

Appendix E

Content Analysis: Correspondence and Comments Received for June 11, 2019 Public Hearing to Adopt TIP

Introduction

NVivo qualitative analysis software was used to code the content of all emails, voicemails, Facebook comments submitted on the TIP ‘events’ page, and public comments made during the public hearing. The correspondence received does not necessarily constitute a representative sample of the general public.

To inform Hillsborough County residents about the TIP and engage their input on projects and priorities, MPO staff mailed hearing notices in both English and Spanish, placed legal ads in newspapers of general circulation (including one with a Hispanic readership and one with an African-American readership), created a Facebook event to solicit comments, and created a TIP hotline.

Leading up to the June 11th, 2019 public hearing on the TIP adoption, the MPO received 122 emails, 38 Facebook comments, and 3 voicemail messages recorded to the TIP hotline. At the hearing, 68 individuals signed up to provide public comment and 28 individuals donated their time to speakers, bringing the total number of individuals represented to 96. Eleven written comments were submitted to the record. Six of the written comments were collected from a Tampa Bay Next meeting held in East Tampa and five were collected at the TIP hearing. Due to limited use in the previous year, a live chatroom was not made available for the 2019 hearing.

General Overview of Email & Facebook Comments

Many of the email comments received were templated responses that had been pre-prepared for commenters. In journalistic parlance, pre-prepared letters are often disdainfully referred to as “astroturf,” which reinforces the perception that such responses are “canned” and may be indicative of an artificial grass-roots campaign.¹ Advocates of templated responses, on the other hand, argue that pre-prepared letters are a useful tool for encouraging public participation and staying on-message.^{2,3}

Many of the pre-prepared letters received in 2019 enumerated three messages that commenters wish to communicate to both the Board of County Commissioners and the MPO Board. Those three points are:

¹ Reader, B. (2008). Turf wars? Rhetorical struggle over ‘prepared’ letters to the editor. *Journalism*, 9(5), 606-623.

² Bimber, B. & Davis, R. (2003). *Campaigning online: The internet in U.S. elections*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

³ Klotz, R.J. (2007). Internet campaigning for grassroots and astroturf support. *Social Science Computer Review*, 25(1), 3-12.

1. [The commenter *wants/needs*] “the I-275 (including malfunction junction) expanded with additional capacity and safety improvements”;
2. [The commenter] “support[s] FDOT's planned I-275 expansion/safety/improvement projects”; and,
3. [The commenter] “adamantly oppose[s] tearing down any part of I-275 that is a major evacuation route in Tampa Bay and so critical and vital to Hillsborough County and the entire region.”

Another pre-prepared letter utilized a bulleted format to communicate four points, which are:

1. “We cannot delay these needed investments in a stretch of corridor on I-275 that saw 1,500 crashes in 2016”;
2. “These improvements are needed to accommodate hurricane evacuation response, population and employment growth and reduce the crash rates along this segment of I-275, which are higher than the statewide average”;
3. “We are the 9th fastest growing region in the country and Hillsborough is the 10th fastest growing county in the nation welcoming 27,000 new residents last year. These improvements are critical to address congestion”; and,
4. “Make no mistake, this is a regional corridor -- the improvements are consistent with regional transportation plans and are a priority of the Transportation Management Area leadership group.”

While the templated responses were not as numerous as in previous years, pre-prepared letters continue to suggest a proliferation of organized campaigns focusing on specific calls-to-action at both the corridor level and region.

Figure 1, shown below, is a word cloud indicating the 100 most frequently occurring concepts found in the emails, voicemail messages and Facebook comments. Larger words appear more frequently than smaller words.

Due to the size of the dataset and limited staff resources, it would be time-prohibitive to fix misspellings found in each item of correspondence. Practical handbooks and guides to conducting qualitative research often advise that misspellings be corrected using spelling correction tools and language modeling in order to reduce errors from unanalyzable cases.⁵ For this supplementary analysis, however, deviations from expected inputs have not been corrected for the aforementioned reason.

NVivo is limited in its capability to autocode pictures, diagrams and hand-drawn maps. While it is possible for codes to be manually applied to images,⁶ the additional insights gained from coding images compared to the effort required render this impractical – not to mention that coded imagery introduces additional problems of bias, credibility, validity, and confirmability.⁷

A number of emails were submitted to MPO staff which included incomplete and partial conversations which been circulated among other parties. In these data samples, some of the partial conversations had been deleted, making it impossible to understand the full breadth of the conversation. In a few instances, long email chains had been forwarded to MPO staff, which made it difficult to follow the conversation. These messy conversations could introduce the possibility of double-counting data if the emails are imputed to NVivo as-is. To reduce this risk, email threads were manually scrubbed in an attempt to eliminate duplicate data.

