something.

There are a number of significant issues facing our systems over the next year (and when is there not you ask) and I hope to hear from all during the next few months on things they feel are important. Detroit Diesel, Medicaid, how about that RTS ridership, State and Federal legislative issues, Re-authorizing TEA-21, why is Jerry Bryant's commissioner so enamored of volunteer drivers, and who the heck arranged the bagpipes at Jeff's introduction? (Hint, Tall, academic type, works at CUTR.)

I hope everyone keeps a good sense of humor as well, you'll need it. I am still trying to determine the

theme for my year as Chairman; perhaps "The Year of Living Dangerously" although that may

scare a few people. Oh well, I will get back to you on that one.

We will be arranging several important events early in the year, a trip to Tallahassee for the legislative committee meetings, to D.C. for the federal issues and then the APTA Legislative Conference. See you all at some point after the Holidays.

Everyone please have a safe holiday season, buckle your seat belt, stop smoking for the New Year and for goodness' sake, do not test electrical circuits with your tongue.

Jeff



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## Beach Voters Approve Bay Link

Miami Beach voters turned out in record numbers at the polls on Election Day and cast affirmative votes on three straw ballot questions.

In early voting and on Tuesday, 71 percent of the city's 41,581 registered voters cast votes not only for the presidential, state and local races but also on three Beach issues. The straw-ballot questions asked them if they favored the Bay Link light-rail system, if the 63rd Street fly over should be kept intact and if voter approval should be required for zoning changes for buildings larger than 50,000 square feet.

The questions, though nonbinding, carry a powerful message to the elected officials and various government agencies who will ultimately decide their fate.

Nowhere is this more clear than with

Bay Link, a controversial plan to build a \$488 million system that would use streetcars to shuttle commuters across the MacArthur causeway and connect the city to the mainland. Streetcars would also circulate in a loop through South Beach.

The project, among the most divisive issues to face the electorate in years, rests in the hands of the Metropolitan Planning Organization- the county agency that oversees transportation projects.

With support from 54 percent of residents who voted, Bay Link may inch up the chain of MPO priorities, said Commissioner Jose Smith, who serves as the city's liaison to the county agency.

For those in favor of Bay Link- in particular member of the City

Commission who thought the issue was settled last year when they voted 4-3 to approve an environmental impact study of the project- the public show of support provided some vindication.

"I think the people have spoken. I feel grateful," Commissioner Luis Garcia said. "It proves what we have been saying all along, that Bay Link is the way to go. Now I just hope it happens in my lifetime."

Mark Needle, a member of the pro-Bay Link group Alliance for Reliable Transit, was pleased with the results and predicted the streetcars will thrust the city into a new era.

"I think its a historic moment," Needle said. "It shows that Miami Beach residents have a positive vision of how streetcars and better transportation are a part of a first-class city."

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## Okaloosa Opens New Transit Building and Expands Services

Okaloosa County's new Public Transit Administration and Maintenance Facility officially opened for business on Thursday, July 28, 2004, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony held at the facility on Transit Way in Fort Walton Beach.

On hand at the celebration were members of the Okaloosa County Board of Commissioners, representatives from the Florida Department of Transportation, local civic and community leaders and many local supporters of public transit.

The new 13,000 square foot facility cost approximately \$1.5 million and was funded completely through a Federal Transit Administration Grant. The facility houses transit administrative staff, reservations, and fleet maintenance.

"Transportation is a critical need in everyone's live. Unfortunately, there are many, many people who cannot

provide transportation for themselves. But through our Okaloosa County Transit Program, public transportation

is available for every citizen of the County. This is an exceptional staff, whose primary goal is to ensure that citizen's transportation needs are met

and I congratulate all involved on a job well done," says Okaloosa County Commission Chairman Elaine Tucker.

In addition to opening a new transit facility, Okaloosa County Transit (OCT) rolled out a new bus route to serve the residents and businesses of Crestview in northern Okaloosa County. "This expansion will be most beneficial to the residential areas south of

Interstate 10, especially for those people needing transportation to and from work.

