

# Revisiting Factors Associated with the Success of Ballot Initiatives with a Substantial Rail Transit Component



MTI Report 10-13



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REPORT 10-13

**REVISITING FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SUCCESS  
OF BALLOT INITIATIVES WITH A SUBSTANTIAL  
RAIL TRANSIT COMPONENT**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the replication of an MTI study conducted in 2001 by Peter Haas and Richard Werbel.<sup>1</sup> That research, itself a continuation of an earlier project completed in 2000,<sup>2</sup> included an analysis of transportation tax elections in 11 urban areas across the nation and culminated in the identification of 17 community-level factors with potential impact on the success of ballot measures for sales tax increases to fund transportation packages with substantial rail components. Many of the 17 factors identified in the research were moderately to strongly associated with electoral success and failure of transit tax initiatives. Among the key findings from the original (2001) report were:

- Passing transit initiatives in communities featuring transit agencies of questionable reputations, in those fielding credible opposition, or those lacking a traffic congestion “crisis” is extremely difficult;
- Achieving consensus support from business community leaders, elected officials, and environmental groups is potentially problematic, but may be crucial in fundraising for and promotion of the final transit package;
- Support for transportation-related tax increases from business community and key elected officials is apparently linked to their close involvement in development of the package; and
- Attracting campaign funds in excess of \$1 million seems essential to effectively promoting transit initiatives.

Closely following the approach of the 2001 study, this updated research employs in-depth analysis of transportation tax elections in eight communities, representing a variety of urban settings across the United States. Unlike the 2001 study which was somewhat exploratory in nature, this report presents a more direct analysis of each of the 17 factors, denoting whether a condition is present, absent or inconclusively present in each case. Whereas the total number of cases is insignificant for purposes of statistical inference, these findings do represent the population of this type of election in the past decade and may be applicable to communities of similar land use patterns, socioeconomic dispersal, political climate and other like environmental factors. Most important, this replication enables a careful reconsideration of the applicability of conclusions of a decade ago to the present day.

The eight cases studies included in this report represent a variety of circumstances, ranging from approval of a starter rail line, to supplementing an existing tax, to affirming public desire that a general excise tax fund a light rail system, to voting against repeal of an existing sales tax.

### **Maricopa, AZ (November 2, 2004): Success**

At the height of a population boom and associated increased congestion, under conditions that conformed almost perfectly to successful transit outcomes identified in the 2001 study, Maricopa County approved with 57 percent voter support to renewal of a ½ cent sales

tax to fund an extension of light rail, new bus services and new highway construction, representing up to \$14.3 billion in revenue generated over a 20-year period. Campaigners were able to successfully blend multimedia tactics in soliciting support for the proposal, raising \$4 million in contrast to (possibly record) unusually large amount of opposition funding (in excess of \$2 million).

### **Seattle (November 6, 2007): Failure**

The 2006 Washington State Legislature required the King, Pierce and Snohomish Counties' Regional Transit Investment District (RTID) to work in partnership with Sound Transit (RTA) beginning in June 2006 to jointly submit a comprehensive transportation and highway plan to voters in the November 2007 election. Sound Transit primarily developed plans for 50 miles of new light rail services and park-and-ride facilities. RTID focused on 186 miles of highway expansions, including HOV lanes and improvements to the pivotal 520 floating bridge connecting Seattle and Medina. The resulting package, nicknamed "Roads and Transit," amassed a base cost of \$18 billion in 2006 dollars, nearly \$10.8 billion of this for Sound Transit's Link Light Rail. The projects would be funded by a combined  $\frac{6}{10}$  of a cent sales tax increase and each automobile owner within the Sound Transit District would pay an increased vehicle excise tax of \$80 for every \$10,000 of his or her car's value for a projected period of 20 years. The remaining financing relied on state and federal government grants, and did not account for \$1.5 billion of the projected cost. Questionable past transit financing decisions and key voices of well-funded, well-organized opposition (including the environmental community) seemed to contribute to the measure's 45 percent to 55 percent defeat.

### **Charlotte, Mecklenburg County (November 6, 2007): Success**

This measure was a repeal vote of a voter-passed 1998 initiative. MTI's 2001 study detailed Charlotte's 1998 vote in favor of a  $\frac{1}{2}$  cent sales tax increase to fund the "2025 Transit/Land Use Plan." Underperformance of tax revenues, construction delays and cost-overruns associated with Charlotte's first light rail line (LYNX Blue or South Corridor Line) led an individual critic of light rail with the financial means to fund a petition drive repealing the  $\frac{1}{2}$  cent increase, which would have effectively ended Charlotte's indefinite plans for expanded light rail, bus rapid transit, commuter rail and street car services. The signatures were accepted and the repeal measure approved for the November ballot in spring of 2007. In response, the Charlotte City Council and Chamber of Commerce launched an aggressive campaign protecting the light rail system, which was set to commence operation Thanksgiving weekend, November 2007, regardless the result of the vote. Citizens of Charlotte voted against the repeal (and for light rail) 70 percent to 30 percent.

### **City and County of Honolulu (November 4, 2008): Success**

This measure was an affirmation vote of a previously enacted excise tax. In August 2005, the council of the City and County of Honolulu exercised its authority to increase the General Excise Tax (GET) on Oahu by .5 percent for the dedicated purpose of funding a new transit system. Prolonged dispute as to what form the system should take, coupled with "steel wheel" champion Mayor Mufi Hannemann's failure to win reelection outright

(in a runoff system), prompted the mayor and council to place a Charter Amendment on the November ballot affirming public support for an elevated 20-mile light rail system to be funded by the tax increase. On November 4, 2008, citizens of Honolulu agreed to the 16-year (sunset-limited) GET increase being devoted to a “steel wheel” system with 53 percent of the vote. Honolulu demonstrates how multi-level governmental cooperation in cultivation may help lead to public support for a new light rail system.

### **Los Angeles County (November 4, 2008): Success**

Measure R funds a comprehensive, 30-year plan for congestion relief in Los Angeles County. A marquee project to be funded by the ½ cent sales tax increase and championed by Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, is a “Subway to the Sea” connecting downtown Los Angeles and coastal Santa Monica. Projected to raise \$40 billion over its 30-year lifespan, Measure R will also fund extensions of light rail service to East Los Angeles, and new light rail lines to West and South L.A. In drafting this enormous proposal, Los Angeles Metro officials appealed to bus riding and automobile constituencies by dedicating 20 percent of revenues to highway construction and 20 percent to bus operations and maintenance. The series of 14 proposed projects garnered support in West Los Angeles particularly, and was able to secure 67.93 percent in favor, exceeding California’s two-thirds threshold.

### **Kansas City, MO (November 4, 2008): Failure**

After approving an infeasible citizen-led initiative in 2006, the people of Kansas City voted to defeat a proposed ¾ cent sales tax increase to fund a 14-mile starter light rail line. The tax would have generated approximately \$815 million over a 25-year period, with remaining financing relying on federal matching grants. While the brand-new line would have connected downtown activity centers and the proposal detailed origin and terminus points, the route was yet to be specified. Kansas City Mayor Mark Funkhouser lent the measure his avid support only after conceding that no consensus could be achieved for a more broadly-based (and expensive) transportation plan. Lukewarm support came from the business community, leading to a poorly funded pro-rail campaign that relied largely on novel ploys (such as use of social media websites and direct contact via text message). This lack of spirited coalition of pro-rail advocates allowed substantially funded opposition forces to fill the news vacuum with messages of lingering uncertainty as to the wisdom of the plan.

### **St. Louis County (November 4, 2008): Failure**

Facing a \$45 million deficit, St. Louis County proposed Measure M, a ½ cent countywide sales tax increase, to meet this operations shortfall and fund future (unspecified) extensions of Metrolink light rail services by generating \$80 million annually over a 20-year period. Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama drew tremendous crowds to polling places across the country, particularly among young people and minorities. In St. Louis County, the Measure M campaign assumed support of the African American community for a measure protecting bus services, and did not target this decidedly pro-Obama group. Many predominantly African American precincts of St. Louis County featured wait times

of two to four hours, and Measure M, which appeared at the end of a long ballot featuring “competing” sales tax initiatives was defeated 48.5 percent to 51.5 percent.

### **Santa Clara County (November 4, 2008): Success**

MTI’s 2001 study featured Santa Clara County’s improbable passage of Measure A in 2000, a 30-year extension of a ½ cent transit-dedicated sales tax increase set to expire in 2006. The 2000 vote featured \$6 billion in projects, including the highly anticipated Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) heavy rail extension to San Jose. Measure A “included more than \$1 billion in rail operating costs, but according to VTA staff, another sales tax to cover operating costs for the life of the tax would probably be needed in 2112 or 2114.”<sup>3</sup> In 2008, the VTA board proposed a ⅛ cent supplemental sales tax increase to generate a dedicated revenue stream sufficient to fulfill the bulk of VTA’s obligation to BART for the operation, maintenance and future capital reserve of the system. On November 4, 2008, the tax increase was very narrowly approved with 66.78 percent of the vote, California requiring a two-thirds majority.

### **General Trends**

General trends observed in these case studies were highly consistent with the following findings from the 2001 study:

- The importance of consensus amongst the business, elected and environmental communities, and accompanying depth of financial support
- The difficulty of passing an initiative without well-funded, effective use of multimedia
- The importance of utilizing experienced campaign consultants

Again, while limited inference can be drawn from this set of case studies, factors or conditions that seemed to decrease in prominence included:

- The effectiveness of presenting a multimodal package
- The perception of benefits of a package being distributed throughout the voting district
- The experience gained in recent transit elections
- The credibility of the transit agency

Further, this compilation includes an exploration of “rebound” elections – those instances in which a failed measure is quickly followed by a successful one – and the factors that seem linked to achieving success in such instances. Four of the eight cases studied were part of a pair of ballot measures offered in rapid succession. While this is again reflective of a small study sample, additional factors that may be of possible importance in this more differentiated context include:



- Assured financing may enhance voter confidence in the deliverability of proposals;
- Specified routes may increase perceptions of individual benefits;
- The bleak reality of tangible service cuts may trump other factors; and
- The effectiveness of a region's predominant newspaper in portraying an initiative in a positive or negative light

These findings suggest that a number of variables not included in the primary analysis may be particularly relevant to the success or failure of transit measures and should not be discredited by transportation planners and campaign entities.



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## I. INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

Local sales, property, and other types of tax increases tied to transit and other transportation expenditures have become the most prominent source of new funding for local transportation projects. With ever greater demand for transportation and transit-related capacity, even as state and federal support for such projects has continued to flatten or decrease, localities are increasingly looking to raise their own funding by means of local, voter-approved tax increases. Although voter-approved property tax increases are also on the rise, most large-scale projects are based on sales tax increases.<sup>4</sup>

Since 2000, a total 367 ballot measures have been considered nationally. Such measures are increasingly meeting with success. In 2000 and 2001, for example, only about half of all measures were approved by voters, whereas more than three-fourths of all measures since 2008 have been approved. In the 11-year period 2000-2010, an average of 71 percent of all transportation measures succeeded, a rate that is twice as high as that for all other types of local tax initiatives. Even in California, where a two-thirds supermajority of votes are required to pass dedicated local tax increases, most proposals are accepted by voters.<sup>5</sup>

But not all transportation measures succeed, obviously. Sale tax increases, which are typically associated with larger, capital-intensive projects, are less likely to succeed than property taxes measures. In 2010 for example, 81 percent of all property tax increase measures were approved, compared to just 59 percent of sales tax increases.<sup>6</sup> As unsuccessful sales tax increase proposals result in a waste of time, effort, and fund-raising, MTI has therefore conducted several studies to help determine how and why transportation tax measures succeed or fail.

In 2000 and again in 2001, MTI conducted and published analyses of elections involving transit taxes initiatives for projects that included a “substantial” rail component. The focus on ballot measures that include rail projects was present because: (a) many larger communities seek to create or enhance rail transit, and (b) such projects tend to be expensive and hence, more controversial and difficult to pass.<sup>7</sup> The 2000 report included a quantitative (logistic regression) analysis of the outcomes of 57 transit tax elections, not exclusively rail-related, that occurred between 1990 and 1998. However, despite the inclusion of many potentially important variables, the model used in that report explained only about 15 percent of the variation in the outcome of transit elections. The report also included four in-depth case studies that examined the impact of more qualitative factors in affecting the outcome of transit tax elections, and particularly emphasized the means by which coalitions of stakeholders were created and used to wage effective campaigns in support of transit taxes.

The 2001 MTI study expanded greatly upon and also refined the case study methodology used in 2000. Based on case studies culled from ballot measures in eleven communities across the U.S., the report focused on systemically identifying the effect, if any, of up to 17 community-level factors on the electoral outcome of these measures. Although the case study approach does not yield results that can be scientifically validated with measurable accuracy, it does enable much closer consideration of community-level variables, or factors,

that are intuitively efficacious in creating a winning or losing campaign. Moreover, the case study approach enables examination of the more actionable aspects of the campaign, such that practitioners can apply the results to actual campaign planning. In fact, since publication of the 2001 report, its authors have received many requests from officials of local agencies and other interested parties for presentations of the results of the study, presumably to see how they applied to their own community's efforts.

However, ten years have passed since the publication of the 2001 MTI study. Are the same factors that seemed most important to the outcome of transportation tax elections still as significant? Have other trends and developments created significant changes in how these factors do or do not affect election outcomes? The current study seeks to address this line of questioning, and is therefore intended to serve as a replication of the 2001 MTI study. The current study is not intended to break new ground concerning the possible effect of factors that may have been excluded from the 2001 study, with the exception of a few observations that may merit consideration for future research.

## **METHODS USED IN THIS REPORT**

The 2001 MTI study had a significantly exploratory purpose and therefore delved into seeking to describe and explain the character of campaigns, including marketing techniques and message components. However, findings from those aspects of the 2001 report were difficult to generalize upon; instead, the most useful findings were culled from a more straightforward analysis of potentially important factors (or variables) that may have affected the outcome of eleven transit tax elections. By contrast, the current study is intended only to directly replicate those key findings from the 2001 report. The differing character of the present study, along with changes in information technology, has direct implications for the methods used.

Both the 2001 and present MTI studies were based on a case study approach. However, as the 2001 effort was of greater scope, it included on-site interviews with key stakeholders and actors in eleven communities of interest. This on-site interviewing enabled in-depth interviews with a wide variety of contacts concerning a wide variety of topics. Typically, at least one person was interviewed from a variety of groups of officials and stakeholders, including political figures, representatives of the local transit agency, the transit tax campaign and its opponents, the business community, an environmental organization, campaign consultants, local journalists, and others.

For the present study, a more circumscribed approach with respect to interviews was adopted. Again, this is appropriate because the scope of the present study is much narrower than that of the 2001, which had a far more exploratory scope and purpose. By contrast, the purpose of the present study is simply to attempt to replicate key findings from the earlier effort. Therefore, for the present study, key interviewees were identified and interviewed via telephone, whenever possible. Additionally, the explosion of documentary material now accessible via the Internet reduced the need to speak directly with many potential interviewees. In 2010, it became relatively easy to verify whether many of the factors analyzed in 2001 were present in most of the elections under review. In some

cases, phone interviews were used primarily to double-check the validity of facts and impressions gleaned from online resources.

In 2001, transit tax elections in 11 communities were analyzed, representing the following elections listed in table 1.

**Table 1. Summary of Case Study Elections, 2001 MTI Study**

Locality	State	Year	Outcome	Margin
St. Louis County	Missouri	1997	Failed	42% to 58%
Charlotte	North Carolina	1998	Passed	58% to 42%
Columbus	Ohio	1999	Failed	45% to 55%
Denver	Colorado	1999	Passed	66% to 34%
Alameda County*	California	2000	Passed	82% to 18%
Austin	Texas	2000	Failed	49.6% to 50.4%
Phoenix	Arizona	2000	Passed	65% to 35%
Salt Lake	Utah	2000	Passed	54% to 46%
San Antonio	Texas	2000	Failed	30% to 70%
Santa Clara County*	California	2000	Passed	71% to 29%
Sonoma County*	California	2000	Failed	60% to 40%

*Note:*

\*California elections that required  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority

Each election involved a significant local sales tax increase to fund a major transportation package, each also including at least a partial – yet significant – rail component. Additionally, sites were selected that represented both successful (six) and unsuccessful (five) campaigns, as well as a geographically and politically diverse group of localities. This approach was selected in the belief that as much might be gleaned from a failed campaign as a successful one.

The present study is intended, to the extent that is possible and practical, to mirror that of 2001 in terms of strategy and design. As in 2001, the current study examines both successful and unsuccessful measures, each with rail components, from a nationwide perspective. The elections selected and associated information is listed in table 2.

**Table 2. Summary of Case Study Elections, Present Study**

Locality	State	Year	Outcome	Margin
Maricopa County	Arizona	2004	Passed	57% to 43%
Seattle	Washington	2007	Failed	45% to 55%
Charlotte*	North Carolina	2007	Passed*	70% to 30%
Honolulu	Hawaii	2008	Passed	53% to 47%
Los Angeles**	California	2008	Passed	68% to 32%
Santa Clara County**	California	2008	Passed	67% to 33%
St. Louis County	Missouri	2008	Failed	49% to 51%
Kansas City	Missouri	2008	Failed	45% to 55%

*Note:*

\*Referendum on the repeal of a sales tax increase, evaluated from a pro-transit perspective,

\*\*California elections that required  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority

Thus the current study includes evaluation of eight elections involving proposed (or, in two cases, already passed but challenged by repeal or referendum) sales tax increases, five that were successful and three that failed to pass. These elections were also chosen to represent the largest (in terms of potential revenue), most important transit tax elections between 2004 and 2009. In identifying and selecting important elections, two somewhat anomalous campaigns emerged: (1) the Charlotte case involves a referendum on an existing tax increase vote passed in 1998, and (2) the Hawaii vote did not in itself raise the sales tax, but affirmed that voters wanted to build rail system, and in effect represented approval of the tax increase that had already been approved legislatively. While these two cases differ somewhat from traditional tax initiatives, they represent a very similar dynamic in terms of campaign conditions, strategies, and activities. (Further details about these cases follow in the subsections devoted to each.)

The current study also represents three fewer elections (eight rather than eleven) than the 2001 study. Unfortunately, a sufficient number of elections of similar cast and proportion to match the 2001 total were not available for use in the current study. In any event, neither study includes enough cases to make statistically significant inferences. The results are intended to help identify potentially important factors from a substantively critical, but not scientifically statistically significant pool of cases.

As in 2001, the primary means for analyzing the case study data, beyond the primarily descriptive narrative that accompanies each subsection, is to identify (a) which factors from a list developed in 2001 were either present, absent, or uncertainly or ambiguously present, and (b) whether those factors are associated with passage or failure of each campaign. Generally, the goal is to identify whether each factor seems to be necessary for the passage of transportation tax initiatives, or its absence conversely associated with failure. Additionally, of course, the results from the current study are then compared

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with those of the 2001 effort to determine to what degree and in which ways the factors associated with passage and failure differ in the latter study.

