

TRANSPORTATION

California-based air taxi company and gondola operator latest to pitch Tampa Bay transit leaders

By Veronica Brezina-Smith
Reporter, Tampa Bay Business Journal
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Air taxis and gondolas are still on the table for the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority, which heard two new presentations from transit companies Friday.

California-Based air taxi company Wisk Aero and Colorado-based gondola firm Leitner-Poma presented their technologies to TBARTA, telling how they can serve the region whether it's connecting to Tropicana Field or to downtowns.

The presentations took place after Lilium, another air taxi company that pitched TBARTA months ago, announced last week it will invest \$25 million to build its [first U.S. vertiport in Orlando](#).

Although Tampa did not actively pursue further conversations with Lilium, TBARTA board members are still interested in its technology as well as tech from other companies that can likely be integrated.

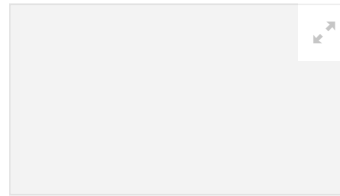
The region has long been in need of improved transit services as the lack of robust systems make the area less competitive when it comes to business relocation, retention and expansion. TBARTA heard presentations from the two companies. It took no action.

Here's a closer look at the two most recent companies that pitched their technologies:

Wisk Aero

The California-based company is backed by the Boeing Company and Google Co-Founder and former CEO [Larry Page's Kitty Hawk](#).

Wisk's latest aircraft is the Cora, the company's fifth generation aircraft. [Dan Dalton](#), Wisk VP of global partnerships, pitched during the meeting.



Wisk, the Mountain View Ca.-based air taxi spinoff from Larry Page's Kitty Hawk, is ready to resume testing of its autonomous Cora aircraft.

WISK AERO

The all-electric aircraft seats two passengers and is envisioned to become fully autonomous to navigate on its own. It has completed more than 1,400 flight tests and has proven to be extremely reliable, Dalton said.

It can travel up to 100 miles per hour with a range of 20 to 50 miles, which would be suitable for an urban core.

TBARTA board members questioned the company in comparing it to German-based Lilium, which looked to connect major cities and they asked if Wisk would be able to use Lilium's vertiport when complete in Orlando.

Many in the industry would agree to share vertiports and not to have a sole proprietorship and exclude others from using it, Dalton said, saying he cannot specifically speak for Lilium.

Hillsborough County Commissioner Pat Kemp noted the aircraft only has two seats and thus, wouldn't be considered mass transit.

However, Dalton said the company did an analysis comparing the service to ride share. Ground ride share transportation companies today usually facilitate between one to two passengers a ride, making the case to start out with two passenger seats.

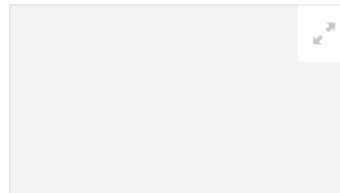
The cost for passengers would also be comparable to costs from ride share companies.

Although it wouldn't carry many passengers, Dalton focused on Tampa Bay's congested transportation network. He said Tampa Bay's commuting workforce spends 1.2 million hours per day commuting. Building more roads still will not address the problem especially as more people are moving to the region every day, he said.

In terms of economic development, the air taxis would help create more jobs in support customer facing roles and maintenance. The air taxi company would also work with cruise lines and hotels to provide transit.

Leitner-Poma

Leitner-Poma, a Grand Junction, Colorado company, pitched a ropeway gondola concept to TBARTA. Leitner-Poma originally specialized in building ski lifts works. It is the American subsidiary of French-based Poma, which is owned by the Italian company HTI Group.

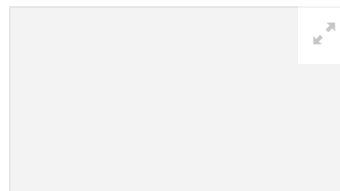


Leitner Poma's rendering of the Georgetown-Rosslyn Gondola concept

PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGETOWN BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

The gondola system would be used to connect from the Trop to the St. Pete Pier area or from Clearwater Beach to downtown. Other gondola companies such as BeachTran and the Shea Carr Jewell Company have pitched similar plans for the area.

The ropeways have a single haul rope and run on one or two carrying ropes. They have detachable grips and a very high transport capacity, are particularly wind-resistant, and can bridge large spans, according to Leitner-Poma.



The benefits of a gondola system

TBARTA, LEITNER-POMA

Jon Mauch, senior sales manager and spokesperson for Leitner-Poma, said the gondola system would look at building tops to connect to.

Although it cannot travel very fast, it can carry 10 or more passengers per cabin and offer 360-degree views.

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