

Over 150 Community Stakeholders Attend Tourism + Transit Summit

Cocoa Beach, Florida — Over 150 community stakeholders attended the 2017 **Tourism + Transit Summit** on January 27, 2017, co-hosted by Space Coast Area Transit; the Space Coast Office of Tourism; reThink Your Commute; Courtyard by Marriott; Brevard County; FDOT District 5, and Transit One, a non-profit council for transit advocacy. Nine municipalities, four County Commission offices, the Canaveral Port Authority, Brevard County Schools Board Members, the Florida Public Transportation Association, and Senator Dorothy Hukill's office were represented, as were local, regional, and state-wide tourism and transit stakeholders and businesses.

The first three years of the summit featured partnerships with CareerSource Brevard, Eastern Florida State College, and FLORIDA TODAY, focusing on transit's relationship to jobs, education, and economic benefits, respectively. The purpose of the **2017 Tourism + Transit Summit** was to: help connect hospitality industry employees with public transportation; present transit tools for tourists to navigate the bus system; explain tourism and transit benefits of Complete Streets; and discuss tourism-transit partnerships, including a new pilot Bike Share program sponsored by the Space Coast Office of Tourism.

Cocoa Beach City Manager Jim McKnight kicked off the interactive **Tourism +Transit Summit**. Panelists included Commissioner Curt Smith, Chairman of the Brevard County Board of County Commissioners; Jim Liesenfelt, Director, Space Coast Area Transit; Travis Hills, Senior Engineer, Kittelson and Associates, representing the Space Coast TPO; Courtney Reynolds, Program Manager, reThink Your Commute; Eva M. Rey, Transit One Executive Board and Director of Community Management, The Viera Company; and Eric Garvey, Executive Director, Space Coast Office of Tourism.

Commissioner Smith stunned attendees with a graph pointing out that Sarasota County received 18.79 million dollars for 3 million riders, while Space Coast Area Transit received 1.55 million dollars for approximately the same number of riders, a difference of 17 million dollars in local funding. "During my time as a County Commissioner, I've had to make some very difficult decisions; however, there was no doubt in my mind that expanding transit funding in the FY 2016/17 budget was an area of critical need," he said. "Many of our riders, including those in the hospitality industry, work multiple jobs to support a family. If we can't help them get to work so they can generate their own income, there will be an additional burden to the County."

With the increased \$154,000 in local funding, Space Coast Area Transit was able to implement an additional 3,175 hours of service annually, including early evening and Saturday service; and more frequent service on Routes 1 and 29, which connect North, Central and South Brevard. Eva Rey, President of Transit One, stated that while Commissioner Smith's efforts were applauded and appreciated, more transit partnerships were needed. "This community is known for getting people to the moon and back, but we can't even get our workforce home after 9PM using public transit. I have



issues with that,” Rey stated. “Less than 20% of our funding is local. If our state and federal grants disappeared, there would be no transit system; this community issue requires a community solution.” Rey went on to outline community partnership opportunities, and encouraged participants to connect with the non-profit organization at TransitOne.org.

There are over 1,000 bus stops located throughout the Space Coast and millions of possible trip combinations. Brevard County’s boarding rates per hour are higher than those in Houston or Kansas City. Jim Liesenfelt stated, “We know that investing in transportation initiatives as an economic development strategy equals job opportunities, educational opportunities, and less stress on our roads, which makes them last longer.”

A new tourism-sponsored Bike Share program, used to get riders from point A to point B, and as a first and last mile transit connection, was unveiled by panelist Eric Garvey who shared that, “even though Cocoa Beach was selected for the Bike Share pilot program, we hope to expand into other tourist-oriented corridors.” Zagster, a full service Bike Share Provider, was awarded the RFP to operate the new service. Courtney Reynolds also identified Cocoa Beach, as well as other tourist areas, as prime communities for the FDOT District 5 commuter assistance program, ReThink Your Commute. “Our mission is to make both employers and employees in the hospitality industry aware of ridesharing opportunities and the benefits they provide, including pre-tax deductions that are available for qualified costs of using transit or vanpooling,” she said.

Additionally, the summit featured keynote speaker, Diana Kotler, Executive Director of Anaheim Resort Transportation (ART), a transportation service provider for the Orange County California region. Kotler explained funding mechanisms that allowed ART’s network to go from ground zero ten years ago, to serving over 9 million hospitality industry employees, residents, and tourists annually, at locations such as Disneyland, Knott’s Berry Farm, and the Anaheim Resort District.

At the close of the Tourism and Transit Summit, attendees boarded vans used in the Commuter Vanpool Program. “It’s hard to advocate for public transit if you’ve never used it yourself,” said Jim Liesenfelt, the transit system’s Director. Many of the participants experienced commuter ridesharing for the first time while traveling a complimentary luncheon sponsored by Clear Channel Outdoor, Space Coast Advertising, and Fishlips Waterfront Grill.

Prior to the event, organizers participated in pop-up marketing events called “New Year New App” at bus stops throughout Brevard, promoting the new 321Transit App. Residents and tourists who searched “321Transit” and downloaded the App through the Apple App Store or Google Play on their mobile device received free bus fare on the day of the **Tourism +Transit Summit**. Based on individual needs, the 321Transit app dynamically creates thousands of pages that display the closest bus stops and what routes they serve, in relation to each user’s individual location.