## FACTORS EVALUATED IN 2001 STUDY

The 2001 MTI study identified 17 factors that might affect the outcome of transit tax elections. These factors were gleaned both from existing literature about tax campaigns (especially Middleton 1998) and from data collected while creating the case studies for that research. In this report, these 17 factors are accepted and seek to determine whether they seem to maintain the same associations (or lack thereof) observed in the 2001 study. This section presents a brief description of each factor and the original rationale behind its selection for the earlier study. The italicized text follows some of the factors to explain any modification of what each factors for the current study.

However, every effort was made to recreate the same evaluation scheme that was used in the 2001 study. The few changes result primarily from the smaller scope of the current study – fewer interviews were conducted on average, stemming from lack of on-site visits. Once again, explanation for each factor’s presence or absence is also supported with narrative, with marginal outcomes generally receiving an “ambiguous” assignation.

The factors identified in the 2001 study emerged after careful consideration of a mass of case study information and are preponderantly and inherently subjective. As noted earlier, using strictly quantifiable measures explains only a small percentage of the variation in election outcomes. In most instances, determining the presence (or absence) of a particular factor involves a combination of information gleaned from telephone interviews, newspaper and other documentary sources, and published statistical information. Every effort was made to maintain consistency and validity of these measures, but, with several obvious exceptions, they are at best considered judgments and not hard measures. Additionally, the number of factors was intended to cast a wide net in the original study. In analysis, several of these factors were apparently not really very important at all. However, in the spirit of replication all are again considered here.

### 1. Congestion “crisis”

**Definition:** This factor refers to the perception, real or not, that a community is facing traffic congestion of such magnitude that it is a high or very high priority for most citizens. Interviews with transportation professionals and other local respondents are weighed. When available, survey data may be used to determine the extent to which transportation problems are considered to be a “crisis” in a given community. *In the current study, traffic congestion statistics from the most recent Texas Transportation Institute report on congestion rates in American metropolitan areas<sup>8</sup> is frequently invoked as a possible proxy for this factor.*

**Rationale:** If traffic problems are perceived to be significantly harmful to the economy, the environment, and/or the quality of life of a community, voters may be more motivated to support tax increases that will fund transportation improvements. Failing such a crisis atmosphere, citizens may be less motivated to do so, particularly when the opposition may



be able to create uncertainty about the ability of rail transit to take a significant number of vehicles off the road.

## 2. Sponsorship by the business community

**Definition:** This factor refers to the degree to which the local business community actively supports the transportation tax increase. In most instances, this means that local business leaders played an active, if not a key role in creating and/or campaigning for the passage of a transportation tax initiative. It does not necessarily connote financial support, although the two are generally closely linked. This was measured primarily by determining whether a consensus of interviewees existed, along with documentary information from newspapers and other outlets.

**Rationale:** Support from business leaders helps measures pass by legitimizing the need for a tax increase; voters may look to local business leaders for cues on tax increases. Additionally, business leaders can communicate their support to their employees. Absent such support or with vocal opposition from business leaders, voters may regard tax increase measures as self-serving for local transit agencies or government officials.

## 3. Sponsorship by key elected officials

**Definition:** This factor involves one or several key elected officials, usually with area-wide responsibilities (such as a mayor or county executive) taking a visible leadership role in the promotion of the tax initiative and virtually no officials opposing the measure. This was determined by consideration of interview and documentary sources.

**Rationale:** Voters look to community leaders for cues on issues like tax increases. Mayors and other well-recognized officials can marshal support among a variety of groups and help to squelch disagreements among political factions. Absent such leadership, voters may perceive an initiative to be relatively unimportant or may be more likely to receive cues from opposing groups.

## 4. Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)

**Definition:** Fundraising for the transportation tax initiative nears or exceeds \$1 million. This figure is admittedly arbitrary, but was suggested *a priori* during the previous study and seems to represent a clear psychological threshold. Not every community of interest makes this data available in a reliable manner, so the accuracy of this factor may be a bit misleading. Furthermore, there is no control for size of community or strength of opposition as this would create far too many values. However, each of the communities in the study is one of the larger cities or urban counties in the U.S., and opposition funding is frequently miniscule.

**Rationale:** Effective campaigns require significant expenditures for consultants, research, publicity, media, direct mail, etc. This is particularly true with tax increase initiatives that voters may oppose unless they are confident the funding will have a substantial impact on



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a high priority problem. Because it is often easy for opponents to attract media attention without spending much money, a poorly funded campaign can easily fail.

## 5. Recent initiative experience

**Definition:** Some communities put another tax initiative on the ballot shortly after a preceding effort. Because there is rarely reason to do this if the preceding effort was successful, this typically is done after an unsuccessful prior effort. Documentary analysis and interviews were used to determine whether communities had conducted a transportation tax campaign in the two to three years preceding the election analyzed in the current study.

**Rationale:** The experience of creating a proposal and carrying out a campaign enables supporters of a tax initiative to learn from their mistakes (or successes) and make necessary adjustments to either the transportation package, the campaign strategy, or both in order to prevail the next time around. Some observers believe that voters are more likely to approve of a second proposal after rejecting the first because they feel they are getting a better “deal” from public officials. Communities without such experience are more likely to make major mistakes, typically by proposing overly ambitious projects without adequate grass roots support. In addition, much can be learned about the arguments used by the opposition when a recent prior campaign exists.

## 6. Support from environmental groups

**Definition:** Local environmental groups endorse and/or campaign for the measure and no significant opposition exists from such groups. Interviews with campaign leaders, newspaper and other documentary accounts were used to determine whether such groups provided an unmistakable endorsement for (or against) each community’s proposal.

**Rationale:** Many communities have active environmental groups that endorse and offer support for transportation tax measures; this support can provide a cue for some voters, while its absence can signal political dissension and potentially negative publicity. Opposition by environmental groups of a transit-only measure may seem credible to voters because such groups tend to be perceived as being pro-transit. At the same time, this perceived pro-transit orientation may lessen their credibility as supporters of a transit only ballot measure.

## 7. Multimodal proposal

**Definition:** The tax initiative contains a proposal for funding of more than one mode of transit. (The inclusion of a highway component is considered separately under the next factor, “highway funding.”) Thus, the definition of “multimodal” is a narrow one that essentially considers whether a bus component is included in the package in addition to the substantial rail component that all proposals in this study contain by design. This is determined through review of the proposed legislation, along with supporting discussion with interviewees and review of other documents.

**Rationale:** Multiple modes attract different kinds and groups of voters. Whereas many voters prefer rail transit, many existing transit users are reliant on bus routes that may not be served by future rail routes. In addition, it is much easier to provide benefits throughout a geographic area when a bus component exists. Finally, inclusion of a bus component tends to create more of a challenge for the opposition, which typically focuses its criticism on rail transit.

## 8. Highway funding

**Definition:** Proposal (or companion proposal) contains funding for highway improvements or additions, along with transit elements. This is determined through review of the proposed legislation, along with supporting discussion with interviewees and review of other documents.

**Rationale:** Providing funds for highways helps allay opposition from opponents of transit systems; it is also a way of spreading benefits that may be concentrated in transit systems, thereby broadening potential support. Failure to include funds for highway improvements risks alienating transit nonusers, who are typically a majority.

## 9. Benefits distributed throughout area

**Definition:** The proposal contains provisions for transportation improvements that are dispersed throughout a wide portion of the jurisdiction voting on the measure. In practice, this is generally measured by distinguishing between proposals that focus funding on a specific route or routes from those that would fund a wider swath of routes and other improvements.

**Rationale:** Distributing the traffic relief, transportation, economic and other benefits associated with transportation tax measures helps to broaden the political base of support. Failure to disperse benefits may lead to geographically based pockets of opposition, creating divisions among voters.

## 10. Sunset provision of 20 years or less

**Definition:** Proposal contains a time limit of 20 years or less on the imposition of the tax; this is primarily determined through review of the proposed legislation. *For the current report, 20 years is used as the threshold rather than the 10-year figure in the previous report, because empirically few, if any, projects use such a short timeframe. Essentially, the issue is whether a proposal includes a sunset provision of any kind or duration or not.*

**Rationale:** Voters are more likely to support measures with finite time limits, particularly with rail transit when the community has little or no prior experience with this transit mode. Indefinite tax periods make the measure more vulnerable to opponents' charges of unlimited taxation for the proposal.

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## 11. Extension of existing rail system

**Definition:** The community had a rail line or lines prior to the most recent ballot measure. For this report, we define this to further include communities with rail lines already under construction where it was unclear whether the lines were actually running or not.

**Rationale:** Voters are more likely to support an incremental improvement than creation of a system de novo. Creation of a new system is more vulnerable to opponents' arguments, whereas an existing system can presumably stand as an example of success, or something that voters have already approved.

## 12. Lack of problems with existing transit system

**Definition:** Some transit agencies develop a reputation for poor management (deserved or not), or have been beset by controversy about service levels, routing decisions, empty buses, inefficient use of resources, etc. Of a group of subjective indicators, this one is perhaps the most subjective. To determine whether it was present, the authors relied upon interviews with knowledgeable residents and officials, as well as reviews of newspaper and other documentary accounts.

**Rationale:** Keeping a positive image of competence and efficiency helps instill trust in the electorate. Conversely, any negative publicity can promote lack of trust and provides an easy target for opponents.

## 13. Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package

**Definition:** The extent to which the business community, environmental groups, transit users, citizens, and elected officials are involved in the planning process used to develop the transportation package. Holding public hearings, which is almost always done, is not sufficient or necessary for extensive public participation. However, the use of surveys to make important decisions about the package could constitute extensive citizen involvement. Yet, extensive citizen involvement does not, by itself, constitute extensive participation if other stakeholder groups are not involved.

**Rationale:** Important stakeholders, such as the business community, environmental groups, and elected officials expect to be involved in the process. Because adjustments and compromises to whatever was originally envisioned by supporters may need to be made, it is important to get agreement from relevant groups that the compromise is acceptable before going forward with the package. Systematic input on citizen preferences through surveys obviously is relevant because these populations will eventually express their views through their ballots. At the same time, preferences expressed through surveys may not always be reliable. For example, a survey conducted by Santa Clara County supporters in 2006 indicated very strong support for a measure that was ultimately defeated in a landslide.<sup>9</sup>

#### 14. Congressional or presidential election

**Definition:** A measure is placed on the ballot to coincide with a congressional or presidential election, as opposed to an off-year “special” election.

**Rationale:** Two different rationales exist. First, placing an issue on a special election ballot further isolates the issue, which may enable opponents to garner free publicity for their cause because there are fewer distracting events. Opponents almost invariably need at least moderate coverage of the ballot measure in the news media because they typically have little if any funding available for advertising. Second, transit dependent citizens are likely to support these ballot measures and this segment, as well as other segments likely to support these measures, may be more likely to vote in a general election than in other elections.

#### 15. Consultant with initiative experience

**Definition:** The campaign for the transportation tax measure is managed by a consultant who has successfully managed prior (local) initiative campaigns. (The prior campaign does not necessarily need to be a transportation initiative.) This was determined through interviews with campaign officials and other observers.

**Rationale:** The complex decisions entailed in a tax increase campaign require the judgment of an experienced professional.

#### 16. Use of media

**Definition:** The campaign makes extensive use of both: (a) direct mail advertising that is targeted to selected audiences on the basis of survey research, and (b) television advertising for general audiences. Other means of communication may also be used. Intuitively, this variable is undoubtedly highly correlated with several previous factors. Extensive use of both television and direct mail cannot be made without a sufficient budget and experienced consultants will almost invariably use both direct mail and television advertising when a sufficient budget does exist. Nevertheless, past experience suggests that some campaigns will not use a variety of media and rely too heavily upon one form of media over all others. Evaluation of the presence of this factor was made via interviews with campaign officials and other observers, along with some review of newspaper and other documentary accounts.

**Rationale:** Television advertising helps create general awareness and enables the campaign to publicize its overall message, while targeted direct mail enables focusing on key demographic groups that may “swing” support for the measure. Over reliance on a single medium fails to capitalize on both of these potential strengths; particularly, failure to use direct mail risks an overly broad message that fails to move key demographic groups.

## 17. Unorganized, poorly funded opposition






**Definition:** Opposition to the tax measure is disorganized, under-funded or nonexistent. Given the existence of at least some opposition in early every campaign, a judgment must be made about the effectiveness of such opposition. Whereas using the amount of funds raised by the opposition as a means of classifying cases on this variable is possible as an objective means of classification, it is not a good indicator of the effectiveness of the opposition. The effectiveness has been evaluated using: (a) the degree of effort exerted by the opposition particularly in attempting to get their message heard; (b) their prominence and credibility within the community; and (c) the arguments used.

**Rationale:** Because the opposition almost always has little funding available for advertising, it must rely on grass roots means of communication along with extensive news coverage. These means of communication require both energy and credibility.





## II. CASE STUDIES


In this section of case study narratives, emphasis is placed on evaluating the role played by factors described in the previous section. The following set of symbols is used to characterize whether (a) the condition specified by each factor was present, absent, or inconclusively present and (b) whether the presence or absence of that factor coincided with the outcome speculated to be associated with it. The same symbols are used later in this report to help assemble generalizations about the relationship between each factor and the outcome of transportation tax initiatives.


1.  Condition existed, outcome consistent with expectation.
2.  Condition present, outcome inconsistent with expectation.
3.  Condition absent, outcome consistent with expectation.
4.  Condition outcome inconsistent with expectation.
5.  Condition inconclusively or ambiguously present.


The following examples illustrate the use of these symbols:

In the 2004 Maricopa County case, funding for the pro-transit campaign exceeded one million dollars, and the tax was approved by voters, consistent with the expectation. (“Condition existed, outcome consistent with expectation.”) 

The 2008 St. Louis County election occurred in the context of a Presidential election; however, the measure was not approved by voters. (“Condition present, outcome inconsistent with expectation.”) 

In the 2008 Kansas City case, the transit tax proposal did *not* include a multi-modal component. Consistent with the expectation, the measure lost. (“Condition absent, outcome consistent with expectation.”) 

In the 2007 Charlotte case, there was no sunset provision associated with the tax measure. However, the tax survived the referendum, despite this expectation. (“Condition outcome inconsistent with expectation.”) 

In the 2008 Santa Clara County case, the transit agency (the Valley Transportation Authority) had been issued a negative assessment by an auditor a year or two before the election, but the agency had made strides in improving its service and was enjoying increased ridership. Therefore it is unclear whether the factor of “lack of problems with transit agency” was at play in this case. (“Condition inconclusively or ambiguously present.”) 



## **CASE STUDY 1: MARICOPA COUNTY (2004) – BIG VICTORY FOR AN AMBITIOUS PLAN**

### **Introduction**

In November 2004, voters in Maricopa County, Arizona (including the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area) voted to extend a ½ cent sales tax that had originally been approved by voters in 1985. Unlike the 1985 measure, which entailed almost exclusively spending for highway construction, the 2004 legislation funded a diverse set of multimodal transportation improvements, including light rail construction as well as enhanced bus service and additional freeway construction. Ultimately, Proposition 400 passed by a near-landslide margin of 57 percent in favor.

### **The Transit Package**

The transportation improvements created by the 20-year extension of the ½ cent sales tax for Maricopa County residents was to result in additional estimated revenues of up to \$14.3 billion. Generally, the package was to support projects associated with an existing long-range plan that had been created by the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Maricopa County Association of Governments. However, for the first time, this revenue stream would represent a major commitment to transit projects as well as highways and streets.

Funding was slated to support (1) new construction of or improvements to freeways (56.2 percent), (2) improvements to arterial surface streets (10.5 percent), and to (3) transit, including light rail and bus services (33.3 percent). More specifically with respect to rail transit, the proposal was to fund 57.7 miles of new light rail construction. As a result, this project conformed positively to every “transportation package” factor associated with passage of transportation tax initiatives in the 2001 MTI study.

#### *Multimodal proposal* ↑

In addition to funding construction and improvements of highways and streets, the proposal included the light rail extensions mentioned earlier as well as a new regional bus service. The bus service was to include local, conventional bus rapid transit (BRT) as well as freeway BRT. Voters were presented with a panoply of transportation benefits.

#### *Highway funding* ↑

Voters were presented with significant upgrades to highways and freeways. The highway component included construction of additional 490 lane miles, 530 general-purpose-lane-miles, and 300 lane-miles of high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) widening. Voters who could not envision benefits from transit enhancements were presented with significant benefits for drivers throughout the region. Nevertheless, local newspapers frequently referred to the tax proposal as a “transit tax.”



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***Benefits distributed throughout area*** ↑

Similarly, the package was extremely diverse with respect to the geographic locale of its impact. The road improvements were distributed across a wide swath of the county, including high-profile projects such as a tunnel to relieve congestion at the Scottsdale airport, a major freeway (State Highway 101 “Loop 101”) would be widened and its key interchange with State Highway 202 improved. These locations would present benefits to both the West and East Valley areas of the county, surrounding Phoenix. On the transit side, the projected \$2.3 billion would create express bus service that would link suburban areas to employment centers. The light rail addition, primarily in Tempe, would complement that being constructed in Phoenix, funded by a previous tax approved by residents of that city.

***Sunset provision of 20 years or less*** ↑

Consistent with the measure that it was replacing, the proposal contained a 20-year sunset provision.

***Extension of existing rail system*** ↑

As mentioned earlier, the proposal was to create additions to a rail system that was already under construction in Phoenix. But this was the first time that rail transit would extend into one of the more suburban cities in Maricopa County. Nevertheless, light rail had already won support in two elections within the county, and it is fair to characterize this as an extension rather than as a new system per se.

***Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package*** ↑

The project received considerable input from both transportation leaders, interested stakeholders in the business community. Essentially, the project had already been extensively reviewed by its inclusion in an existing long-range plan that had been created by the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Maricopa County Association of Governments.

**Transit Environment**

Maricopa County is the fourth-most populated county in the U.S., and represents approximately 75 percent of the entire population of the state of Arizona. It includes the major cities of Phoenix, Glendale, Mesa, Chandler, Scottsdale, Gilbert, and Tempe. Regionally, the city of Phoenix had taken the lead by passing a tax increase that had enabled construction of a major new light rail system (documented in the 2001 MTI report).

***Lack of problems with existing transit system*** ↑

Since 1993, “Valley Metro” was the identity associated with all regional transit in Maricopa County. All buses and other transit vehicles share the same logo and color scheme to help create a regional identity that residents can recognize. As a system, Valley Metro, enjoyed a generally positive image, as confirmed by positive votes for transit improvements in

Phoenix (in 2000) and Tempe (1996) in recently preceding years. Additionally, Mesa had passed a “quality of life” half-cent sales tax in 1998, with a small of revenues dedicated to transit, and Glendale had passed a ½ cent tax dedicated for transit in 2001.

