Whether the barriers are access to vehicles, medical conditions, or a global pandemic, many older adults face transportation challenges. About 15% of Hillsborough County’s population belongs to the 65+ community, and their limited access to transportation options restricts medical visits, grocery shopping, and visiting family and friends.

The Healthy Buddy Program (HBP) at the University of South Florida’s Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) provides older adults with personalized transportation options.

In spring 2020, the Center for Transportation, Equity, Decisions, and Dollars (CTEDD) accepted the team’s proposal for phase three. The third phase introduced the program to Hillsborough County’s Spanish-speaking older adult population. The Hispanic/Latinx population in Hillsborough County is significant, at approximately 30% of the area’s total population, compared to 18% at the national level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Program materials were translated, and Spanish-speaking students were recruited to assist.

With COVID-19 and safety being their first
Established in 2018 by Siwon Jang, Ph.D., HBP matches University of South Florida students with older adults at Hillsborough County senior centers. Students with backgrounds in social work, public health, or other related fields work directly with their older adult "buddy" to craft a personalized transportation plan.

"Affordable transportation options exist in our community, but many transportation-disadvantaged older adults do not know how to use them," said Jang. "We wanted to connect the older adults with our trained USF students to provide transportation and health resources available in Hillsborough County."

Exploratory interviews with local older adult residents were conducted in the first phase to determine the feasibility and desirability of HBP. The second phase paired English-speaking Hillsborough County residents with students. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, students traveled with the research team to local senior centers to speak with residents about their needs during an assessment period.

The students recorded their findings and worked with the CUTR research team to produce a unique transportation plan for each participant. Many of the participants had limited transportation resources and faced affordability issues; the team found innovative solutions to a variety of barriers including paratransit and local buses. In the second phase, 22 older adults from the case group completed the program and received their personalized transportation plan. Another 21 participants from the control group provided invaluable feedback to the program.

The lack of in-person collaboration has decreased the program's enrollment numbers, and the team is searching for ways to engage the community during this global crisis.

"The Spanish version of Healthy Buddy Program was started to respond the need of Spanish-speaking older adults we met during Phase I and II of the study," said Jang. "Even though we are having hard time to connect with them due to COVID-19, we strongly believe that there are many Spanish-speaking older adults who need this transportation and health-related information to maintain a healthy and safe life. We hope that the Spanish version of the Healthy Buddy Program could be recognized more in the community so that it can contribute to improving mobility and quality of life for transportation-disadvantaged Spanish-speaking older adults."

Learn more about the programs below.

University of South Florida Named a Silver-Level Bicycle Friendly University by National League of American Bicyclists

The University of South Florida (USF) Tampa campus has been recognized as a Silver-Level Bicycle Friendly University with an award from the League of American Bicyclists, the premier grassroots advocacy organization encouraging better bicycling and protecting the right of people who bike. The award recognizes
USF's achievement in promoting and enabling safe, accessible bicycling on campus. USF St. Petersburg campus was previously awarded the BFU Bronze designation in 2017 and will reapply for a designation renewal later this year.

**FDOT Districts 1 & 7 Local Agency Safety Summit**

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and the Florida Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) Center recently presented the FDOT Districts 1 & 7 Local Agency Safety Summit. The Summit was held to inform parties on how Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Florida Division, FDOT Headquarters, and both FDOT Districts are addressing local road safety concerns and using the latest FHWA and FDOT rules. Topics of discussion include Highway Safety Improvement Program Guide (HSIPG) funding, safety actions from Central Office and both districts, along with success stories by our local agencies.

**Creating a Better Message for Bicycle Safety via Bay News 9**

Chuck Henson from Bay News 9 sat down with Research Associate Julie Bond and the University of South Florida's Erin Scheffels, Ph.D. to discuss messaging about bicycle safety.

**Transportation Security Workshop**
CUTR is part of a research team that will be hosting a series of FREE transportation security workshops from March - November 2021.

If you have a keen interest in enhancing your knowledge of transportation-related security; a desire to be part of a professional community that advances transportation security thinking; and a passion to learn current transportation security-derived research, then this is an opportunity you do not want to miss.


2021 Best Workplaces for Commuters

Government and academia often approach the development and delivery of transportation infrastructure and services on a macro scale. The goal is to keep peak period traffic flowing on major corridors. A converse approach is to provide highly targeted transportation services at a micro scale to meet the needs of those same commuters. Best Workplaces for Commuters, representing over 4 million U.S. employees, uses this approach for its program.

Best Workplaces for Commuters (BWC) released its 2021 list of just over 450 U.S.-based employers who meet the program’s National Standard of Excellence. These elite employers reap business advantages by providing exceptional commuter benefits to their employees. Such commuter benefits enable them to recruit and retain top talent, while lowering office and parking overhead costs. These benefits can include Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefits allowed under IRC Sec. 132(f), bike friendly amenities, last-mile shuttles, guaranteed emergency ride home, and telework arrangements.

A national authority on commuter benefits, BWC provides members with an array of services to bolster
Cong Chen, Ph.D. was named as a Young Member for TRB Standing Committee on Bicycle Transportation (ACH20) for the upcoming three-year term. Congratulations!

"Evaluation of a Low-Cost Countermeasure to Prevent Incorrect Turns at Highway-Rail Grade Crossing" is now available in the March 2021 ITE Journal.

Authors: Zhenyu Wang, Pei-Sung Lin, Abhijit Vasili, Rui Guo, and Runan Yang

The BWC list represents a diverse mix of public and private employers from 33 states, large and small, and a range of workplace types including hospitals, banks, hotels, retail, utilities, non-profits, government and universities.

The University of South Florida Tampa campus and five district offices of the Florida Department of Transportation are among the businesses in this elite list.

BWC represents a successful partnership of meeting both business needs and commuter transportation needs, one work site at a time.

Learn more about Best Workplaces

Stay safe!
CUTR was established in 1988 in the College of Engineering at the University of South Florida, in Tampa, Florida. CUTR’s mission is to proactively support implementation of innovative multimodal transportation solutions and develop leaders through research, education and action. Our work supports transportation agencies, the transportation profession and community, policymakers, and the public. CUTR provides high quality, objective expertise in the form of insightful research, comprehensive training and education, effective technical assistance and in-depth policy analysis, that translates directly into benefits for CUTR’s project sponsors. CUTR’s 45 research faculty, 60 students and post-docs combine academic knowledge and extensive “real world” experience in developing innovative, implementable solutions for all modes of transportation. The multidisciplinary research faculty includes experts in engineering, planning, computer science, economics, public policy, public health, and geography. CUTR logs nearly $20 million per year in expenditures through contracts and grants to support its research, education, training and technical assistance missions.