Themes Emerging from Email & Facebook Comments

A sample of the most common themes emerging from the emails and Facebook posts received include:

- Improvements
 - “Operational improvements”
 - “Safety improvements”
- Route
 - “Hurricane evacuation response”
 - “Major evacuation route”
- Economy
- Westshore Interchange
- Transit
 - “Rail transit lines”
 - “Mass transit”
 - “Transit options”
 - “Full transit system”

Among these emails and Facebook comments, the theme of **improvements** occurred most frequently. The frequency is attributable to its appearance in e-mail subject lines, as well as several appearances in lines of text from the pre-prepared letters shown above in the *General*

⁵ King, L. and Dickinson, M. (2014). Leveraging known semantics for spelling corrections. *Proceedings of the third workshop on NLP for computer-assisted language learning*. NEALT Proceedings Series 22 / Linkoping Electronic Conference Proceedings 107: 43-58.

⁶ Banks, M. (2014). Analysing Images. In Flick, U. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, 394-408. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

⁷ Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *NursingPlus Open*, (2), 8-14.

Overview of Email & Facebook Comments. Subthemes include references to “operational improvements” and “safety improvements.” See Figure 2 below.

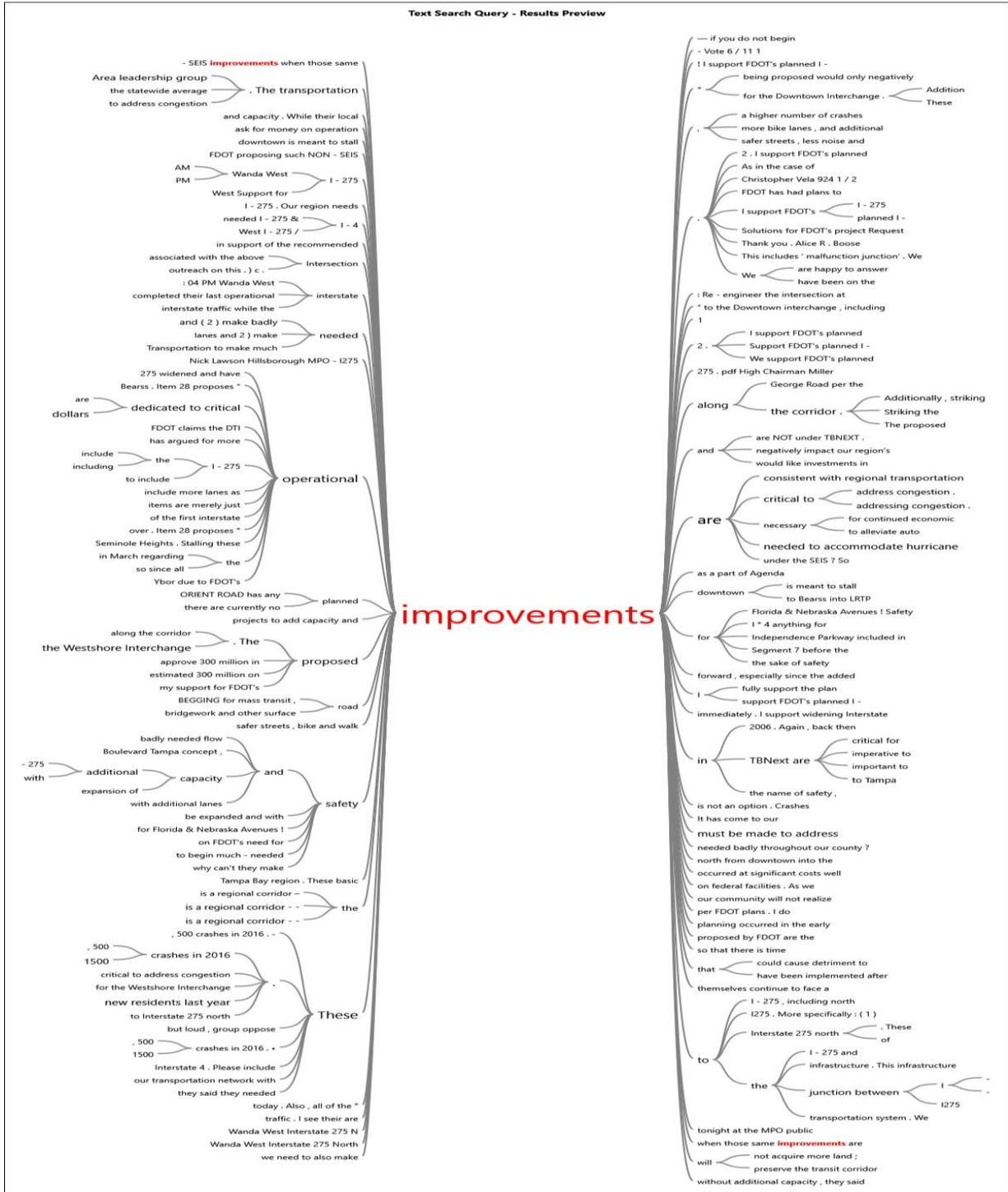


Figure 2: Textual Word Tree of the comments related to 'improvement' and its stemmed words. The larger font size indicates that a sub-theme emerged, which was often stemmed to the predominant theme.

As in the previous three years, **safety** again emerged as a dominant theme in emails and Facebook comments, especially with respect to bicycle and pedestrian modes. For the 2019

comments, “safety” emerged as both a parent theme and a subtheme of “improvements.” References to bicycles, pedestrians, and bike lanes appeared in a number of comments, as shown in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3: Textual Word Tree of the comments related to ‘safety’ and its stemmed words. The larger font size indicates that a sub-theme emerged, which was often stemmed to the predominant theme.

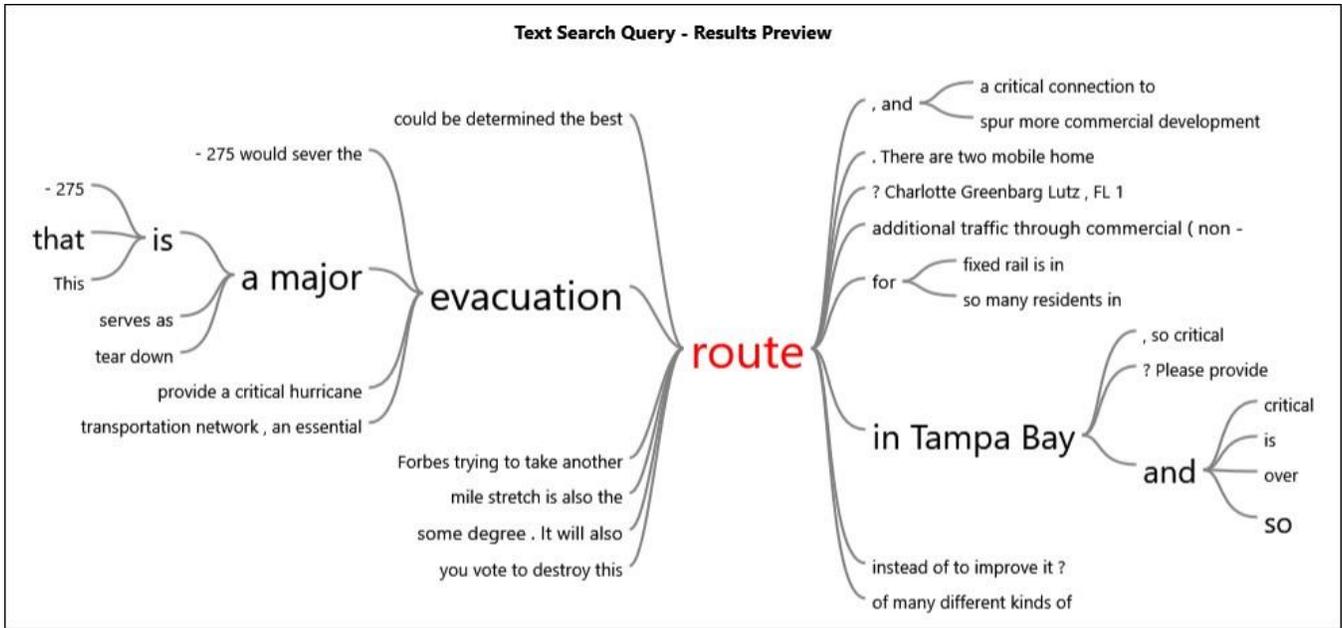


Figure 4: Textual Word Tree of the comments related to ‘route’ and its stemmed words. The larger font size indicates that a sub-theme emerged, which was often stemmed to the predominant theme.