### *Congestion “crisis”* ↑

Maricopa County has been one of the fastest growing urban centers in the US for several decades. However, in 2004, Maricopa County was in the middle of a *major* population explosion; between 2000 and 2007, its population grew by nearly 800,000. In 2004, Phoenix metropolitan area subsumed by Maricopa County ranked fifteenth nationally in annual delay due to traffic congestion and fourteenth in costs associated with traffic congestion.<sup>10</sup>

### *Recent initiative experience* ↔

Although as an entire governmental entity Maricopa County had not experienced a transportation tax initiative campaign since 1994, when a ½ cent increase for highway and transit funding was defeated by voters, several key localities and their leaders certainly had. Most importantly, Phoenix, Glendale and Tempe had each successfully launched transit tax campaigns in the eight years preceding the 2004 election for Proposition 400.

## **The Campaign**

The campaign for Proposition 400 received protean support and leadership. Not only did the business community embrace the measure, it assumed a political leadership role that it shared with nearly every major local elected official in the area.

### *Sponsorship by the business community* ↑

The area business community was heavily involved and invested in the proposal. Several kinds of business associations comprised this support, including the local Chambers of Commerce, the Association of General Contractors (AGC), and construction and construction consulting firms. In addition to contributing millions of dollars (as described below), the business community provided political leadership in the form of individuals from these groups who acted in a high-profile capacity during the campaign.

### *Sponsorship by key elected officials* ↑

Political leaders in Maricopa County were generally quite supportive and united in their support for Proposition 400. First, the Proposition was enabled by the efforts of key state legislators who helped pass state legislation authorizing the tax initiative. Mayors of the largest cities in the county, especially that of Phoenix, joined the campaign for passage.

Perhaps the region’s most prominent elected official is the mayor of Phoenix. In 2004, that office had recently passed from Skip Rimsza, who left due to term limitation after 10 years of service, to Phil Gordon. Both were staunch supporters of mass transit and the light rail system. Gordon, however, took something of a backseat in leadership of the pro-Proposition 400 campaign in favor of Rimsza, who had a longer track record as

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an advocate (and perhaps less to lose than the recently elected Gordon). In any event, support for the Proposition was clear and vocal from the region's political leadership.

### *Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)* ↑

Because of the unusually large amount of funds available to the opposition (see section on opposition below), supporters of Proposition 400 probably needed to exceed the \$1 million threshold. Due to the wide-ranging coalition of supporters they had assembled, Proposition 400 supporters were able to garner a vast war chest of over \$4 million.

### *Support from environmental groups* ↑

High profile environmental groups such as The Sierra Club backed the proposal. Of particular note was an enthusiastic endorsement from the local environmental issues association "Valley Forward," which boasts a membership of "large corporations and small businesses, municipalities and government agencies, educators, non-profits and concerned individuals."<sup>11</sup>

### *Consultant with initiative experience* ↑

HighGround Public Affairs Consultants, an Arizona firm that had also successfully assisted with the passage of a variety of local initiatives (including transportation-related ones) was the lead consultant on the campaign. Additional expertise was contributed by David Schwarz, who helped liaison with the local transit community and Alan Wulkan, an experienced transportation initiatives consultant who led local construction consulting engineers.

### *Use of media* ↑

With its enormous campaign fund, the supporters' campaign was able to invest in a massive infusion of advertising, including direct mail and broadcast media outlets. The media message focused on melding the need for both road and transit improvements. The overall strategy was to impress upon voters that transit and roads were "married and worked well together."<sup>12</sup>

### *Unorganized, poorly funded opposition* ↓

Although the opposition could be characterized as less than well organized, it was certainly not poorly funded. An individual opponent that was fiercely and specifically opposed to the light rail portion of the proposal wrote two separate \$1 million checks to fund a barrage of commercials on television and other media. That alone made opposition to this measure one of the most heavily funded on record, and it forced the supporters to raise far more than the typical campaign might have been expected to. That being said, the opposition did not create an organized, grassroots campaign – it focused on media spots.

## Evaluation

This election seems to pose a textbook example of an alignment of factors that would portend a successful outcome, so the convincing victory (57 percent in favor) of Proposition 400 comes as little surprise. Indeed, of the 17 factors associated with electoral success identified in the 2001 MTI report, 15 were solidly in place in manner consistent with success for the supporters' campaign. Only two factors were either ambiguous (recent initiative experience) or anomalous (lack of a well-funded opposition).

Of those two, as the earlier discussion suggests, one could even make the case that collectively, officials in Maricopa *did* have sufficient recent experience with the imitative campaign process to succeed. Moreover, the lack of a well-funded opposition in this instance, notable by the sheer amount of the opponent's campaign fund (at least \$2 million) might have helped to enable defeat at the polls, had the supporters not marshaled more than twice that amount from their own well-organized and broad-based support in the community.

With an area hard-hit by population growth and traffic congestion, a well-funded, high-profile campaign blessed with visible political leadership, and a transportation package that presented tangible benefits throughout the region, Proposition 400 turned out to be a slam dunk.

## **CASE STUDY 2: PROPOSITION 1 IN SOUND TRANSIT DISTRICT (2007) – A SOUND INVESTMENT?**

### Introduction

The 2000 MTI study included an analysis of a transit tax initiative that passed in Seattle in 1996; this case study returns to the Seattle area to examine a failed 2007 measure. As the 2000 study chronicled, after failing to pass an ambitious, hurried, multimodal proposal in a special election in 1995, in 1996, the voters of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (RTA) district passed a more modest (\$3.6 billion) and regionally balanced proposal containing commuter rail, express bus service, improvements to HOV lanes, and light rail. This package, deemed "Sound Move," is funded by sales and motor vehicle excise tax increases.

In the years between 1996's "Sound Move" and 2007's Proposition 1, a number of important events occurred. Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority, (encompassing parts of King, Pierce and Snohomish Counties) transitioned to the popular designation "Sound Transit" (ST) with the ST express bus series launch in the late 1990s. Sound Transit's initial light rail build (Central Link, connecting downtown Seattle to Tukwila) ran well over budget and behind schedule and was forced to undergo a controversial revised cost estimate and downsizing process in 2001.<sup>13</sup>

Backlash to Sound Transit's perceived mismanagement was severe enough to incite a 2002 vote in favor of capping Vehicle Excise Taxes at \$30. This provision posed a threat to 20 percent of Sound Transit's budget, but was ruled unconstitutional and unenforceable in

early 2003.<sup>14</sup> Also in 2002, the Washington State Legislature passed ESSB 6140 creating the Regional Transit Investment District (RTID) to develop roads improvement proposals for the counties whose urban areas comprise the Sound Transit District.<sup>15</sup>

The cost of the full Central Link route approached \$5 billion in 2007, with the initial segment not set to open until 2009. In the context of previous questionable finances and not fully financed proposals contained within, Proposition 1, which would have represented the largest tax increase ever in the state of Washington, was greeted by a skeptical electorate and defeated 45 percent to 55 percent.

## The Transit Package

The 2006 Washington State Legislature required RTID to work in partnership with Sound Transit beginning in June 2006 to jointly submit a comprehensive transportation and highway plan to voters in the November 2007 election, essentially combining two ballot measures under one proposition title. Sound Transit primarily developed plans for 50 miles of new light rail services and park-and-ride facilities under the project title “Sound Transit 2–Making Connections.” RTID focused on 186 miles of highway expansions, including HOV lanes and improvements to the pivotal 520 floating bridge connecting Seattle and Medina under the project title “RTID Blueprint for Progress.” The resulting package, nicknamed “Roads and Transit,” amassed a base cost of \$18 billion in 2006 dollars, including nearly \$10.8 billion for Sound Transit’s Link Light Rail.<sup>16</sup> The projects would be funded by a combined  $\frac{6}{10}$  of a cent sales tax increase and an increased, universal vehicle excise tax of \$80 for every \$10,000 of vehicle value for a projected period of 20 years. The remaining financing relied on state and federal government grants, and matching funds non-withstanding did not account for \$1.5 billion of the projected cost.<sup>17</sup>

### *Multimodal proposal*

The package included \$40 million for route expansion and service increases of Sound Transit Express Bus in King County, which includes Seattle. An additional \$15.5 million would have been allocated to community buses or vanpools in Snohomish County. While the package was technically multimodal, the lion’s share (or over \$10 billion) was to be dedicated to light rail construction.

### *Highway funding*

King County population centers Seattle and Bellevue are primarily connected by the Evergreen Point Bridge, known as the “520 Bridge” to local residents. Spanning Lake Washington, it is the longest floating bridge in the world and a primary point of congestion in the Puget Sound region. Improvement to this highway structure was the marquee project of the RTID Blueprint for Progress, which also included a number of smaller highway widening and expansion measures for regional choke points. Despite its prominence as a congestion point, improvement to the 520 Bridge was one of only three of RTID’s projects in Proposition 1 to not receive a full financing plan, with a \$1.315 billion shortfall predicted in 20-year cost. In sum, this package contained extensive highway funding plans, although



the way these funds were allocated may have had a significantly negative impact on the package's prospects.

### *Benefits distributed throughout area*

Sound Transit and RTID developed the package under the governing principle of “sub-area equity,”<sup>18</sup> meaning that tax revenue generated ought to be spent in the county in which it was raised. Seattle and Bellevue are located in King County, and would have been among the largest contributors of both sales tax and vehicle excise tax revenue within the Sound Transit District. In terms of number and dollar value, King County was to receive the greatest portion of projects. The benefits of this package would have been distributed equitably throughout Sound Transit District in both per capita effort to deliver congestion relief and a diverse array of light rail and highway projects serving population dense areas.

### *Sunset provision of 20 years or less*

While estimated to collect over a 20-year period, Proposition 1 contained no official sunset provision. The Proposition was written so as to allow decreases in the sales tax collection rate if rail tax collection ran ahead of this 20-year schedule, and subjected roads expenditures of greater than 20 percent cost overrun to a revote by the electorate or approval of all three affected county councils. Before the depths of the current recession, there was speculation that Sound Transit would be running surpluses by 2035 and its governing board would be able to rollback sales tax rates.<sup>19</sup>

### *Extension of existing rail systems*

Sound Transit's initial Central Link Light Rail line connecting downtown Seattle to Tukwila (near the airport) was not set to open until 2009, in accordance with 2001 revised cost estimates.<sup>20</sup> While this package entailed an extension of light rail, no part of the light rail system was in operation at the time of the vote. With just three-quarters of heavy construction having been completed a month before the November 2007 election and a train parked outside a new maintenance facility in the months leading to the vote, this factor was only inconclusively present.

### *Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package*

Sound Transit and RTID both worked extensively to incorporate public and targeted stakeholder input into development of their packages prior to and after combining forces. Each collected public comment via surveys, letters, community meetings and hearings in developing a slate of priority projects. Seattle professional sports teams and major corporations were involved in discussions of light rail access to their facilities. Planning and transportation agencies of the effected counties contributed to the engineering and design work of the proposal. This was a comprehensive five-year process.

## Transit Environment

The Seattle area is consistently ranked among the world's most livable regions. At the time of the 1996 light rail vote, the Seattle urban area population was 2,570,000. In 2007, it was 3,100,000 – a 20 percent increase. Congestion grew steadily and the numerous bridges spanning the Puget Sound experienced increased strain and rates of dilapidation, which left one with an “extremely unsafe” rating.

In addition to arguments in favor of bridge and highway improvements, Seattle had a series of votes pertaining to a “doomed” (inadequately financed) monorail system in the early and mid-2000s.<sup>21</sup> The region was already familiar with pro-transit discourse by the time of the 2007 vote, therefore, but had also suffered a series of false starts in this regard.

### *Lack of problems with existing transit system* ↓

Sound Transit was the subject of various forms of controversy in the months leading up to the 2007 election. A Title VI Compliance Review dated February 2005 found that Sound Transit lacked standards of transit access and failed to measure impacts of service change on predominately minority communities. In January 2006, a citizen oversight panel proposed calculations for operation and maintenance inflation projections to be accounted for in Proposition 1 projects.<sup>22</sup> Sound Transit used lower than recommended inflation presumptions, which contributed to a well-publicized dispute over the true cost of the package. While a number of news articles from the time indicate a sense of growing faith in Sound Transit since the RTA board's appointment of CEO Joni Earl in 2001, several contain a lingering question of citizen trust in the system.

### *Congestion “crisis”* ↑

Measurements for traffic congestion decreased somewhat in the Seattle area from the mid-1990s to the late 1990s, but were on the rise once again by the early 2000s. By 2007, total Congestion Cost for the Seattle urban area had risen to \$1.59 billion, earning it 15th highest ranking in the U.S.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the term “crisis” may only be most applicable to the conditions of certain key highway segments connecting larger cities, the sentiments of several Seattle area interviewees coupled with the State Legislature's action creating RTID to specifically address traffic in the Puget Sound Region tend to confirm the existence of a “crisis” mentality in the area.

### *Recent initiative experience* ↑

This was the Seattle region's fifteenth vote on a transportation-related measure in a dozen years.<sup>24</sup> Many of the same legislators, consultants and business community players involved in the Proposition 1 campaign were active in supporting Referendum 51 in 2002, a nine cent per gallon gas tax to fund highway construction, which likewise failed after an aggressive campaign. Another possible priming mechanism was at issue in 2006, when the Seattle Department of Transportation successfully spearheaded the “Bridging the Gap” initiative. This levy included some funding for transportation (increased bus hours), and roads and pedestrian projects (i.e., bicycle master plan, street resurfacing).

The region's pro-transit establishment was familiar with the initiative process, and its citizens relatively well versed in transportation discourse, which previous research has suggested correlates with increased chances of success. However, in the case of the Seattle region, it appears a long and spotty history in this regard may have been more harm than help.

## The Campaign

Proposition 1 was one of few measures on the 2007 ballot. As it was the most closely contested item, it drew extensive coverage from local media. Polling from June 2007 indicated that 57 percent of voters supported the measure, and that the two packages polled better together than separately.<sup>25</sup> During summer 2007, the political action committee "Keep Washington Rolling" formed with the aim of raising several million dollars to funnel into the "Yes on Roads and Transit" campaign. The campaign was successful in forming a broad coalition, but lost at least one crucial group to well-funded opposition forces.

### *Sponsorship by the business community*

The Puget Sound area business community was almost uniformly in support of Proposition 1. Microsoft Corporation and its executives contributed \$500,000 to the Yes on Roads and Transit campaign.<sup>26</sup> Notably, one of the proposed light rail builds featured a terminus near Microsoft's main campus and a number of the highway projects would have eased the commutes of Microsoft employees. As was the case in 1996, major regional employer and business leader Boeing contributed a significant sum. Regional banking leader Washington Mutual lent its support. The Seattle Mariners organization also gave generously to the Yes on Roads and Transit campaign. Nearly every Chamber of Commerce located within Sound Transit District and several Labor Councils endorsed the measure.

MTI's prior research has suggested that a nearly unanimous vote of confidence and unmatched funds from the business community have been driving forces in the success in a number of light rail elections. However, this case demonstrates the influence one voice of dissent among the business community may assert. Eastside King County developer Kemper Freeman – a man with an acknowledged, longstanding vendetta against light rail – despised one proposed light rail project enough to dedicate his efforts and considerable resources to organizing opposition in defeating this package.

### *Sponsorship by key elected officials*


While Proposition 1 received a broad base of political support, an accompanying depth of conviction or belief in the package was not evident. As early as April, legislators of both parties at the state and local level expressed doubts as to the cost-effectiveness, financing and timeliness of certain Proposition 1 projects. Sound Transit board chairman and Pierce County Executive John Ladenburg's response was that the package "was in good shape."<sup>27</sup> Joint Sound Transit board member and RTID board member King County Councilmember Julia Patterson had worked in developing the package over five years and was among its few ardent supporters. While the vast majority of area political leaders supported the "Roads and Transit" package, King County Councilmember and supporter



Jane Hague may have best captured the general sentiment surrounding Proposition 1 in stating, “We sort of view it as an ugly baby, but it’s the best baby we’ve got.”<sup>28</sup>

One key elected official, former Sound Transit board chairman and known light rail proponent King County Executive Ron Sims, surprised everyone by submitting an opinion editorial to the *Seattle Times* titled “The roads-and-transit plan: so much cost to do so little.” He wrote, “While containing some good projects, this plan doesn’t solve traffic congestion in the short term, nor does it provide enough long-term relief to justify the financial and environmental costs.”<sup>29</sup> One project he and the Sierra Club attacked was a proposed light rail line with projected trip duration longer than commuter rail and bus services in the same corridor. Sims later partnered with the Sierra Club, giving an encouraging speech to their leaflet-spreading volunteers.<sup>30</sup>

The depth of opposition from one key source may have greatly contributed to counteracting the lackluster support of the majority. Moreover, the measure appeared to lack a high visibility champion among the ranks of its elected supporters.

*Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)* 

Yes on Roads and Transit raised and spent nearly \$5 million, outspending opposition by a margin of greater than 6:1 and greatly exceeding the threshold total of \$1 million.

Top contributors included:

- Washington Association of Realtors: \$300,000
- Microsoft Corp.: \$300,000
- The Boeing Co.: \$175,000
- Laborers International Union: \$155,000
- Operating Engineers Union locals: \$135,000
- Bill Gates, Microsoft chairman: \$100,000
- Steve Ballmer, Microsoft CEO: \$100,000
- Washington Mutual, Inc.: \$100,000
- Seattle Mariners: \$89,000
- Washington State Labor Council: \$60,000

Notably, opposition groups raised approximately \$800,000—a far greater amount than the typical election of this type.<sup>31</sup>

### *Support from environmental groups* ↓

The pro-rail coalition included some of the Seattle area's progressive, pro-environment groups, but the Cascade Chapter of the Sierra Club, the Cascade Bicycle Club and Conservation Northwest took positions against the measure.<sup>32</sup> Of these, the Sierra Club was most active in opposing Proposition 1, its leaders engaging in a number of public forums debating the ill effects of increased carbon emissions as a result of proposed highway expansions. Possible evidence of the effect of this opposition: an exit poll indicated that at least 6 percent of Sound Transit District voters opposed Proposition 1 due primarily to global warming concerns, creating a unique bloc of "pro-transit defectors."<sup>33</sup>

### *Consultant with initiative experience* ↑

The Yes on Roads and Transit Campaign utilized a number of consultants who had worked at all levels of government, including several media and policy consultants with experience in previous Seattle area transportation initiatives.

### *Use of media* ↑

Due to these incredible fundraising efforts, both Proposition 1 proponents and opponents were able to afford far-reaching campaigns. Both ran television and radio ads, distributed leaflets or mailers, printed lawn signs and engaged in numerous public discussions which were attended by reporters of the major local news papers and filmed to be posted on YouTube. As Yes on Roads and Transit spokesperson Aaron Toso stated, "the Washington way is to allow for a lot of debate."<sup>34</sup>

Yes on Roads and Transit television spots featured "everyday people" sharing stories of congestion problems that would be lessened by the passage of Proposition 1. Targeted television ads and mailers were distributed to different sub-areas of Sound Transit District relating how specific highway and light rail projects in the immediate vicinity would ease a citizen's commute. Increased safety on improved roads was another key message of Proposition 1 proponents.