In total, the WAVE bus system in Crestview now has 74 stops. Also, to help facilitate transferring between buses, OCT ordered a bus shelter that the city will install at the City Hall location. The city has also recently installed ten new benches along the routes and OCT plans to expand the number of benches and shelters in Crestview in the coming months.

All buses are wheelchair accessible and are equipped with bicycle carriers so that riders can secure their bikes to the front of the bus during their trip.



## Helping Our Community in Its Time of Need, Palm Tran Employees Rose to the Challenge

On Saturday, September 4<sup>th</sup> Hurricane Frances was pummeling Palm Beach County. All Palm Tran buses and County emergency vehicles were pulled off the road due to excessive winds and gusts. Around 7:30 p.m. the Emergency Operations Center received a call from Avalon Assisted Living Facility in Lantana expressing concern over the condition of their roof and for the safety of the eighty residents housed there. Fire Rescue suggested that two buses could be dispatched during the eye of the storm, when wind speeds were low, to rescue these residents.

With apprehension, Palm Tran supervisors began calling around for two drivers on a strictly voluntary basis to drive the two rescue buses. This itself was a challenge due to many phone lines being down. Maintenance Supervisor Demetrio Lyrio, who was at Palm Tran's facility, volunteered to drive one of the buses. Operations Supervisor Nathaniel Evans was called at his home and agreed to drive the second bus. By 10:30 p.m. it was clear

the eye was not going to pass through Palm Beach County and the residents of Avalon were in imminent danger of their roof collapsing.

Palm Tran Assistant Executive Director Chuck Cohen stated, "Demetrio and Nathaniel were given strict instructions that if it became too dangerous, or if at any time they felt their life was in danger, they had permission to abandon the bus and retreat to safety. The safety of the people was primary."

The Sheriff's Office and Fire Rescue provided an escort for the two buses filled with eighty Avalon residents. The escort was none other than "The Hulk" an armored vehicle used in emergency situations. During the worst of the winds, with gusts up to 80 miles per hour, the caravan traveled cautiously. A small group of residents were dropped off at a high-care facility and the rest were transported to the Special Care Unit at the Fairgrounds. Demetrio and Nathaniel returned safely to Palm Tran's facility after midnight.

## Lili Agee Selected as National Transit Institute Fellow

Liliane M. Agee, Palm Tran's Marketing and Community Relations Manager, has been selected as an NTI (National Transit Institute) Fellow for the class of 2006 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.



The Fellows program was created in 1994 to recognize and promote the sharing of innovative practices in the transit industry. The program seeks innovators with practical experience and those who strive to realize the potential of cutting-edge ideas. Selection is both an honor and a responsibility since NTI only chooses seven Fellows every two years on a national level. NTI Fellows receive a unique personal learning experience and opportunities to share knowledge gained from a particular field with colleagues in transit.

Agee will share her experiences with transit-related implementations at professional workshops and at selected transit-related organizations exploring the adoption of innovative practices.

## Awards Event Dodges Hurricanes

FPTA conducted a "mini-conference" in conjunction with its General Membership meeting on November 7 and 8, 2004. It was in response to our having to cancel our scheduled Annual & Expo in WPB.

The event was successful beyond our expectations. The Awards Luncheon attracted 140 attendees. Twenty five Business Class Members exhibited and the Sunday golf outing brought out 40 duffers. The Monday morning "Hurricane Best Practices" Session, as expected, received special attention from the audience - as did the afternoon various Network Sessions.

Thanks go to CUTR, FDOT, and Randy Veenhoven for their invaluable assistance. Also, sponsorship firms are listed on page 6.

### FPTA Mechanic of the Year

**Luis Villalobos**  
Manatee  
County Transit



### FPTA Operator of the Year



**Andrew Berney**  
RTS  
(Gainesville)

## New HART Director

*Continued from page 1*

management expertise to the position. He will replace outgoing HART Executive Director, Sharon Dent, who has served in the capacity for 14 years.

Negotiations will now begin on a compensation package and contract for Mr. Miller. The HART Board anticipates the approval of the contract at the December 6, 2004, regular monthly meeting.

Mr. Miller is expected to begin his duties January 2005.