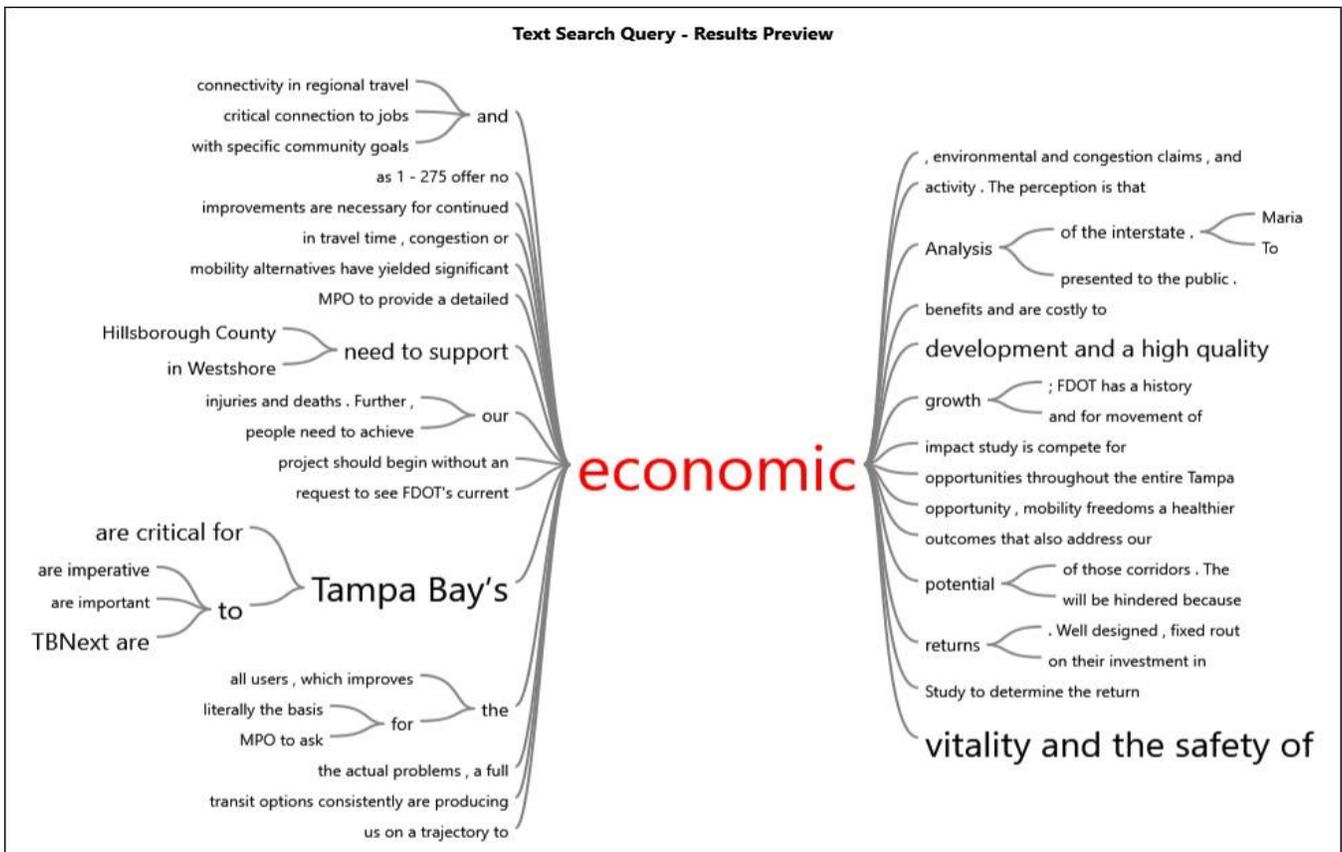


Figure 5: Textual Word Tree of the comments related to “economic” and its stemmed words. The larger font size indicates that a sub-theme emerged, which was often stemmed to the predominant theme.

Discussion

For the 2019-2020 TIP hearing, comments regarding the Tampa Bay Next initiative were far more abundant than in the previous year. In the previous year's Content Analysis, we attributed the relatively few references to the Tampa Bay Next initiative, Supplemental Environmental Impact Study (SEIS), and Downtown Interchange to FDOT's public engagement efforts, which were still underway. As these efforts draw to a close, the 2019-20 TIP comments once again reflect the community's strong interest in interstate modernization projects. Approximately 60% of the emails received explicitly supported either interstate expansion, the TBNext process, or advocated for the MPO Board to adopt the TIP. Alternatively, 20% of the emails received explicitly opposed those themes or called upon the MPO Board to amend the TIP to delete Priorities #27 and #28 from the program. Of the 38 Facebook comments received, all but one expressed opposition to interstate expansion and many asked for transit options to be explored as an alternative to roadway capacity projects. Of the comments provided at the public hearing, 28 opposed Priorities #27 and #28 or general interstate expansion, while 23 supported approving the TIP with those priorities included.

The TIP was approved with Priorities #27 and #28 included in an 11-5 vote and, following procedural clarification, an amended motion to remove Item 40 carried 16-0.