### *Unorganized, poorly funded opposition* ↓

Opposition to Proposition 1 came from three major citizen groups: Citizens Against RTID, Neighbors Opposing Proposition 1 and [NoToProp1.org](http://NoToProp1.org). [NoToProp1.org](http://NoToProp1.org) led and coordinated opposition efforts, and was formed by independently wealthy Mark Baerwaldt, former proponent of extending Seattle's monorail and former party to a lawsuit against Sound Transit. He pledged nearly \$200,000 of his own money to defeating Proposition 1.<sup>35</sup> East Side developer and road advocate Kemper Freeman contributed more than \$210,000 to [NoToProp1.org](http://NoToProp1.org) through two of his companies.<sup>36</sup> The two did not know each other prior to summer 2007, but were able to work together in coordinating anti-tax messages, advertisements and public appearances, with Baerwaldt serving as treasurer and spokesman and Freeman appearing in debates.

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The NoToProp1 campaign was able to partner in opposition with the Sierra Club and provide printed materials to its volunteers, creating an unlikely coalition of pro-roads/anti-transit and anti-roads/pro-transit forces that felt Proposition 1 did not contain a proper balance of projects, and at too high an overall cost, but for different reasons.

In sum, Proposition 1 faced a much better-funded and well-organized opposition than do most transit tax campaigns.

### *Congressional or presidential election* ↓

The 2007 Puget Sound election was technically a general election, but this was the most closely contended item featured on a short ballot. A large body of research indicates that off-year, non-presidential elections tend to yield lower overall voter turnout, along with higher turnout among older, more conservative voters. However, campaign leaders did not concern themselves with this factor, as the package was essentially ordered to the November 2007 ballot by the Washington State Legislature.

### **Summation of Factors**

The failure of the Proposition 1 (2007) in the Sound Transit District occurred despite the presence of the following factors generally associated with success from the 2001 MTI study:

- Congestion “crisis”
- Extensive stakeholder support in development of package
- Benefits distributed throughout area
- Multimodal proposal
- Highway funding
- Recent initiative experience
- Sponsorship by the business community
- Consultant with initiative experience
- Use of media
- Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)
- The effect of one factor in this case was ambiguously, or inconclusively present:
  - Extension of existing rail system

The following factors, associated with passage in earlier research, did not accompany Proposition 1, and are consistent with the failed result:

- Sponsorship by key elected officials
- Support from environmental groups
- Lack of problems with existing transit system
- Unorganized, poorly funded opposition
- Sunset provision of 20 years or less
- Congressional or presidential election

This culminates to a total of ten anomalously present conditions, one ambiguous condition and six factors that were consistent with their expected outcomes.

## **Evaluation**

When asked why Proposition 1 failed, Seattle area interviewees uniformly stated, “It was too big.” The comprehensive package, which would not have seen its 50 miles of light rail completed for decades, would have represented the largest local tax increase ever in Washington State. The loss of Sierra Club support and the unforeseen opposition from respected transit advocate King County Executive Ron Sims also appear to have harmed Proposition 1. The conflict over underlying financial assumptions creating a media stir and a lack of financing for pivotal projects also appears to have hurt the prospects for passage.

The fact that the vote came in an off-year election, which tend to yield higher turnout among older, more economically conservative voters, was also mentioned by some sources. As a caveat to this case study, Sound Transit returned to the ballot in 2008 (free of its legislated obligation to RTID) and was able to ride the progressive wave of candidate Barack Obama, particularly among younger voters, to an easy victory of a more modest, strictly transit package. (For a further discussion of this vote see the Rebound Election section.)

## **CASE STUDY 3: CHARLOTTE GROWLS AT ATTEMPTED REPEAL (2007)**

### **Introduction**

MTI’s 2001 study detailed the 1998 vote of Charlotte and surrounding Mecklenburg County that approved a ½ cent sales tax increase to fund the city’s “2025 Transit/Land Use Plan.” Since 1998 the plan, created Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC) has established strategies for smart growth and transit planning in the region, with operations and maintenance carried out by Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS), a department of the City of Charlotte created to replace the city Department of Transportation in 2000. Transit program approval and budgetary authority ultimately fall to both the Charlotte City Council and the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners. Transit projects falling under the

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purview of the tax include light rail (dubbed LYNX in accordance with the region's big cat theme and in promotion of connectivity), commuter rail, street cars, bus rapid transit (BRT) and expansion of existing bus services along five corridors affirmed by the MTC in 2006. The "2030 Transit Corridor System Plan" was written in 2006 as an update to the "2025 Transit/Land Use Plan." The renaming of the transit investment plan reflects the indefinite nature of this tax increase and its failing to generate an originally projected \$1 billion by 2025 – key points of discontentment for opponents of public transit in Charlotte.

- As early as 2000, objections were raised that the MTC was allocating too much funding for light rail projects. In October of that year, nationally active anti-rail consultant Wendell Cox gave a speech in Charlotte as to the implausibility of the city achieving all its transit goals with its \$1 billion target.<sup>37</sup> This helped trigger a financial review of proposed projects and a shift in designation from the "2025 Plan" to the "2030 Plan."

Construction of the first light rail segment, the South Corridor Line, ran well over budget and behind schedule, helping fuel the contention that Charlotte's light rail system is not as cost-effective as other smart growth alternatives allowed by the 2030 Plan. In the spring of 2007, a local activist used his own funds to pay National Voter Outreach to collect the roughly 49,000 required to qualify a referendum repealing the tax on the November ballot. Later that year, the pro-repeal group Sensible Charlotte Area Transportation (SCAT) was somewhat successful in stirring community unrest over the merits of continued light rail construction.

While the repeal measure initially written off as the efforts of a fringe movement, it gained enough traction over the summer of 2007 to pull within a threatening distance, with most (unscientific) polls by October 2007 indicating just over half of Charlotte-Mecklenburg residents were in favor of keeping the tax. Thus the referendum's November's defeat by 40 percentage points was surprising to all.

### **The Transit Package**

In 2000, the Parsons Transportation Group was awarded a \$5.8 million contract to perform engineering and environmental studies, and begin planning of stations and transit-oriented development housing for what would be the first light rail system in Charlotte, excluding an historic streetcar serving a less than two mile route.<sup>38</sup> The final plan was originally scheduled for adoption by 2003 and operation of the light rail system set to begin as early as 2005. However, a series of setbacks, including community concerns that centered around a lack of parking and bike storage in early station proposals and delays in finalization of agreements in federal and state matching funds, resulted in delay in adoption a final plan by the MTC until November 2006.

The first segment of LYNX light rail (the South Corridor, or Blue Line) was set to begin operations in late November 2007, at a final cost of \$521.85 million, an overrun of the 2006-adjusted \$462.7 million estimated cost.<sup>39</sup>

### *Multimodal proposal* ↑

Implementation plans from 2004 indicate desired establishment of light rail, commuter rail, or bus rapid transit services along each of the five corridors by 2012 with streetcar services to expand by 2025.<sup>40</sup> The 2030 Transit Corridor System Plan's revisions include delayed implementation of a planned streetcar loop for Center City, and noted the MTC's decision to delay and further consider if the Southeast Corridor would receive BRT or LRT services (CATS). By 2007, existing bus services had been dramatically expanded and the first light rail line was nearly complete, but the vast majority of planned projects had yet to commence.

### *Highway funding* ⇔

The MTC may dedicate sales tax revenues for high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, but highway widening is not among the priority projects of 2030 Transit Corridor System Plan, based on the belief that HOV lanes do not directly stimulate land use intensification to the degree of other projects allowed by the plan. As this package was crafted and promoted with public transit as the focus, therefore, the effect of theoretical highway funding is at best only ambiguously present.

### *Benefits distributed throughout area* ↑

The five planned corridors connect a seven county region, creating a greater than 20 mile ring around Charlotte. The five proposed lines come from every direction to converge in central Charlotte locations. Lines would connect jurisdictions of four metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and could serve upward of 1.5 million residents.<sup>41</sup> Future expansions of rail service are planned to University of North Carolina (UNC) Charlotte's University City and Charlotte/Douglas International Airport. Theoretically, at least, this package is intended to spread service and economic benefits across the region.

### *Sunset provision of 20 years or less* ↓

This tax has no official sunset. The ½ cent increase was originally projected to generate enough revenue to complete all projects by 2025, and then 2030, but it is presently unknown when this tax will cease collecting. At present, the tax generates revenues of approximately \$120 million annually,<sup>42</sup> more than enough to keep the existing system elements in operation, but not necessarily allowing for timely new construction.<sup>43</sup>

### *Extension of existing rail system* ⇔

In 1996, the city of Charlotte experimented with a resurrection of streetcar services along Norfolk Southern track. Ridership led CATS to continue streetcar service and purchase new rolling stock. The first light rail line is along the same corridor, which necessitated a temporary halt in streetcar services, but the two services now share LYNX tracks. As the South Corridor Line is a much longer route than the less than two-mile streetcar line, this could be considered an extension of exiting rail, but the effects of this factor are somewhat ambiguous.



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### *Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package* ↑

MTI's 2001 study noted that in 1994, Charlotte's Planning Commission convened a "Committee of 100" civic leaders to generate stakeholder input in development of the 2025 Transit/Land Use Plan. The group contributed to the identification of five key transit corridors and offered suggestions for improved and increased services. By 1997, the group's proposed one cent sales tax increase was deemed infeasible and this committee's membership dwindled to ten elected officials and business leaders who ultimately succeeded in getting the 1998 sales tax increase on the ballot. While the committee disbanded shortly after the 1998 vote, stakeholder input pertaining to station design and accessibility were among the factors contributing to construction delays in the years leading to the repeal vote. Thus the original package was associated with extensive participation; the repeal effort emerged from the efforts of relatively few individuals.

### **Transit Environment**

Charlotte is a relatively low-density (2,515.7/sq mi) area characterized by urban sprawl. Interests in the region feature several advocates of expansion of existing roadways and improved traffic signals over further public transit investment. In the months leading up to the November 2007 vote, the conservative research group The John Locke Foundation published a number of articles revealing what it characterized as egregious federal earmarks for this project. This, coupled with low rates of expected use, contributed to a growing sense among some observers that perhaps light rail transit was not the right solution for Charlotte.

### *Lack of problems with existing transit system* ↓

Charlotte had a bus system in existence before the 1998 tax increase, but the bus system pre-sales tax was small and in disrepair. By 2007, roughly 65 percent of the 2030 Plan-dedicated sales tax revenue funneled into the much-improved bus system, featuring better stops and signage, and a fleet of 497 buses and vans.<sup>44</sup> Also indicative of an upward trend; the system has received statewide acclaim for paratransit services every year beginning in 2007.<sup>45</sup> However, in August 2007 (months before the vote), the *Charlotte Observer* ran an article stating that system ridership had increased 66 percent since 1998, but at an 170 percent increased operating budget, calling to question the efficiency of a system in which costs were growing at a faster rate than income.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, CATS had to contend with the negative publicity generated by the cost overruns and fiscal underperformance associated with the tax measure that resulted in the repeal effort. In the final analysis, the very existence of the repeal referendum created significant problems with popular perceptions of the transit system, although that impression may have ultimately proved to be illusory.

### *Congestion "crisis"* ↑

Texas Transportation Institute data indicate that the notable congestion situation noted in the 2001 MTI study worsened steadily between 1997 and 2007. Over this period, the Charlotte urban area population rose from 720,000 to over 1,070,000, and its Travel Time

Index rose from 1.16 to 1.25, moving Charlotte from 38<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> ranked in the country. The area's Total Annual Delay rose by over 260 percent over the same period. Perhaps most startling, the calculated Congestion Cost (an estimation of productivity value and excess fuel consumption lost to delays) leapt from \$140 million in 1997 to \$525 million in 2007.<sup>47</sup> Beyond this statistical evidence, interviewees articulated that a sense of frustration among Charlotteans existed concerning traffic patterns, commuting times, and other reflections of pervasive congestion, their support for additional transit system components notwithstanding.

## Political Environment

The City of Charlotte is governed by a council-manager system, but as the only citywide elected executive official, the mayor wields significant political leadership. In November 2007, Republican Mayor Pat McCrory, the popular light rail proponent that was instrumental to passage of the 1998 tax increase, was reelected to a record seventh term. General election challenges in the interim were based in anti-rail issue campaigns, and his challenger in the September 2007 Republican primary likewise tried to make rail the centerpiece of the mayoral election debate. As the Democratic challenger that November was also pro-rail, the mayor did not champion the issue to the same extent as he had previously, while remaining a supporter of public transit.

Mecklenburg County is governed by a nine-member County Commission. Republicans on the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners were among the strongest proponents of repealing the transit tax. Their October 2006 attempt to consider a repeal referendum was stifled by the Democratic majority of the board, who felt this move was premature and an over-reaction to the latest bout of cost overruns.<sup>48</sup>

### *Recent initiative experience*

Charlotte had not experienced a tax campaign since the last, successful one in 1998 and was therefore lacking this kind of experience. More specific to the special status of this case, citizen-led referenda in Mecklenburg County or elsewhere in North Carolina in the years leading up to the repeal vote were unprecedented. Citizen led efforts are uncommon in North Carolina, which had its first proposal allowing for initiatives amending the state constitution on the November 2010 ballot.

## The Campaign

Jay Morrison, a wealthy software engineer and Republican activist, applied his background in Florida politics (where citizen-led initiatives are much more common) to Charlotte. He almost single-handedly brought about the "Stop the Train" petition drive. In March of 2007, he paid for political consulting firm National Voter Outreach to collect the verifiable signatures of 48,669 county voters. At the end of March, when the drive was near completion, Morrison told supporters he did not want credit for the measure, and was quoted, "I'm done with this. You can't make me talk about it."<sup>49</sup> By this time he was contemplating a run for school board, and would only offer the following statement:



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We have misplaced priorities in Mecklenburg. We need to redirect our limited resources to building schools. Light rail is wasting billions of dollars at a time when Dr. Peter Gorman says he needs \$2.5 billion for schools. I would say that our resources need to be redirected away from light rail and instead we should spend those dollars on new school construction.<sup>50</sup>

*Unorganized, poorly funded opposition* ⇔

Over the course of the summer of 2007, the loosely organized group Sensible Charlotte Area Transportation (SCAT) held a small number of community talks, some of them led by UNC Charlotte Transportation Engineering Professor David Hartgen. Hartgen was a member of the “Committee of 100” contributing to the development of the 2025 plan, and had then advocated for a sunset or trigger mechanism of the tax to measure its effectiveness. By 2007, he was of the belief that the MTC and CATS were allocating too much money for light rail and were not implementing alternatives that could have been more effective in alleviating traffic congestion. His critiques were funded and distributed by the conservative John Locke Foundation, which also financed a pro-repeal speech by light rail critic Randal O’Toole and produced a series of online articles condemning the system.<sup>51</sup>

Other leaders of the repeal movement were former Charlotte Councilmember Don Reid and Mecklenburg County Commissioner Jim Puckett. The former was a frequent critic of public spending and the latter had received an \$11,000 campaign contribution from Morrison.<sup>52</sup> The majority of their influence came in the form of comments published in the region’s major newspaper, *The Charlotte Observer*. Additionally, State Senator Robert Pittenger, R-Mecklenburg, produced a TV spot questioning spending money on light rail before completing “crucial road projects.”

In July 2007, Morrison requested access to all of Mayor McCrory’s and the City Council’s emails on the subject of the transit tax. *Charlotte Observer* articles from the time indicate that the request irked the mayor. Within a week, the *Observer* revealed that Jay Morrison had come into his wealth as a serial litigator, and was involved in a shady credit scheme. The accusations led Morrison to drop his bid for school board and eventually to leave Charlotte.

Of note, an early *Observer* analysis of submitted signatures found them to be disproportionately from Democrats, women and African Americans. It was somewhat puzzling why these typically socioeconomically disadvantaged groups (who theoretically would stand to gain most from a public transit system) would be for a repeal process led by wealthy, white Republican men. It was later reported that many of the signature collectors went about asking voters to “sign this petition to lower the sales tax” and provided no explanation as to the specific ramifications of that action.<sup>53</sup>

Pro-repeal forces were weakly connected and leaderless after Jay Morrison walked away from the effort he began. Without a champion, the pro-repeal message quickly dwindled in public discourse on the issue. The campaign from anti-rail activists lost momentum over the course of summer 2007, and secured only \$12,000 in almost entirely individual contributions. Apart from a series of blogs and articles featured on The John Locke Foundation website, SCAT did not appear to have maintained a unified or officially coordinated presence.

In sum, this unique, from the standpoint of transit tax measures, election featured an opposition that was strong enough to qualify a repeal measure for the ballot and yet virtually dissolved by the time of the actual campaign for the repeal referendum.

### **The Anti-Repeal/Pro-Transit Campaign**

In March 2007, realizing that a repeal vote was imminent, Mayor McCrory demanded that CATS present scenarios to the City Council detailing the effects of repeal. These alternatives effectively communicated that a repeal of the sales tax increase would lead to a likely increase in property taxes to maintain service levels, and could threaten the county's credit rating, possibly leading to a repayment of state and federal funds and increasing the cost of future borrowing.<sup>54</sup>

The Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, which ran the 1998 campaign detailed in the 2001 MTI study, took responsibility for its own lack of public information efforts leading to unrest in 2007.<sup>55</sup> The Chamber ran the aggressive "Vote Against Repeal" campaign in partnership with members of the Charlotte City Council. As in 1998, the group succeeded in crafting a multifaceted pro-rail coalition.

According to the senior vice president of public policy with the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber committed a disservice in not making a public education effort after leading the 1998 campaign. The economic boom of the early 2000s invariably impacted the final cost of construction projects whose estimates were drawn in the mid-1990s. As the original 2025 plan did not include specific routes or account for construction of pedestrian bridges and automobile accommodations, cost projections and delays continually increased in the years leading up to the repeal vote.

#### *Sponsorship by the business community* ↑

As noted in the 2001 study, Charlotte is one of the nation's largest banking centers. Bank of America and Wachovia, as well as other banks with downtown locations, are regarded as critical voices in the local business community. Each donated \$60,000 to the Vote Against Repeal Committee, leading a coalition of businesses that also represented the construction, hospitality and utilities industries.<sup>56</sup>

Additionally, local businesses provided volunteers to speak about the expected benefits of economic connectivity. The Chamber did not host any of its own events, instead maintaining a presence at every park festival and local church barbeque leading up to the election.<sup>57</sup> By limiting spending on personnel costs, the Vote Against Repeal Campaign was able to launch a series of targeted campaigns that employed various media.

#### *Sponsorship by key elected officials* ↑

Largely in response to the number of African Americans signing the petition to repeal, African American leaders in Charlotte-Mecklenburg banded together to form the African American Coalition Against Transit Tax Repeal.<sup>58</sup> The Black Political Caucus of Charlotte-Mecklenburg came out in favor of keeping the transit tax, and popular former Charlotte

Mayor Harvey Gantt delivered speeches to predominately African American communities, campaigning for the “bigger picture” benefits of public transit. The message, presented in more human terms, was this tax supports bus systems heavily relied upon by minority communities and is a key to economic and social mobility.