*"I'm pleased and excited to have this opportunity, and look forward to the challenges that this leadership position will bring," said Miller. "I am committed to working closely with the HART Board to help restore the public's confidence in the agency."*

# SKYWAY: Go with us on ride downtown

Reprinted:  
By **JUDY WELLS**  
The Times-Union

Jacksonville's Skyway Express has been the butt of many jokes since the automated tram line opened 15 years ago. It doesn't go anywhere, critics say. And nobody rides it anyway. Just try to tell that to Tom Dahlgren, a market manager for CSX who works at the BellSouth Building downtown. "I ride it basically every day," Dahlgren said. He parks at the Kings Avenue garage and rides the Skyway to work. And he's not the only one. He said he recognizes about a dozen riders who share his schedule. "Rarely in the morning are you alone." Cheryl Boehm, Skyway director for the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, said more than 2,700 people rode the tram every weekday in May and June. Ridership peaks between 8 and 9 a.m., and the trains fill up again around lunchtime and at the end of the workday. We watched the tram on a recent Wednesday, riding from 7:30 to 10:45 a.m., 11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 7 to 8 p.m. A riderless train wasn't spotted until 10:33 a.m. and within an hour, the lunch crowd was filling them up again.

The 2.5-mile Skyway system costs 35 cents to ride. Ten two-car trains run through downtown and across the river into parts of San Marco. For downtown commuters, the Skyway's a pretty good deal. They can park at the Kings Avenue garage or in Park-and-Ride lots near the convention center for much lower monthly rates than the downtown garages charge.

There seem to be many reasons the Skyway is being used. But, to those we talked to, they love it, and there can be no doubt, that they are using it.

*Morning passengers arrive at the Skyway's Central Station near the BellSouth tower. Ridership peaks between 8 and 9 a.m. as people use the trains to get to work downtown.*



## From The Capitol

*Continued from page 1*

taxes. These would include things like surcharges on rental cars, tag fees, etc. Revenues would be substantial if passed as recommended and public transportation modes would receive at least 15% of any new funds.

I also understand that the coalition of businesses in SE Florida are, again, going to bring the regional (local option) tax initiative back to the Legislature. It would provide a dedicated source of funding for transit in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties and, hopefully, bring in significant federal funding,

The recent election did little to change the composition of Florida's Legislature. Any changes will depend more on personalities than anything else. Senator Tom Lee of Brandon, is much in the tradition of moderate Republicanism. He has shown to have a very pragmatic side. In the House, new Speaker Allen Bense is from Panama City and a self made businessman. He is conservative, of course, but hasn't shown quite the ideological zeal of some of his predecessors. In my opinion these two leaders will probably mesh better than the recent combinations.

### HSR Defeated


The last election also deleted High Speed Rail from the state's Constitution. This is unfortunate because I think most of us would love to see such a "high tech" form of transportation in Florida. On the other hand, its defeat precludes what would have been an enormous 'food fight' among transportation modes on how to pay for it. Proponents continued to insist it would have no impact on roads because HSR would be funded from the dedicated 15% for Public Transportation – conveniently overlooking that WE are funded from that source, already.

### InterModal Working Council

FPTA is now a charter member of the Intermodal Working Council, composed of non-road transportation modes – Transit, Aviation, Ports, Trucking, Rail, and the Space Port. The group has already impacted state legislation and DOT initiatives while just a loose, informal group of those modes' Executive Directors. But, we are now formally organized and will be a substantial force in the future as well.


### Congrats to New Officers

Congratulations to our new officers, Jeff Logan, Myra Hernandez, and Joe Giulietti. We have a challenging year before us, but working together it will prove fruitful.



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# Martin County Weathers TWO Hurricanes

By Jerry Bryan

The odds are staggering – a county with a 20-mile coastline being directly hit by not one, but TWO hurricanes within three weeks. No sooner did Martin County's transit system recover from the effects of large, lumbering Hurricane Frances that made landfall in Sewall's Point on September 4, along came the faster, deadlier Hurricane Jeanne on September 25, making landfall only two miles from Frances on South Hutchinson Island.