While not as fervent a supporter as in 1998, Mayor McCrory did reaffirm his pro-rail stance. He was assisted by Charlotte City Councilmember Pat Mumford, chair of the Vote Against the Repeal Committee. The majority of both the Charlotte Council and Mecklenburg Board of Commissioners were anti-repeal. A small number of state legislators representing Mecklenburg County were in favor of repeal, but were not as visible or vocal as Mumford.

### *Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)* ↓

Big businesses funneled \$600,000 dollars into the pro-rail media blitz in the weeks immediately preceding the repeal vote. Of note, CATS contractors Siemens (\$50,000), Parsons Brinkerhoff (\$30,000) and construction management firm STV (\$30,000) all provided substantial contributions in protecting their interests.<sup>59</sup>

While this is definitely a significant sum, particularly when compared to the approximately \$12,000 raised by repeal-advocates, it is not near enough the \$1,000,000 threshold for the condition of excessive fundraising to be considered met. However, the fact that this election was a repeal referendum and not an initiative – and the apparently diminished profile of the opposition – may have relaxed the need to raise more funds.

### *Support from environmental groups* ↑

One targeted campaign entailed reaching out to the North Carolina Sierra Club. The Chamber of Commerce did not have an existing relationship with the environmental community, which may often be demonstrably in conflict with business interests. By emphasizing the air quality improvements that light rail was expected to achieve, the Chamber attained the buy-in of the Sierra Club and was able to assist it in crafting an Anti-Repeal message to disseminate to its constituents.<sup>60</sup>

### *Consultant with initiative experience* ↑

Councilmember Mumford was instrumental in hiring R&R Partners to construct a television campaign for the anti-repeal effort. This public strategies group was chosen for having led a successful transit campaign in Salt Lake City in 2000.

### *Use of media* ↑

According to campaign leaders, the Vote Against Repeal Committee ran a series of television commercials from September onward urging voters to keep the transit tax. Playing up the local affinity for NFL football, one such ad featured Carolina Panthers President Mark Richardson asking popular former Panther Mike Minter for help in stopping the repeal. In the spot, Minter drives home the point that repealing the tax will cut bus service and increase traffic to Panther games.

Another advertisement featured a conservatively dressed elderly woman entering a seedy Charlotte bar populated with the heavily tattooed and pierced. After a moment's pause, the woman leans over to the bar tender and says, "You know, we've got more in common than you think." She then proceeds to roll up her sleeve and reveal a "Vote Against Repeal" tattoo.

Perhaps most effective, the last TV spot starred two popular former mayors of Charlotte: Richard Vinroot (a Caucasian Republican) and Harvey Gantt (an African American Democrat). In the ad, the two convene in a dark parking garage for an inconspicuous meeting to share a secret: vote against repeal.

The Vote Against Repeal Committee was able to target different areas of Mecklenburg with different pro-rail messages via direct mail as well. Specifically, it distributed a flier in the African American and lower-income senior communities that focused on cuts to bus service if the tax was repealed.

The anti-repeal camp maintained an online presence at [VoteAgainstRepeal.com](http://VoteAgainstRepeal.com). The site enabled individual donations and specifically catered to university students and young professionals on the supposition that this demographic element wants a transit-oriented urban environment.<sup>61</sup>

### *Congressional or presidential election* ↓

The vote on repeal occurred simultaneously with the mayoral election on November 6, 2007. The South Corridor LYNX line was set to begin operations that Thanksgiving weekend regardless the result of the vote. According to interviewees, this poor timing coupled with the aggressive pro-rail media campaign led to an aura of "let's wait and see." The election featured 24 percent voter turnout with only 38,000 voting for repeal, in contrast to nearly 49,000 signatures that were required to place the measure on the ballot.

Support for the tax was ultimately strongest from the African American community (in which several precincts topped 80 percent of African Americans voting for keeping the tax) and among newcomers defined as those who had registered to vote in Charlotte after the 1998 vote.<sup>62</sup> Election day *Observer* quotes from African American voters reflect recognition of community reliance on the bus system and quotes from workers who have moved in from other major cities suggest that the latter were accustomed to and willing to pay more for quality public transit.

### **Summation of Factors**

This case provides some replication of the findings from the original study, with the qualification that this election did not in itself represent a tax increase, but rather an attempted repeal. To provide consistency with other analyses treating anti-rail groups as the opposition, this summation of factors will be from a pro-transit/anti-repeal perspective.

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The case of the Charlotte 2007 anti-repeal vote featured a replication of the following positive factors from the 2001 study:

- Multimodal proposal
- Benefits distributed throughout area
- Congestion “crisis”
- Sponsorship by the business community
- Sponsorship by key elected officials
- Support from environmental groups
- Consultant with initiative experience
- Use of media
- Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package

Due to complicating circumstances, the effects of the following factors are ruled inconclusively present:

- Extension of existing rail system
- Highway funding
- Unorganized, poorly funded opposition

The following factors, which were associated with transit successes in the earlier research, were not in effect for this election:

- Lack of problems with existing transit system
- Congressional or presidential election
- Sunset provision of 20 years or less
- Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)

The county had not voted on a sales tax repeal or any transit related initiatives in the time since the 1998 vote.

This yields a total of eight replications of the apparent effect of factors from the previous study, four inconclusive findings, and five anomalous conditions.

## Evaluation

The ability of the anti-repeal campaign to appeal to a wide range of citizens, and particularly to reaffirm African American support, was unassailable by the inadequate efforts of scattered opposition. Nonetheless, the 70-to-30 percent result was shocking to both sides.

The extent to which these results are a function of the unique “repeal referendum” status of this election cannot be estimated. Certainly the tax was at actual risk when the repeal qualified for the ballot and was polling at only about half in favor; supporters of the existing tax were fortunate that the opposition essentially self-destructed at about that time.

From the standpoint of the factors identified in the 2001 study, this case seems to best illustrate the importance of timely political leadership from both elected officials and the business community, along with the public’s perception that traffic congestion woes require an active transit system to be part of the public solution. Had that leadership not occurred, or was a transit solution not in the public imagination, the result might have been quite different.

## **CASE STUDY 4: AFFIRMATION VOTE FOR STEEL WHEEL IN HONOLULU (2008)**

### Introduction

After his 2004 election, Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann made the construction of a passenger rail line a priority of his administration. In May of 2005, the Hawaii State Legislature passed a bill allowing the City and County of Honolulu (a consolidated entity encompassing the island of Oahu) to impose a .5 percent increase in the General Excise Tax (GET) for the specific purpose of improvements in public transportation.<sup>63</sup> In August of 2005, the Honolulu City Council voted 7-to-2 to increase the GET from 4 percent to 4.5 percent, to be collected over the period of January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2022, in order to fund a new transit system for population-dense southeastern Oahu.

Opposition to this increase arose almost immediately, largely centered in uncertainty as to what form the transit system would take. The mayor and majority of the council heavily favored an elevated steel wheel-on-steel (e.g., light rail) rail system,<sup>64</sup> but a particular councilmember as well as local transit enthusiasts questioned the logistics of the proposed line.

An alternatives analysis report was presented to the Honolulu City Council in November 2006. The report detailed the benefits of four different mode and alignment proposals, ultimately recommending an elevated light rail track over expansions of existing bus service. The council struggled with the issue in various ways, including appointing a panel of experts to consider a slate of four modal options for the recommended route: light rail, rapid bus transit (BRT) system, monorail or magnetic levitation. Debate was re-opened even after four of five on the panel recommended light rail. In April 2008, Mayor Mufi Hannemann stated that he would veto any proposal that was not steel on steel, affirming this project as his political legacy. Shortly thereafter, the opposition group Stop Rail Now



began collecting signatures to put a measure against rail on the November ballot. Their petition was rejected by the City Clerk and the court system. The anti-rail campaign was ultimately outspent by the City and various rail proponents by a ratio of 100 to 1. However, this opposition, coupled with Hannemann's failure to win re-election outright (in a run-off system) against anti-rail candidates in September, had the effect of persuading the Honolulu City Council to unanimously agree to place a City Charter Amendment affirming the public's support of rail on the November ballot.

In the ensuing November election, Mayor Hannemann was easily re-elected in the run-off against his anti-rail opponent, and the citizens of Honolulu affirmed support for his steel wheel project with 53 percent of the vote.

This case is unique in that it entails an election that involves a tax that was already approved. However, had the project failed at the ballot box, it is not clear that the tax would also have necessarily survived and an alternate transportation system been implemented. In a real way, citizens of Honolulu were considering whether an investment in light rail transit should or should not be made.

### **The Transit Package**

The new transit system was aimed to alleviate congestion primarily along Honolulu's Lunalilo Freeway (H-1) via an elevated route connecting Kapolei (western Oahu) and downtown Honolulu. Of note, the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project is a major component of the greater Oahu Regional Transportation Plan 2030, approved by the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in April 2006. The 2030 Plan features a variety of highway, transit and development projects, with GET revenue slated to fulfill local funding requirements for a transit system serving the H-1 corridor. Solely at issue in this election was the form of system the GET revenue would finance. At issue was the first rail system on the island after over 40 years of debate and three previous attempts to implement a light rail system.

#### *Multimodal proposal*

While at the time of passage the GET increase was for a "to be determined" transit system, and different modes were advocated by various parties, at no point in the development of this package was it a multimodal proposal. Further, the bill passed by the Hawaii State Legislature in 2005 allowing for county level increases in GET expressly forbids the City and County of Honolulu from expending GET revenue on any transit system in existence prior to July 2005, meaning this revenue stream cannot fund existing bus transit.

#### *Highway funding*

As it is administered by the State of Hawaii, GET generated revenue has often been the proposed target of raids (primarily by the now former governor of Hawaii, but also state legislators) seeking to close budgetary shortfalls and finance other infrastructure projects, but has been thus far protected. Highway elements of the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan 2030 are to be funded from the state Highway Special Fund, the Honolulu General

Fund and county motor vehicle taxes.<sup>65</sup> While opposition arguments included appeals for greater highway improvements, the GET increase is expressly intended for the new transit system.

### *Benefits distributed throughout area* ↑

The proposed rail line will eventually serve a heavily populated 20-mile stretch of southeastern Oahu, which includes parts of six or seven of the nine council districts. There is general agreement that service to Honolulu International Airport, University of Hawaii at Manoa campuses, popular Ala Moana Shopping Center, and area community colleges will be beneficial to the majority of citizens of Honolulu, though estimates of expected congestion decrease have varied.

### *Sunset provision of 20 years or less* N/A

The GET increase is slated to be in effect until December 31, 2022, rendering this a 16-year commitment. However, as the GET increase was approved by the Honolulu City Council and the transportation mode affirmed by the voters of Honolulu, this provision was not at direct issue in this election.

### *Extension of existing rail system* ↓

There was no passenger rail system on Oahu prior to this vote.

### *Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package* ⇔

The decision of the transit mode was subject to prolonged debate, but as the strong mayor threatened to veto anything other than his own proposal, extensive stakeholder participation was essentially not at play. A panel of experts was consulted to appease the concerns of the minority of the council and citizenry, but this action was viewed by most as a rubber-stamping motion. The opposition had its preferred ballot measure language forbidding the expenditure of GET revenue on a steel wheel system denied by the City Clerk, but was successful in forcing a vote affirming citizens' preference for rail, rendering the existence of stakeholder participation ambiguous.

## **Transit Environment**

More than 900,000 people reside within the City and County of Honolulu, with an estimated 705,000 living within a 140 square mile metro area of southeastern Oahu.

### *Lack of problems with existing transit system* ↑

Honolulu's bus system, simply dubbed "The Bus," has been twice recognized America's Best Transit System by the American Public Transportation Association, possibly lending to both the credibility of a new public transit system and arguments for expansion of the existing one. Combating appeals for an expansion of bus services over a new rail system, Roger Morton, president and general manager of Oahu Transit Services Inc., stated, "bus



service cannot be expanded- there's simply no more room on the road."<sup>66</sup> Honolulu's Lunalilo Freeway (H-1) is among the most congested in the country in part because it features only three lanes in each direction and cannot feasibly be widened, leaving some form of elevated construction as the only viable alternative.

### *Congestion "crisis" ↑*

Honolulu features a tangible congestion crisis. The urban area has a Travel Time Index of 1.24, ranked 28<sup>th</sup> in the country. According to residents, trips that should take 20 minutes can take over an hour at peak commute times. *One analysis* recently ranked the commute along Honolulu's Lunalilo Freeway (H-1) second worst in the country, behind only the Hollywood Freeway in California.<sup>67</sup> Consensus exists that a number of measures will need to be enacted to combat expected population and associated congestion increases in coming years.

### *Recent initiative experience ↓*

Honolulu has been debating the issue of light rail since the 1960s, with three previous efforts failing largely due to poor economic circumstances. The most recent pro-rail push transpired in 1992, when the Honolulu City Council voted against a similar GET increase. November 2008 was the Hawaiian electorate's first vote pertaining to mass transit. A possible priming mechanism occurred in the 2006 general election, when the people of Honolulu passed environmentally friendly Charter Question 8, which read:

Should one of the priorities of the Department of Transportation Services be to make Honolulu a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly city, and should the powers, duties, and functions of the Director of Transportation Services include bikeway systems?

While passage of the measure indicates a growing acceptance of bicycle and pedestrian community alternatives, it is not transit specific and therefore does not qualify as recent initiative experience for the purposes of this analysis.

## **Political Environment**

The state of Hawaii is predominantly Democratic. At the time of this vote, its U.S. Senators and Representatives were also Democrats, and both the Hawaii House and Senate were under firm Democratic control. Notably, the Republican Governor refused to support this project in the face of a slowing economy, a growing budget deficit and the prolonged debate leading to a stockpile of untouched funds.

The City and County of Honolulu features a strong mayor and council form of governance, in which a supermajority of the nine-member council tends to align with the mayor. While these conditions may seem auspicious for the passage of a Democratic mayor's legacy rail project, opposition was fierce enough to make the vote over affirmation of steel wheel on steel rail the focus of that November's election, generating more discussion than the simultaneous election of native son Barack Obama.

## The Campaign

After the series of events that led the City Council to place language affirming public support of a steel wheel system on the November ballot, The City of Honolulu embarked on a public information effort illustrating the rail project proposal. One such document compared the benefits of rail to those of a rubber tire (BRT) system and elevated High- Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, making the case for rail on the basis of being a proven mass transit solution. Another featured headers such as “Why is rail transit such an important investment in Honolulu’s future?” and “Why is rail transit considered eco-friendly?” Rail opponents, of course, felt that these brochures were decidedly biased.

Stirring an even greater accusation of media manipulation, The City of Honolulu did not release a somewhat unfavorable Environmental Impact Statement until three days before the general election – after 105,000 absentee ballots had already been cast. The report included promising job creation projections, but also detailed the necessary displacement of 80 properties. The nominee opposing Mayor Hannemann (and the steel rail system) exercised this opportunity to slam him with accusations of leading a dishonest government, but did not seek formal recourse.<sup>68</sup>

Upon learning that the affirmation vote was to be on the November ballot, community based non-profit *Go Rail Go* spearheaded efforts to generate a groundswell of support for the proposed steel wheel system. Go Rail Go volunteers took to the field to touch voters directly, utilizing a walk-piece (a hand delivered mailer) and cultivating support for rail with the understanding that Hawaii is a “talk story place,” where citizens need to see, feel and connect with an idea on a personal level to vote for it.<sup>69</sup> This group also reached out to the bicycle and pedestrian community, landowners, development companies and environmental groups in constructing a pro-rail coalition.

### *Sponsorship by the business community* ↑

The business community was largely and vocally in favor of the rail project. Many trades unions strongly support what is now the biggest infrastructure project in Hawaii, as they stand to benefit. Carpenters and other building trades did their own fundraising and radio and television advertisements, and provided critical communication with U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye (D), who now chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee and seeks ongoing support by the federal government.

Interestingly, the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce stayed out of the fray until just before the November vote, ultimately lending its endorsement to the pro-rail coalition. Some members of the small business community were in alliance with the opposition group Stop Rail Now, but did not provide the manpower or dollars of the unions.

### *Sponsorship by key elected officials* ↑

Mayor Hannemann pointedly and vigorously rejected any system that was not steel wheel on steel rail. Aside from the resolve of Hannemann, powerful allies on the Honolulu City Council included members Nestor Garcia, Gary Okino and Todd Apo, whose districts could

greatly benefit from the proposed route. These Councilmen put in appearances on behalf of the mayor at public forums in the months leading up to the election and led get-out-the-vote efforts.

Also critical to the success of the pro-rail campaign were Kirk Caldwell and John White. While a member of the Hawaii House of Representatives, Caldwell was instrumental in passing the legislation that allowed the Honolulu City Council to increase the GET. Once his term was up in 2008, he became a spokesperson for Go Rail Go. John White was an active presence for Go Rail Go at Honolulu's 32 neighborhood board meetings, and was considered a strong contender for Honolulu's 2<sup>nd</sup> City Council district in 2010.

### *Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)* ↑

In addition to maintaining an attentive presence at community meetings, the City of Honolulu spent an approximately \$3 million<sup>70</sup> on its public information campaign, featuring direct mail and an online presence. It later spent \$10,000 for the mayor's televised "State of Rail" address in October 2009. The mayor also used his personal campaign funds to take out large advertisements in both daily newspapers, the *Honolulu Advertiser* and the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, that attacked opposition group Stop Rail Now as consisting of "ultraconservative groups" that supported the auto and oil industries.

Go Rail Go expended contributions in the hundreds of thousands from a number of pro-rail organizations. The combined efforts easily exceed the million-dollar threshold for this factor.

### *Support from environmental groups* ↑

Known to be otherwise fiscally conservative, Mayor Hannemann did not enjoy the strongest of relationships with the Sierra Club Hawaii Chapter or other environmental groups. The Sierra Club remained neutral through much of the campaign, eventually lending its endorsement to the pro-rail side, but not providing personnel. Non-withstanding, area interviewees deemed Sierra Club support immensely important. Another constituency specifically targeted by the Go Rail Go campaign was Honolulu's growing bicycle and pedestrian community.

### *Consultant with initiative experience* ↑

Go Rail Go was something of a lobbying entity prior to the 2008 election campaign, mostly encouraging the Honolulu City Council regarding transit-engineering specifications and smaller details of the rail project. The group sought to contract consultants with grassroots campaign and coalition development experience in guiding a successful vote affirming a steel wheel system. Justin Fanslau, a transportation policy and campaign expert with ten years experience working mostly on California sales tax increases for transit purposes were hired as a consultant.

### *Use of media* ↑

Go Rail Go produced a number of radio and television spots, and took a cue from the Obama campaign, turning to social networking sites and viral videos in courting younger voters. Go Rail Go provided materials to Obama campaign precinct captains, hoping to further court the progressive vote. The carpenters' union was also particularly active in producing radio and television advertisements in favor of the proposal.

The two major local newspapers were decidedly pro-rail in their coverage of project developments, treating outcomes in the mayor's favor as expected and allowing him to run advertisements attacking the opposition.

### *Unorganized, poorly funded opposition* ↑

Before the City Council agreed to have citizens affirm support for rail, opposition group Stop Rail Now attempted to amend the Honolulu City Charter to specifically exclude the GET funds being used for rail. To get any measure on the November ballot, a citizen group needs to attain the authorized signatures of 10 percent of registered voters in Honolulu, or roughly 44,500 signatures, by August 1<sup>st</sup>. The leaders of Stop Rail Now thought they had met this criterion, but eventually the City Clerk rendered thousands of its signatures invalid and its petition was denied. After having trouble finding an attorney who would go against the mayor and pursuing court challenges in vain, the group shifted its focus to public education.

Stop Rail Now focused its efforts in a door-to-door campaign, gave testimony to the City Council and was also a constant presence at neighborhood association meetings, aided in technical matters by University of Hawaii at Manoa Professor Panos Prevedouros, the lone dissenter in the vote by the panel of experts. Movement co-chairs Dennis Callan and Michael Uechi appeared in local news interviews whenever possible, as the group was unable to afford television, radio or print advertisements.

The opposition in this case was at a severe fundraising disadvantage. Stop Rail Now raised \$40,000, nearly half of which was provided by local retired businessman and transit enthusiast Cliff Slater.

While ultimately unsuccessful, rail proponents credit Stop Rail Now with using its minimal budget and volunteer force to affect an impressive showing. By focusing its education campaign in areas not directly benefiting from the rail line (such as western and northern Oahu), Stop Rail Now likely contributed to drastic differences in precinct reports.

By all accounts, the opposition's efforts were not as organized or meticulous as those of rail proponents. However, by rousing the ire of citizens over the inflating cost of the project during a recession and questioning the logistics of the proposed route, the group was able to stir enough interest to make the rail vote "more top of mind than the election of Barack Obama."<sup>71</sup>

In sum, the opposition was successful in stirring debate, but was not a well-organized or well-funded group.

### *Congressional or presidential election* ↑

The vote took place on November 4, 2008, simultaneous to the election of Hawaiian Barack Obama. The fact that a native son was standing for national office imply a potential amplification of the effect of this factor, whereas in reality the transit vote was seen as the more interesting contest.

### **Summation of Factors**

This case provides substantial replication of the findings from the 2001 study, with the caveat that this election did not in itself represent a tax increase. (As such, the variable of 'sunset provision of less than 20 years' was deemed a "non-applicable" condition.)

The case of the Honolulu 2008 affirmation vote featured a replication of the following positive factors from the prior study:

- Sponsorship by key elected officials
- Sponsorship by the business community
- Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)
- Use of media
- Consultant with initiative experience
- Unorganized, poorly funded opposition
- Support from environmental groups
- Benefits distributed throughout area
- Lack of problems with existing rail system
- Congestion "crisis"
- Congressional or presidential election

The level of stakeholder participation, while arguably high in that the transit mode was subject to much debate in public forums, was also low in that opposition groups never saw a vote on their most favored alternatives or had their amendment language approved by the Honolulu political establishment, rendering this factor imperceptible and therefore inconclusively present.

The following factors, which were associated with success in the earlier research, were not in effect for this election, which was nevertheless won by transit advocates.

- There is no existing rail system in Honolulu
- The City and County of Honolulu had not experienced a transit initiative in the recent past
- The proposal does not include multiple modes of transportation

The proposal did not include highway funds

This yields a total of 11 replications from the previous study, one inconclusive finding, four anomalous conditions and one non-applicable condition.

## **Evaluation**

The Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project deviates from the others studied in a number of ways. Chiefly, the vote in question did not directly bring about a tax increase, which had already been enacted by the City Council. This exercise simply affirmed that the people of Honolulu approved the mayor's plan for applying GET funds to the construction of a light rail system. However, had the plan failed at the ballot, pro-rail politicians stated they would pull their support and be forced to consider other mass transit alternatives. Further, a "no" vote would have likely jeopardized federal funds earmarked for this project.<sup>72</sup>

This election contained a strong element of political involvement, and that went beyond the local level. Pro-rail advocates at the council, mayoral, state and federal levels have worked harmoniously to help guarantee the success of this project. That being stated, this case may serve as a prime example of the influence of ardent support of rail transit by a key political figure (i.e., the mayor) in a strong-mayor and council form of governance.

## **CASE STUDY 5: LOS ANGELES COUNTY PASSES MEASURE R "FOR RELIEF" (2008)**

### **Introduction**

In November of 2008, Los Angeles County voters approved Measure R, a ½ cent sales tax increase to fund a massive, countywide transportation and roadway improvement plan. Los Angeles voters had passed sales tax increases for public transit in 1980 and 1990, but neither was as extensive as this proposal. As a two-thirds vote is needed to levy any new dedicated tax in California, and given the fallout of the national economy in September-October 2008, this case speaks to both successful coalition building in a large, diverse metropolitan area and the willingness of the citizens of Los Angeles to embrace new capacity in search of congestion relief.



## The Transit Package

In the 2005 mayoral election, current Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's campaign promises included increased funds for road repairs and modernized, expanded public transit, his cornerstone project being a "Subway to the Sea" that would connect downtown Los Angeles to coastal Santa Monica via proposed tunneling under major thoroughfare Wilshire Blvd. Immediately upon being sworn in, Mayor Villaraigosa exercised his authority to assume the chairmanship of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA or Metro) Board.<sup>73</sup>

MTA and independent organizations conducted polling in 2005 and 2007 attempting to establish specific projects and a funding model Los Angeles voters would support in realizing Villaraigosa's vision of a comprehensive congestion relief plan. Vehicle license fee increases, carbon taxes and gas taxes were unpopular means in a time of high gas prices, but a sales tax increase consistently polled near or above two-thirds approval. A list of priority transit projects already existed in the form of unfunded 2003 CA Senate Bill 314, to which few adjustments were made to meet citizen and stakeholder demands.

Ultimately, the citizens of Los Angeles County approved a 30-year, \$40 billion package with 67.93 percent of the vote.

### *Multimodal proposal* ↑

Theoretically, 45 percent of the revenue generated by the tax increase is to be dedicated to transit capital and operations, encompassing the areas of new light rail and Bus Rapid Transit, and extensions of existing rail lines. Due largely to the influence of stakeholder the American Automobile Association (AAA), 20 percent of funds raised by the tax are slated to go to highway improvements. In a measure of appeasement to the Bus Riders Union (BRU), and concession to the fact that the majority of Los Angeles public transit is on buses, the package dedicates 20 percent of revenues to bus maintenance and operations. To maximize local buy-in, the package devotes 15 percent of revenues to miscellaneous 'local returns' (i.e., signal synchronization and pedestrian improvements).

### *Highway funding* ↑

According to MTA insiders and consultants, this package would not have earned the endorsement of AAA without the inclusion of at least a 15 percent highway funding component, and would likely not have earned the approval of Los Angeles voters without substantial freeway improvements. Historically, Angelenos have by-and-large supported instillation of HOV lanes and sound walls separating housing developments from perpetually widening freeways. Ultimately, these (and other) highway provisions will receive approximately \$7.88 billion (or 20 percent) of generated revenues.

### *Benefits distributed throughout area* ↑

While the system proposal sought to install the "Subway to the Sea" as the hallmark project, transportation leaders placed utmost importance in the development stage on

creating regional balance in project prioritization and monetary allocation. South Los Angeles and West Los Angeles were designated priority regions. Upon presentation to the 13-member MTA Board (chaired by Villaraigosa and including three of his appointees) in July 2008, the package met resistance from board members representing the San Gabriel Valley (northeast of downtown) and East Los Angeles. San Gabriel Valley felt it would not receive a fair share of projects in dollar terms or priority status, whereas representatives of predominately lower-income, minority East Los Angeles felt it unreasonable that higher cost, higher profile projects were being awarded to the more affluent West Side.<sup>74</sup> The proposal was approved for the November ballot by the MTA board on a 9-to-2 vote, with two abstentions.

Despite its apparent importance in the process, the MTA's vote alone would not authorize the collection of any approved tax increase. That power is granted by the California state legislature, which needed to pass an accompanying statute of authorization raising the limit on LA County's sales tax. West Side Assemblyman Mike Feuer's bill met resistance in the state Senate from East Side politicians, rivals of Villaraigosa, and fellow Democrats wishing to include their pet transportation projects.<sup>75</sup> Feuer was able to keep this from becoming a "Christmas Tree" bill, and it gained the approval of the legislature just days before the deadline allowing the tax to take effect at the proposed date, the first day of the next Fiscal Year, July 1, 2009.

### *Sunset provision of 20 years or less* ↓

This ½ cent increase was to be in effect for 30 years, until the end of FY 2038–2039. It is projected to generate \$40 billion in revenue, of which 1.5 percent (or \$600,000,000) will cover administrative costs.

### *Extension of existing rail system* ↑

Four of the 14 transit capital projects described in the MTA Expenditure Plan are extensions of existing rail lines, and one project, dubbed the "Regional Connector." will link the four lines which converge in central Los Angeles.

New construction projects were given higher priority than extension of existing lines. While improved pedestrian, bicycle and automobile access to the Gold Line (serving San Gabriel Valley and East Los Angeles) was allotted \$30 million and top priority in the long range plan, Gold Line extensions were not to begin construction until after the completion of a new rail line on the West Side – the Exposition Blvd. Light Rail.

### *Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package* ↑

This case featured an expansive and robust coalition of stakeholders and supporters from inception of the package to passage of the measure. The presence of numerous pro-environment, pro-labor, anti-traffic constituencies in a large, predominately left-of-center, metropolitan area was both a benefit and challenge to pro-transit organizers and Metro's long-term transportation plan development teams.



As previously noted, the majority transportation projects constructing the skeleton of the package were delineated in SB 314. Metro worked with stakeholders such as AAA, labor union leaders, and business and environmental leaders to come to a construction priority and funding scheme each interest would endorse while simultaneously striving for geographic balance. Metro Board Member Richard Katz was the point person in negotiations with Los Angeles area politicians in incorporating pet projects and gaining endorsements.<sup>76</sup> All of this made for a delicate balancing act to the end of securing the required supermajority of the popular vote.

## **Transit Environment**

In terms of population, Los Angeles is the second largest U.S. city after New York City. 3,833,995 people reside in Los Angeles proper, creating a population density of 8,205/sq mi. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates L.A. County's July 2008 population to have been 9,862,049, but Texas Transportation Institute estimates the urban area population to have been upwards of 12,800,000.<sup>77</sup> Population density is significantly lower beyond the central/downtown area, where Metro's headquarters and the majority of public transit are located.

Los Angeles is synonymous with traffic congestion and automobile generated air pollution in the American psyche. According to statistics published by the Texas Transportation Institute, Los Angeles had ranked first in nearly all measurable congestion categories since TTI began compiling statistics in 1982.<sup>78</sup> Actuated left turn arrows and protected left turn pockets are generally only found in newer developments and heavily travelled areas of downtown and West Los Angeles. At any given time, odds are at least one Los Angeles freeway is under construction. Partially due to the high-density auto travel and poor planning, the city is not particularly bicycle or pedestrian friendly.<sup>79</sup>

A basic understanding of the existing transit system is necessary in order to grasp the potential impact posed by Measure R. Los Angeles County features an extensive bus, BRT, light rail, and heavy rail subway system. Metro is the primary transit provider for the City of Los Angeles, whereas the City Department of Transportation provides separate service to outlying areas. Metro assigns colors to rail and BRT fixed guideways, and operates 191 bus routes. Metro system wide ridership estimates for August 2008 put average weekday boardings at 1,551,459.

### Heavy Rail

Two heavy rail subway lines currently run under downtown Los Angeles. The Red Line connects central LA to North Hollywood, and the Purple Line connects downtown to westward Koreatown via Wilshire Blvd., the beginning of the "Subway to the Sea." (Note: greater Southern California heavy rail system Metrolink is operated by Amtrak.)

### Light Rail

Two light rail lines, the Gold Line, (which diverges to serve East Los Angeles and South Pasadena), and the Blue Line (which connects the financial district to downtown Long

Beach), originate downtown. Measure R projects include a Connector Line to link these two light rail lines to the Red and Purple heavy rail lines.

The Green Line serves southwest Los Angeles, including Los Angeles International Airport, but does not funnel into downtown, only intersecting the Blue Line at the time of this vote.

### Bus Rapid Transit

MetroLiner is the designation of Bus Rapid Transit services in Los Angeles County. At the time of the development of this package, the Orange Line (a westward extension of the northern Red Line) was in operation and the Silver Line (a separate corridor between downtown and northeastern San Gabriel Valley) was in the planning stage. Measure R projects include funds for expansion of BRT services in the San Gabriel Valley.

### Other Bus Services

Metro operates 191 bus routes with varying travel time schemes and number designation based on geographic location and service level. It also transfers to neighboring bus operators such as Big Blue Bus in Santa Monica. Interestingly, 20 percent of Measure R funds are allotted for bus operations and Metro estimates August 2008 bus system boardings at 1,227,211 daily, or 79.1 percent of all system riders. (The latter figure applies only to the Metro system, and excludes the many other transit operators, including the Metrolink commuter system, that provide service in the region.)

### *Lack of problems with existing transit system* ↑

Any shortcomings notwithstanding, L.A. Metro was recognized as America's Best Transit System by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) in 2006. Decals advertising this fact were featured in every Metro-operated vessel. Partially due to pressure from social justice advocacy group the Bus Riders' Union, thousands of buses were added to the fleet between 1996 and 2005, allowing high-demand routes to feature service every 12 minutes and increasing access to jobs, schools and medical services. Buses embrace new technologies; almost all new vessels run on natural gas and some incorporate sensors alerting street lights of their approach. Perhaps the greatest single problem with this system is that it is in Los Angeles, where measures to improve timeliness are limited by an environment of overbearing congestion.

### *Congestion "crisis"* ↑

The average automobile-driving Los Angeleno will spend copious amounts of time in halted traffic. Typical rush hours range from 5 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. to 9 p.m., but traffic jams occur at any time. A recent analysis of national data ranked the Hollywood Freeway (Hwy. 101 through downtown Los Angeles) as the worst commute in the country, with an estimated 77 weekly hours of congestion at the worst bottleneck.<sup>80</sup> The Los Angeles urban area in 2007 boasted a Travel Time Index of 1.49 (Chicago was second place at 1.43), total annual delay of 485,022,000 person-hours, and annual congestion cost of

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\$10,328,000,000.<sup>81</sup> In the case of Los Angeles, the term “crisis” may fail to convey the gravity of the congestion problem, both real and perceived.

### *Recent initiative experience*

Neighboring Orange County renewed its ½ cent sales tax for transportation-centered Measure M in 2006, but the possible carryover experience or attitudes born of this action are beyond the scope of this analysis. Los Angeles County had twice before voted to raise the sales tax rate by a ½ cent: Proposition A in 1980 and (auxiliary) Proposition C in 1990. These taxes continue to generate revenue and partially fund Metro transit operations and recent capital projects. Los Angeles area interviewees spoke to the willingness of residents to continuously embrace new transit capacity in search of congestion relief, but an 18-year gap since the passage of the last transportation ballot initiative cannot qualify as “recent initiative experience” for the purposes of this analysis.

## **The Campaign**

Former Santa Monica Mayor Denny Zane had independently chartered a “Subway to the Sea” coalition after Mayor Villaraigosa announced his intention to bring rail to the West Side, but this group disbanded upon realization that funds were not to immediately materialize for any such project. Notwithstanding, news articles and documentary material from the time indicate that Zane was a key player in bringing about Measure R, and he was directly contacted for information regarding his involvement in bringing the initiative to fruition.

Zane was closely allied with organized labor, having worked with the County Federation of Labor on a living wage while Mayor of Santa Monica. He was also connected to Dan Rosenfeld, chair of LA Chamber of Commerce’s Transportation and Land Use Committee, from their mutual work on Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica.

In November 2007, Zane formed “Move LA,” an organization dedicated to coalition building for a long-range transit plan. He and his associate Terry O’Day (executive director of Environment Now) were able to call a meeting of over 40 executives from organizations such as the Los Angeles Business Council, the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO), the Central City Association of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Building & Construction Trades Council (AFL-CIO), Ironworkers, the Coalition for Clean Air, and many others. All agreed that a long-range transportation plan would be beneficial to their constituencies, and to work in partnership with Metro in developing and promoting a balanced, comprehensive package. A central point of communication came in January 2008, in which Zane facilitated a conference of over 350 representatives of organized interests to hear from Villaraigosa and other Metro officials about the need of coalition support for what would become Measure R. In effect, Move LA acted as an ombudsman between Metro and organized interests, particularly organized labor and environmental groups, over the course of summer 2008.

As previously stated, the state legislature was sluggish in passing accompanying legislation to allow the tax increase. Some factions of Metro and Move LA were under the mistaken

belief that the legislature needed to approve the measure being placed on the November ballot, when in reality the legislature only needed to approve the collection of the tax upon passage. This confusion led to a shorter than desired Measure R specific campaign period in the face of a slowing economy. After Metro funded a public information campaign that upset East Los Angeles representatives of the Metro board in September 2008, Mayor Villaraigosa hired his election campaign manager to run a private campaign in favor of Measure R in conjunction with the efforts of Move LA. Villaraigosa himself is estimated to have helped raise 80 percent of funds.<sup>82</sup> The official campaign lasted six weeks.

### *Sponsorship by the business community* ↑

Measure R was extremely popular with the Los Angeles business community and organized labor. Acknowledging the number of construction jobs that Measure R will create, Laborers International Union of North America contributed \$200,000 to the campaign. Even the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) contributed \$900,000. LACMA is located on Wilshire Blvd. and proposals for the 'Subway to the Sea' (the Purple Line extension) include a stop adjacent to LACMA.<sup>83</sup>

### *Sponsorship by key elected officials* ↑

In addition to comprising a legacy project of Villaraigosa, Measure R won the endorsement of Santa Monica Mayor Pam O'Connor. Coupled with the fact that West Los Angeles Assemblyman Mike Feuer defended the accompanying Assembly bill and actively campaigned in the community,<sup>84</sup> the endorsement of the mayor of Santa Monica augmented opposition beliefs that this package would be most beneficial to the West Side.

Outside of Villaraigosa's appointees, the Metro Board of Directors consists entirely of elected officials: City Council members and Mayors of neighboring jurisdictions and Los Angeles County Supervisors make up the remainder. Particularly active in favor of Measure R were Los Angeles County Supervisors Michael Antonovich (representing the northernmost supervisory district) and Zev Yaroslavsky (representing the northwest supervisory district extending to Santa Monica).

### *Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)* ↑

With respect to the funds for the campaign per se, there was significant business support for Measure R. In addition to the munificent donation by LACMA, the Measure R campaign included the following contributions:<sup>85</sup>

- Carpenters-Contractors Cooperation Committee: \$125,000.
- Paul Haaga (vice chairman of Capital Research and Management Company): \$100,000.
- AECOM (transportation engineering services firm): \$100,000.

- Anschutz Entertainment Group (owners of Staples Center, Nokia Theater and LA Live in downtown): \$100,000.
- Edith Wasserman (widow of the head of Universal Pictures): \$100,000.
- Former Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan: \$100,000.
- Parsons Brinckerhoff Americas, Inc. (transportation engineering firm): \$50,000.
- International Union of Painters and Allied Trades: \$50,000.
- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 47: \$25,000.
- Southern California District Council of Laborers: \$25,000.
- AT&T California Employee Political Action Committee: \$25,000.