While Martin County residents certainly bemoaned this fate, the transit system was activated to provide nearly immediate relief. For both hurricanes, the transit fleet was 'commandeered' by the County's Emergency Operations Department, providing transportation to and from shelters for special needs residents and others without available transportation. After each storm, regular service was back in operation quickly – for Frances, operations resumed on September 14, ten days after landfall. For Jeanne, due to lessons learned from Frances, normal operations resumed on September 30 – only five days after landfall.

In an odd way, Frances provided an excellent real-life 'practice' of emergency operations, not only for transit

services but also for the myriad of activities involved with restoration. The lessons learned from Frances came into operation during Jeanne. Recovery time was shortened in all aspects due to the various agencies cooperating more smoothly. Having Witham Field, the local airport, already set up as a staging point after Frances certainly aided in the restoration effort after Jeanne. Electrical workers, many of whom were sent to the Panhandle to deal with the effects of Hurricane Ivan that struck between Frances and Jeanne, did an about-face back to Martin County after Jeanne.

Despite being in the bulls-eye of these two storms, damage to fleet and facility were relatively minor. No vehicles were seriously damaged, but the transit administrative center did incur some water intrusion from not only Jeanne, but also the tattered remnants of Hurricane Ivan that washed back ashore in Martin County on September 20 after hitting the Panhandle. We are presently working to restore the administrative center back to its pre-September condition.

The popular joke around these parts is how rich we would be if we had placed a bet in Vegas on the odds of being landfall for two hurricanes within a month!




## ***FPTA Wishes to Thank the Following Business Class Member Firms for their Sponsorship of our Awards Event in Tampa, November 8<sup>th</sup>***

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## Seeking Director

Director of TalTran (Public Transit System), City of Tallahassee, Florida' (population 162,310) seeks dynamic and experienced leader to manage the day-to-day operations of TalTran and to lead in the evaluation, development and implementation of cutting edge short and long range strategies to position TalTran for the future. Position appointed by the City Manager and reports to the Assistant City Manager for Development and Transportation Services. TalTran provides fixed route service, special transportation, contractual services to Florida State University and Florida A&M University through its 138 full time and 35 part time employees and its 73-vehicle bus fleet. The TalTran annual budget is \$11.6 million. The successful candidate must possess demonstrated leadership abilities, excellent oral and written skills, in-depth knowledge and at least seven years (professional, administrative, and managerial) experience in transit operations, three years of which must have been in a senior management capacity in a transit organization of significant size and complexity and must possess at least a Baccalaureate Degree in public or business administration, mass transportation, planning or related field, or have an equivalent combination of training and experience. Starting salary range up to the low \$100,000s, negotiable, depending upon qualifications, experience, and professional achievement. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. Requests for detailed recruitment profile, inquiries and applications should be directed to City's Executive Search Consultants: Steve Bernard, The PAR Group, 100 N. Waukegan Road, Suite 211, Lake Bluff IL 60044. TEL: 847 / 234-0005, FAX: 847 / 234-8309; Email: resume@pargroupltd.com.

In accordance with Florida's Public Records Laws, all application materials are open to public inspection. Preference shall be given to certain veterans and spouses of veterans as provided by Chapter 295, Laws of Florida. EOE.

## Operations Compliance Officer

The **South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SFRTA)** has an immediate opening for an Operations Compliance Officer to assist in providing project management services for Contract Operator functions, ensure Contract Operator provides all required deliverables, perform contract compliance audits, develop and perform customer satisfaction surveys for transit services, investigate and respond to passenger complaints/comments and assist in all aspects of Agency's Operational activities.

Graduation from an accredited four (4) year college or university and a minimum of three (3) years experience in transit operations or related field or possess the equivalent combination of education and experience. Requires proficient computer skills utilizing Word, spreadsheets and database software. Excellent English written and oral communication skills required.

The starting pay range for this position is \$ 42,436-\$46,679. SFRTA offers a competitive compensation package that includes comprehensive life and health insurance, paid vacation, sick leave, and a retirement program.

SFRTA is an Equal Opportunity Employer

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