News reports from late October 2008 indicate that well above \$3 million was raised for the Measure R campaign. Combined Metro expenditures and campaign fundraising therefore greatly exceed the \$1 million threshold of influence.

#### *Support from environmental groups* ↑

Mainstream environmental groups uniformly endorsed Measure R. The Sierra Club was among the organizations represented in the early coalition meetings, and a conference coordinator is executive director of Environment Now. Some smaller social justice focus environmental groups based in East Los Angeles were persuaded by opposition arguments, but took no action against the measure.

#### *Consultants with initiative experience* ↑

The consultant Mayor Villaraigosa brought in to lead the Measure R campaign was also the mastermind behind Villaraigosa's insurgent victory in 2005: nationally renowned Democratic strategist Ace Smith. Once deemed "legendary" by the *New York Times* because of his many electoral victories on behalf of a range of clients, Smith's primary claim to fame with respect to initiatives was serving as campaign manager for "No on 67," a statewide initiative that lost by a huge margin.<sup>86</sup>

During a stint as executive director of the Clean Air Coalition in the early 1990s, Denny Zane had worked with Metro to begin the transition to a natural gas bus fleet. He had also previously managed successful bond campaigns for Santa Monica College, worked with City of Los Angeles planners in developing Third Street Promenade (the famous outdoor mall), and worked with the County Federation of Labor on a living wage policy while Mayor of Santa Monica. In an open letter dated December 2009, Metro Board member Richard Katz wrote to Zane:



*I want to thank you very, very much for the exceptional leadership you and your organization, Move LA, have shown these past two years. Measure R would not have happened without your vision and ability to build a support constituency of labor, environmental, and business groups.*

*Your hard work proved to be the essential cornerstone that enabled us to garner support from our elected leaders, to move forward with Measure R and was crucial to its success.<sup>87</sup>*

In brief, the Measure R campaign featured extremely talented and experienced leadership and advice from a firm grounding in Los Angeles (and greater California) politics.

### *Use of media* ↑

The Metro-run public information effort consisted of one mass distributed direct mail piece. The glossy, full-color leaflet came under the scrutiny of Metro Board members representing East Los Angeles and San Gabriel Valley, who claimed it was an advertorial. Certain persons within Metro felt that the direct mailer was not informational enough.<sup>88</sup> Because Metro is an entity in partnership with the city of Los Angeles, it could not legally run advertisements directly in favor of Measure R. This facilitated the transfer of leadership to Villaraigosa's private campaign manager. Due to the enormous fundraising effort, the pro-Measure R campaign was able to run prime time television and radio spots in the weeks leading up to the vote.<sup>89</sup>

According to the Chief Communications Officer of LA Metro, Measure R gained the endorsement of five of the seven major Los Angeles area newspapers. The most prominent endorsement came from the *Los Angeles Times* on October 9, 2008. However, *the Times* also allotted column inches to arguments from opposition groups, perhaps lending more credibility to its endorsement.

Additionally, Metro maintained a state-of-the-art online presence of information similar to that distributed in the direct mail piece. This site also featured a link to the Measure R expenditure plan that yielded in excess of 14,000 individual downloads prior to the vote.<sup>90</sup>

### *Unorganized, poorly funded opposition* ↑

The most vocal opposition to Measure R came from the BRU, a social justice advocacy group. The BRU purports to represent the interests of bus riders throughout Los Angeles County, although the majority of bus riders in Los Angeles are probably located from downtown eastward, in accordance with the city's socioeconomic geography.

However, as BRU enjoys non-profit status and receives governmental matching funds, it could not directly campaign against Measure R. The leaders of BRU relied on free media outlets such as the *Los Angeles Times* op-ed section to feature BRU-submitted facts and historical arguments against. It also maintained a web presence detailing the potential threats posed by Measure R.

The BRU had previously pursued legal recourse against Metro and gained a ten-year consent decree over ruled violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.<sup>91</sup> BRU legal representatives were able to successfully argue that Proposition A and Proposition C funds were being spent disproportionately on suburban rail, disproportionately benefitting affluent, white Angelinos, and that proposed fare increases and eliminations of monthly passes would disproportionately harm minorities. The decree was not extended in 2006, clearing the way for Measure R.<sup>92</sup> With this history in mind, as a preemptively pacifying maneuver, Metro increased the percentage of funds devoted to bus operations and capital in this package as compared to previous ones.

Keeping the focus on Measure R as being anti-social justice, anti-civil rights, BRU leaders attempted to forge a coalition with leaders of the concurrent “No H8” (No Hate) campaign against the ban on gay marriage in California, but to limited success. Their version of a public information campaign consisted largely of aforementioned utilization of free media and some paper distribution and personal contact. Their lead organizers debated Denny Zane in a public forum held in Santa Monica. Esperanza Martinez, a lead organizer, had this to share in describing the event, “West Los Angeles crowds didn’t see the social justice aspect – they wanted their subway.”<sup>93</sup>

Without the legal ability to fund a proper opposition campaign or a coalition of significant scale to counter the titanic pro-Measure R forces, the opposition in this case was poorly funded and organized in the context of this study.

### *Congressional or presidential election* ↑

This vote took place simultaneous to the November 2008 election of Barack Obama. From the conception phases in 2007 forward, all pro-transit parties involved assumed that this election would render high turnout among Democrats and progressives. Measure R was intentionally slotted for the 2008 ballot in an attempt to capitalize on this anticipated turnout of (theoretically) sympathetic voters.

## **Summation of Factors**

The success of the Los Angeles’s Measure R featured a substantial replication of the positive factors from the 2001 study, including:

- Multimodal proposal
- Highway funding
- Extension of existing rail system
- Benefits distributed throughout area
- Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package
- Lack of problems with existing transit system

- Congestion “crisis”
- Sponsorship by key elected officials
- Sponsorship by the business community
- Support from environmental groups
- Consultant with initiative experience
- Use of media
- Congressional or presidential election
- Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)
- Unorganized, poorly funded opposition

The following factors, which were associated with success in the earlier research, were not in effect for this election:

- The ½ cent tax increase is not subject to a sunset provision of 20 years or less
- Los Angeles County had not experienced a transit initiative in the recent past

This yields a total of 15 replications of the apparent effect of factors from the previous study, and two anomalous conditions.

## **Evaluation**

Los Angeles is the most vast site in the current study in every sense: it is the largest county studied, with the largest congestion problem, with the largest existing transit system, and the largest ballot proposal in terms of both dollars and projects. Therefore it is perhaps appropriate that this complex set of circumstances cast the biggest players. Without the vision and direction of key elected officials, primarily Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, and progressive leaders, primarily Denny Zane, this measure may not have made it to the 2008 ballot. In the words of Zane, “Someone had to say ‘let’s go.’”

The utilization of experienced consultant Ace Smith and the millions of dollars that flowed into the efforts he managed were unmatched in an area desperate for congestion relief. This package met some resistance along geographic and socioeconomic lines and petty personal differences between politicians, but was ultimately deemed to be well-enough balanced, and supported by 67.93 percent of Los Angeles County Voters. Despite the many advantages held by supporters, their margin of victory was less than 2 percentage points, due to the supermajority requirement.



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## CASE STUDY 6: KANSAS CITY: DEFEAT FOR A NEW, RAIL-ONLY SYSTEM

### Introduction

On November 4, 2008, voters in Kansas City voted overwhelmingly against a tax that would have funded the creation of a new light rail system. Only 44 percent of voters favored the proposal for a 14-mile light-rail system that included a  $\frac{3}{8}$  cent sales tax increase that would have generated an estimated \$815 million.

The vote marked the eighth light rail tax election in Kansas City since 1998; in seven of those elections, voters rejected the tax proposal. However, in 2006 the city passed a proposal that was placed on the ballot primarily through the efforts of local activist and rail advocate, Clay Chastain; several of the other previous failures were also initiated by Chastain. Chastain's 2006 voter-approved proposal entailed a 27-mile light rail system that was quickly repealed by the city on the basis of excessive cost and other impracticalities (including a proposed gondola system). Mindful of the citizenry's apparent support for a light rail system, the city then promised that it would create a more workable plan for approval by the voters. With the support inherent in the recent victory for an ambitious transit proposal and a ballot accompanying presidential election with relatively high support for urban residents, victory seemed all but assured.

### The Transit Package

The proposal was to create a 14-mile "starter" light-rail system. The single route funded by the package would have extended from Interstate 29 south through downtown Kansas City, and would have linked several urban "activity centers," such as the River Market, the Crown Center, and Country Club Plaza, the latter located three miles south of downtown and one of the first shopping centers in the United States. The city planned to receive about half of the project's total cost from the federal government, with construction beginning in 2012 or 2013.

#### *Multimodal proposal* ↓

The proposal was strictly limited to design and construction of a 14-mile light rail system, although proponents did make the claim that the system would "integrate with bicycling and walking to create a seamless transportation system, even including a new bike/pedestrian path on the planned light rail bridge over the Missouri River."<sup>94</sup>

#### *Highway funding* ↓

No highway funding was included in the proposal.

#### *Benefits distributed throughout area* ↓

Because the proposal was limited to a single route, it was difficult for proponents to portray it as creating a project that would quickly bring tangible benefits to the entire metropolitan area, although North Kansas City was also voting for a  $\frac{1}{2}$  cent sales tax increase for light

rail, in hopes that the Kansas City system would originate there. The general direction, along with beginning and end points were established, but the plan lacked a specific route, which allowed opponents to allege that the plan wasn't really thought through. In fact, the transit agency staff was still examining which downtown street would carry the line. Thus, although proponents sought to portray the project as a key step toward a regional system that would enhance the entire metropolitan area, they really could not point to specific benefits beyond those afforded by the single line in the near term.

Ultimately, this may have proven to be one of the more damaging aspects of the proposal, as Kansas City spreads into four different counties, with a relatively small urban core that the proposed, single light rail line would have served.

#### *Sunset provision of 20 years or less* ↓

The proposal would have been in effect for 25 years.

#### *Extension of existing rail system* ↓

The project would have created the initial route of an entirely new light-rail system. This, in fact, became a significant sore point for supporters. As noted earlier, voters had approved of a much more ambitious system in 2006, but city leaders (spearheaded by the Kansas City mayor) found common ground only in a much more limited proposal. Later, opponents would use the apparent support for a much more ambitious plan against the much more modest "starter system" called for by the ballot language. In effect, the opposition was able to corral erstwhile supporters of rail development to join them.

#### *Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package* ↓

The plan – relatively modest and straightforward as it was – was developed by the city. A regional steering committee that consisted of Kansas City Mayor Mark Funkhouser and other mayors as well as county officials met during the spring and summer of 2008. Despite Funkhouser's stated goal of the creation of a larger, regional rail system, this group could not agree to prepare an acceptable plan in time for the November election.

Because this starter line was a very modest initial step toward creation of a more extensive system, there was little room (or time) for an extended discussion with stakeholders or the public, once the decision was made to move forward. Additionally, the public had already voted to approve a more elaborate system, so there was certainly reason to believe that a more modest system might also meet with approval. Moreover, the electorate had considered six other rail proposals in the decade preceding the November 4, 2008 ballot.

## **Transit Environment**

#### *Lack of problems with existing transit system* ↑

Kansas City's existing transit system, almost exclusively bus service, is a relatively low-volume operation. In 2009, for example, a total of approximately 1.7 million trips were

taken system-wide, compared to the St. Louis metropolitan total of 5.6 million. The system therefore lacks a high profile and has not typically been the subject of great acclaim or controversy. Moreover, city voters had approved the renewal of a ¾ cent sales tax for the bus system earlier in 2008, so there is little reason to believe that the existing transit system was viewed with disfavor.

### *Congestion “crisis”* ↓

Supporters tried to make the case that of the 27 metropolitan areas larger than Kansas City, only three (Detroit, Cincinnati, and Orlando) do not have rail transit).<sup>95</sup> They cited studies that stated that Kansas City’s labor force loses approximately \$570 million in productivity while waiting in traffic and that rush hour congestion had more than tripled between 1983 and 2003.<sup>96</sup>

However, in comparison to other metropolitan areas, the Kansas City metropolitan area is not characterized by extreme amounts of traffic or congestion. Although ranked 29<sup>th</sup> in population, the area ranks in the 70<sup>th</sup> for measures such as delay per peak traveler and 80<sup>th</sup> in total travel time.<sup>97</sup> So although Kansas City almost certainly experiences some negative consequences of from its reliance on the automobile, its current traffic levels probably did not connote a “congestion crisis” to most residents as defined in this study.

### *Recent initiative experience* ↓

In some ways, Kansas City has had more collective experience with transit tax initiatives than virtually any other community. As stated earlier, the city had voted on a spate of proposals over the decade preceding the 2008 campaign. However, most of these proposals, along with being failures, were in essence sponsored by the same self-directed individual and therefore lacked official imprimatur as well as professional campaign mechanisms. So city and transit agency staff themselves had little experience with mounting such a campaign, despite the recent success of a much more costly plan at the polls in 2006.

## **The Campaign**

The campaign for the light rail proposal was led by attorney Pat McLarney, with Kansas City Mayor Mark Funkhouser’s avid support. A primary argument leveled by supporters was that the light rail system would be a bargain, because: (a) around 40 percent of the sales tax increase burden would fall on visitors; (b) 25 percent would be recovered via light rail fares; and (c) the federal government would come through with subsidies to cover up to one half of the remaining cost. Supporters also appealed to civic pride, suggesting that most other cities now had light rail systems, and that Kansas City was losing a competition for modern transit. Initially, the high price of gasoline was a selling point as well, which became less effective as the price of gasoline nosedived during the ongoing economic crisis.

### *Sponsorship by the business community* ↓

Generally, key business groups in Kansas City seemed to favor the proposal; one major victory for the plan was an endorsement by the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce – its first expression of support for a light rail proposal after opposing several. Several law firms with downtown offices as well as Downtown Council of Kansas City also expressed support. However, several other key business and civic groups failed to rally behind the proposal. Additionally, some members of the Chamber seemed to voice reservations about the long-term costs of the proposal. Moreover, the business community failed to come forth with the kind of financial support that signals a real commitment to such a proposal and interviewees from the proponent’s campaign signaled frustration over the lack of meaningful support.

### *Sponsorship by key elected officials* ↑

Mayor Mark Funkhouser was the single outstanding and outspoken champion of the light rail proposal among elected officials. Although he had consistently favored a more ambitious regional transportation plan, he also threw his adamant support in favor of the starter project. (His previous opposition to the starter project concept, even though it was in the context of seeking a grander project, became fuel for the opposition, however.)

### *Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)* ↓

Total fundraising for the supporters campaign was much less than the \$1 million benchmark, closer to \$500,000.<sup>98</sup> Citizens for Light Rail, the proposal’s campaign arm reported receiving approximately \$300,000 in donations. Reportedly, approximately one-fifth of that total came from downtown law firms that presumably stood to benefit from the proximity of the proposed initial line.<sup>99</sup>

### *Support from environmental groups* ↑

Major environmental groups supported the proposal, although their contribution did not comprise substantive contributions to the campaign effort beyond their endorsements.<sup>100</sup>

### *Consultant with initiative experience* ↔

The primary consultant for the campaign was Pat Gray, a local campaign specialist with a track record in getting candidates elected, but relatively little experience, if any, with tax campaigns. Additionally, supporters hired “Zata3,” a “Democratic-leaning” Washington, DC firm that emphasizes direct contact with voters (over mass media), including text messaging. However efficacious such tactics may be, they are essentially untested in the context of a transportation tax initiative.

### *Use of media* ↓

The supporters’ campaign emphasized a low-key approach that downplayed use of major media outlets. Instead, their efforts were focused on neighborhood meetings, the Internet,

including social media such as Facebook, and direct mail. The campaign also relied upon email and text messages. However, the bulk of the supporters' war chest was apparently directed toward direct mail. Said campaign director Pat McLarney, "Frankly, we spent a lot more of our money on direct mail, which has significant information that goes to every household in the city. We feel like we can get the full message out a lot better than we can on 30-second sound bites on the TV."<sup>101</sup> However, the campaign lacked a high-profile major media presence is associated with the presence of this factor.

### *Unorganized, poorly funded opposition* ⇔

Some opposition did arise with respect to the light-rail proposal. A group called "Citizens for Sensible Transit" (also known as "Citizens for Responsible Spending") raised roughly \$150,000, primarily from small business owners, some with ties to the automobile industry writ large. Donations came from a car-wash owner, a road builder, and a "media placement" specialist. The last apparently helped pay for the placement of "flashy" anti-light rail billboards across the city.<sup>102</sup>

The opposition centered its message on a theme of uncertainty, suggesting that "too many unresolved details about the plan remained."<sup>103</sup> It also unsuccessfully sought to stop the election in court, contending that the city had not followed proper legal procedure when it enacted the ordinance that put the light rail proposal on the ballot. Beyond free press coverage from an otherwise generally supportive local media, the opposition group had little chance to affect the outcome of the election.

The opposition's success therefore followed a not unprecedented pattern of exploiting a news vacuum about such a proposal. Said a frustrated supporter, "The opposition can just pick out [words] like 'experiment, 'a billion dollars' and a few words on a negative side and get that message out. It's hard to do it on a positive side."<sup>104</sup> Had supporters been able to raise more funds, the type and amount of organized opposition to the project might have been insufficient to forestall a positive outcome.

### *Congressional or presidential election*

The November ballot coincided with the presidential election. Turnout for the election was indeed high (66.7 percent). However, approximately 10,000 fewer individuals completed their ballot for the light rail question than for the presidential choice, indicating some drop-off in voter interest and/or stamina. Because the measure lost by more than 10,000 votes, this fact did not really affect the outcome, but it does suggest that the measure was not paramount in voters' minds, despite the high turnout.

## **Evaluation**

"Too many things broke against us," said Kansas City lawyer Pat McLarney, a leader of the campaign supporting light rail."<sup>105</sup> Supporters tended to blame the economic downturn for the rapid reversal of support for a light rail tax between 2006 and 2008. Only 44 percent of voters backed the  $\frac{3}{8}$  cent sales tax for a 14-mile light-rail line.



In terms of the expectations associated with the factors used in this report, the initiative was ill-fated. The Kansas City campaign was saddled with at least nine factors that associated with losing efforts (lack of a multi-modal proposal, lack of highway funding, lack of widespread benefit from proposal, sunset provision over 20 years, lack of a congestions “crisis,” lack of recent initiative experience, lack of fundraising over \$1 million, lack of a mixed media campaign), and only four clearly positive ones (support from key elected official, lack of problems with existing system, support from environmental groups, lack of organized opposition, general election). Ambiguous or inconclusive factors, such as, use of a consultant with imitative campaign experience, and sponsorship by the business community did not seem to auger well for the outcome either.

In retrospect, the opposition was not particularly well-funded or organized, but relative to the amount of financial and organizational support that the measure received, it was quite effective. The small scale of the project may also have helped to doom it, as this aspect of the proposal created ripples among several factors (lack of a multi-modal proposal, lack of highway funding, lack of widespread benefits from proposal). It is likely that relatively few voters saw any specific benefit to themselves or their community from this scaled-back proposal.

## **CASE STUDY 7: ST. LOUIS COUNTY – ANOTHER DEFEAT FOR METROLINK**

### **Introduction**

In November of 2008, St. Louis County voters narrowly defeated Proposition M, a ½ cent sales tax that would have supported public transit operations and infrastructure, including the region’s light rail system, known as “MetroLink.” Proposition M would have raised an estimated \$80 million a year for a system that faced a \$45 million deficit, and in doing so might have provided stability for the foreseeable future. However, the campaign to pass Proposition M failed, as opposing voters edged supporters by 51.5 to 48.5 percent. Had merely 8,000 voters out of the 509,000 total supported the measure, the outcome would have changed in favor of Proposition M.

The St. Louis area was also featured in the 2001 MTI report, which also chronicled a losing effort. In 1997, voters rejected a ¼ cent sales tax increase that would have primarily funded additional lines for the existing MetroLink system by a 58 percent to 42 percent margin. One of the primary factors that seemed to doom that initiative was controversy over the plans for a routing of an additional MetroLink line that had already been approved for funding.<sup>106</sup> This was one of the cases from the 2001 study that helped build the case for “Lack of problems with existing transit system” as a potentially critical factor in helping passage of transit tax initiatives.

### **The Transit Package**

Proposition M was planned to inject public transit in the St. Louis area at an estimated rate of \$80 million per year, with half of that sum to be used to cover a shortfall of operating funds at “Metro,” the agency that runs most of the Metrolink system as well as the MetroBus service, including demand-driven bus services. Some funds were to go to modernizing the

system's fare collection system. The remainder was to be devoted to future expansion of the MetroLink light rail line. However, no specific lines or routes were detailed in the Proposition.

The 2008 campaign carried additional significance for area residents, as passage of the St. Louis County measure would also have the effect of kick starting a ¼ cent sales tax increase in the City of St. Louis that had been passed in 1997, contingent on the county tax increase.

Proposition M would put a shot in the arm for public transportation at an estimated rate of \$80 million per year, \$40 million of which would be used to cover a shortfall of operating funds at Metro, with the remainder banked for future expansion of the MetroLink light-rail line.

### *Multimodal proposal*

As the funds raised by this tax increase would have been in part devoted to shoring up Metro's operating deficit, including its MetroBus service, this was at least in theory a multimodal proposal. On the other hand, the only new service it would have funded was light rail expansion.

### *Highway funding*

The proposal contained no funding for highways.

### *Benefits distributed throughout area*

To the extent that Metrolink and MetroBus serve the entire county, this project could be characterized as providing benefits throughout the service area. Improvements in fare collection technology would presumably also be system-wide. Additionally, the future expansion of the Metrolink system that was to be funded by half of the revenue was not specified by area, further expanding the potential for perception, if not the reality of system-wide benefits. The fact that passage would have activated an additional tax in the City of St. Louis further confirms that this measure could be perceived as benefitting a wide area.

### *Sunset provision of 20 years or less*

The new ½ cent increase was slated to sunset in 20 years.

### *Extension of existing rail system*

Half of the revenue garnered by the tax was planned to help fund expansion of the MetroLink system, although specific routes were not identified in the transit package. The MetroLink system was a well-known, even popular public transit option at the time of the election.



### *Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package* ↓

The proposal was prepared largely by County and Metro transit agency officials. As it did not call for a creation of a new system, or the detailed systemic expansion of the existing one, it is unsurprising that large scale public participation was not a factor in its development. Nevertheless, the public did not have significant exposure to or input into the transit package that went to the ballot.

### **Transit Environment**

The City of St. Louis – which excludes St. Louis County – is a medium-sized American city of approximately 350,000, but the Greater St. Louis Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is the fifteenth largest in the United States, with a population of 2.8 million. Traffic congestion is moderate; the Texas Transportation Institute recently ranked the area is only 47<sup>th</sup> in “Annual Delay per Traveler” and 52<sup>nd</sup> in its “Travel Time Index.”<sup>107</sup> (However, the St. Louis public transit system is robust and its light rail system is widely regarded as one of the more successful new systems in the US.

That said, the Metro system is not without its problems and challenges. As detailed in the 2001 MTI study, ill-timed squabbling about Metrolink routes seemed to cripple its 1997 tax initiative campaign. Similar problems would seem to have helped doom its 2008 effort.

### *Lack of problems with existing transit system* ↓

Although Metro has earned a reputation as a reliable system in terms of service provision that had improved on-time performance during past five-to-ten years, problems with new construction of the MetroLink system arose in the form of cost overruns. As these problems threatened to push the agency over budget, the agency leadership opted to sue an engineering firm over the overruns. However, Metro lost its case in court and was also obliged to pay legal fees for the defendant. These events, along with a cutback in its federal operating subsidy had the combined effect of draining the system’s operating budget to the brink of bankruptcy. Thus the agency’s public image was at low ebb as Proposition M came up for public consideration.

### *Congestion “crisis”* ↓

As documented by TTI statistics, traffic congestion in the St. Louis area, while certainly not insignificant, is probably not what was at issue in this election. The viability of the existing transit system and its future were of more direct importance, although proponents of Proposition M certainly attempted to establish a link between possible service cuts and increased congestion.

### *Recent initiative experience* ↓

Before the 2008 election, the last tax ballot initiative in the County of St. Louis was the failed 1997 effort that was detailed in the 2001 MTI study. Therefore, neither policymakers nor the public had recently gained experience or familiarity with the process. However, the

fact that a similar initiative was passed just two years later (in 2010) would seem to reaffirm the potential utility of recent ballot experience. (The latter election is briefly discussed in a subsequent section titled Outcomes of Rebound Elections.)

### **The Campaign**

In cooperation with support from the County Executive's office, Bob Baer, the CEO of Metro endeavored to have the St. Louis County Council voted to put Proposition M on the ballot for November of 2008. The public campaign was driven by the County Executive's (Charley Dooley) office, while Metro led public education portion of the effort. Additionally, a key staffer from the County Executive's office, Darren Cline, was tasked to the campaign. Opposition to the initiative was neither broad-based nor well funded. However, the campaign seemed to lack a major selling point, a key public figure to energize its cause, and lacked the funding support that many successful efforts boast. One of the campaign's central messages – that failure to pass Proposition M would result in service cuts – was essentially negative and, in retrospect, perhaps did not constitute a convincing rallying point given the agency's other problems.

At the same time, what could be characterized as a more grassroots effort was marshaled by the Transit Alliance, an amalgamation of more than fifty community-based organizations with an interest in the transit system. However, the role of this coalition was neither broad nor clear enough to make a decisive impact on the outcome of the election, although it did help to raise nearly \$100,000 for the campaign. To a certain extent, the efforts of the Transit Alliance were not well-coordinated with those of the Proposition M campaign.<sup>108</sup>

A further problem for the Proposition M campaign was the fact that the issue was going before an essentially suburban electorate. Pre-election polling suggested that only 10 percent of the respondents used the Metro system, and many of those used it to get to and from sporting events in downtown St. Louis.

#### *Sponsorship by the business community* ↓

Although not by any means totally absent, support for the measure from the local business community seemed to be lukewarm, as some ambivalence existed towards a tax increase seemed to temper enthusiasm and donations for the cause. Major business coalitions such as Civic Progress and the Regional Business Council were on board, but perhaps less than optimally engaged on a leadership and financial support basis.

#### *Sponsorship by key elected officials* ↔

St. Louis County lacks a strong elected executive official, so this aspect of the election is problematic to evaluate. The County Executive and most of the County Council supported the measure strongly, but it is not clear whether the public could associate this measure with a well-known, visible elected official.

### *Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)* ↓

Due perhaps to the less than enthusiastic support from the local business community, the Proposition M campaign raised \$700,000 and the Transit Alliance raised an additional \$100,000 – not a trifling amount, but not close enough the million dollar benchmark identified for this factor. The recalcitrance of the business community may have been linked to a negative experience with the consultant to a previous campaign. In any event, fundraising efforts were deemed less than successful by the supporters of Proposition M.

### *Support from environmental groups* ↑

The proposal received support from environmentalists, including the Sierra Club, which noted the funding measure would help “get more people out of their cars and on alternatives like transit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions” and “meet the growing demand for public transit service, thereby encouraging more sustainable life styles.”<sup>109</sup>

### *Consultant with initiative experience* ↑

The campaign hired a consultant, Rich Slackman (a Democrat from San Francisco with extensive experience in local initiative campaigns), although the extent which Slackman had transit-specific tax initiative experience or experience in other St. Louis campaigns is unclear.

### *Use of media* ↓

Slackman is well-known for his effective use of direct mailing strategies, which were used heavily in the Proposition M campaign, but interviewees questioned the effectiveness and volume of other media ads. Essentially, the campaign lacked sufficient funding to do an adequate amount of on-air campaigning using major media.<sup>110</sup>

### *Unorganized, poorly funded opposition* ↑

Although several County Council members opposed the measure (and had voted against its inclusion on the ballot), they did not take an active or vocal role once the campaign began. Other opposition wasn’t organized or funded to any significant degree.

## **Evaluation**

Given that seven factors associated with passage of transit tax initiatives (highway funding, extensive stakeholder participation, lack of problems with transit agency, congestion crisis, recent initiative experience, strong business community support) were not satisfied by the St. Louis County effort, the negative outcome seems quite consistent with that predicted by the model. Five factors (multi-modal proposal, wide distribution of benefits, sunset provision, extension of existing system, and lack of organized opposition) mitigated in favor of passage, and two were found to be inconclusive (support of key elected official, experienced transit election consultant).

Of the negative conditions, the negative public perception of the transit system was deemed by interviewees to be one key to the outcome, but other factors were potentially at play as well. One might have expected such an initiative to fare well in a county with a large African American population in the presidential election of 2008, where Barack Obama won by 20 percentage points (and by more than 100,000 votes). However, the presidential election turned out to be quite possibly a negative factor, as it created such high turnout that some precincts had four-hour lines, particularly in African American precincts. Some questioned the extent to which the campaign actively courted the African American community. As Proposition M was near the bottom of a lengthy slate, nearly 50,000 fewer voters weighed in on the ballot measure as voted in the Presidential race. Given the slender margin by which it failed, this precipitous voting drop-off may have singlehandedly doomed Proposition M.

Another possible negative factor unique to this case was the presence of two additional tax measures on the St. Louis County ballot. Pre-election polling suggested that Proposition M would fare poorly if it were in competition with other tax measures. This forecast proved valid; the fact that the campaign lacked enough funding to raise awareness above these “competing” measures was perhaps an additional and final impediment to its prospects.

## **CASE STUDY 8: SANTA CLARA COUNTY’S CALCULATIONS – MEASURE B’S ⅛ CENT SUPPLEMENTAL SALES TAX INCREASE (2008)**

### **Introduction**

The 2001 MTI study featured Santa Clara County’s improbable passage of Measure A in 2000, which was a 30-year extension of a ½ cent transit-dedicated sales tax increase set to expire in 2006. The 2000 vote featured \$6 billion in projects, including the marquee Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) heavy rail extension to San Jose. By 2002, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) – the special district tasked with managing congestion and maintaining the county’s roads and transit – was experiencing a budget shortfall and was forced to reduce existing bus and light rail services. In 2005, VTA withdrew requests for matching federal financing for BART so as to be able to resolve travel demand modeling discrepancies, evaluate ridership estimates and address financial capacity issues. Measure A “included more than \$1 billion in rail operating costs, but according to VTA staff, another sales tax to cover operating costs for the life of the tax would probably be needed in 2112 or 2114.”<sup>111</sup> The bursting of the Silicon Valley high tech bubble probably contributed to the need for additional revenue sooner than prophesied, prompting Measure B in 2008.

### **The Transit Package**

In 2008, the VTA board proposed a ⅛ cent supplemental sales tax increase to generate a dedicated revenue stream sufficient to fulfill the bulk of VTA’s obligation to BART for the operation, maintenance and future capital reserve of the system without impacting existing and planned service levels for VTA bus and light rail service. On November 4, 2008, the tax increase was very narrowly approved with 66.78 percent of the vote, California requiring a two-thirds majority. The ballot language of Measure B made collection of the tax contingent on assurance of state and federal funds, specifically: receipt of a Full Funding Grant Agreement of \$750 million from the Federal Transit Administration and an

Allocation Request of at least \$240 million from the California Transportation Commission (or equivalent).

*Multimodal proposal* ↓

Measure B strictly addressed the need for further revenue to finance BART.

*Highway funding* ↓

Corresponding to Measure A in 2000, Measure B contained no funds for highway projects.

*Benefits distributed throughout area* ↔

VTA has traditionally organized itself according to the principle that its routes cover a comprehensive geographic area. Year 2000's Measure A projects sought goals of high expected ridership, regional connectivity and socioeconomic balance. Most prominently, Measure A sought to connect the east Bay Area to the population center of the south Bay Area via the BART rail system. The route is expected to be within a 15-minute automobile or public transit trip for 1,007,000 residents.<sup>112</sup> However, as this represents just over half of Santa Clara County residents and many proposed stations of the BART extension are not easily accessible by south and west San Jose residents, this factor is deemed inconclusively present.

*Sunset provision of 20 years or less* ↓

The ⅛ cent sales tax increase will be in effect for 30 years once matching funds are secured.

*Extension of existing rail system* ↑

The original planners of the BART system envisioned heavy rail surrounding the San Francisco Bay. The line currently terminates in the Alameda County city of Fremont, not extending into Santa Clara County. The BART extension detailed in Measure A and more fully financed by Measure B will serve the South Bay cities of Milpitas and Santa Clara and populous areas of north, east and downtown San Jose.

*Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package* ↔

As was the case in 2000, Silicon Valley Leadership Group (SVLG, previously known as Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group) sparked the coalition building process, beginning as early as 2006. The group hosted targeted stakeholder meetings with organizations such as the League of Conservation voters, the San Jose Downtown Association and the League of Women Voters. Further, it conducted a survey gauging support of SVLG member companies, and coordinated communications to key networks throughout the campaign. SLVG also conducted polls testing a variety of ballot language.



Akin to 2000, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors declined to place the measure on the ballot, but the VTA board (consisting largely of San Jose and other local municipality council members) consented to do so. As a governmental body, VTA was required to conduct public hearings on the proposed BART extension.

While these actions are certainly evidence of some stakeholder participation, given the intended dedicated expenditure of this  $\frac{1}{8}$  cent increase, the process did not feature the level of interaction and negotiation indicated by this factor. Yet this measure was built upon a series of previous measures that did entail more sweeping participatory measures. Thus, this factor is at best inconclusively present in this case.

## Transit Environment

Santa Clara County features in excess of 1.7 million residents, with more than 1 million located in the city of San Jose. Due to decades of development-friendly land use decisions, San Jose is a vast sprawl of over 178 square miles in which many residents live in low-density suburbs several (if not dozens of) miles from their places of work. High paying high tech jobs are typically located in northern San Jose and northern neighboring cities, whereas many affluent communities are located in inadequately connected southeast San Jose. Car ownership is nearly uniform in the “Capital of Silicon Valley,” and the City of San Jose’s focus on transit-oriented development (TOD) and increased connectivity in its Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan Update are slow to captivate residents who rely on automobiles out of personal convenience and/or necessity. While smart land use planning and the concept of regionalism are increasingly gripping leaders throughout the Bay Area region, a change in attitudes toward personal use of public transportation has yet to be seen among the vast majority of Santa Clara County residents, whose vehicle occupancy rates are among the lowest in the nation.

### *Lack of problems with existing transit system* ⇔

In 2007, VTA received a scathing audit from the consulting firm the Hay Group, including charges that the VTA board’s rotation scheme led to ineffectual decision-making and that the system was vastly underutilized and its assets mismanaged. In response, VTA launched “The New VTA” campaign, which expanded bus service in the highest ridership corridors and eliminated routes with low ridership. An August 2008 VTA press release showed a 2.6 percent increase in system ridership from a year previously, partially due to expansion of the system’s EcoPass partnerships with private businesses, colleges, and residential organizations. Though not time tested, a trend of improvement carried into this vote.

### *Congestion “crisis”* ↑

After many improvements to highways and public transit, Santa Clara County remains a heavily congested metropolitan area with impacted corridors in nearly all cities. Area congestion statistic rankings peaked with the high tech bubble in 2000–2001, at which point Travel Time Index, Delay Per Peak Traveler and Cost Per Peak Traveler were consistently among the six worst metropolitan areas in the nation. Conditions improved

slightly in the early 2000s, but congestion was on the rise once again by the latter half of the last decade. In 2007, a Travel Time Index of 1.36 exceeded year 2000 measures and Congestion Cost totaled over \$1 billion.<sup>113</sup> Public opinion surveys – the present day economic crisis conditions aside – typically find “traffic congestion” ranking at or near the top of residents’ policy concerns.

### *Recent initiative experience* ↑

In 2006, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors (in consultation with vested stakeholders) placed on the ballot a 30-year ½ cent sales tax increase for general county purposes, including healthcare and transportation planning and improvements. While it could not legally be expressly stated that the general tax would fund BART, it was understood to be a priority project. The general-purpose tax increase required only a simple majority to pass, however, it was defeated 43 percent to 57 percent. (For a further discussion of this vote see section Rebound Elections.)

### **The Campaign**

The Silicon Valley Leadership Group, led by Carl Guardino, advocated a sales tax increase for BART operations and maintenance in 2006, which was collapsed into the failed general-purpose measure. SLVG approached the VTA board about putting the ⅛ cent supplemental increase on the 2008 ballot and ran the “Yes on B” campaign. As a taxpayer funded special district, VTA is severely limited in its ability to campaign for measures it supports. A week before the election, VTA came under scrutiny for alleged collusion with SVLG after email correspondence between the two groups strongly indicated that opinion editorials in favor of the measure run in the *San Jose Mercury News* – the county’s major newspaper – were written by VTA staff.<sup>114</sup> This legal gaffe and ensuing court challenges notwithstanding, the pro-transit coalition backing Yes on B ran an effective, comprehensive series of targeted campaigns.

### *Sponsorship by the business community* ↑

Nearly every member organization of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group and the San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce supported Measure B. The substantial capital from these business interests served as a solid fundraising base, and was augmented by efforts from the Santa Clara Building & Construction Trades Council and South Bay Labor Council as well as individual donations from SVLG and Chamber company executives.

Numerous Silicon Valley CEOs were quoted professing their beliefs that the planned BART extension will stimulate economic growth by providing construction jobs and increased commercial opportunity along the designated corridor. Many also expressed the desire for greater connectivity and transit options for themselves and their employees.

Yes on B consultants indicated that among the most significant proponents of Measure B were: Carl Guardino (SVLG), Neil Struthers from the Building Trades Council, and Phaedra Ellis-Lamkins from the South Bay Labor Council. Guardino has been a stalwart supporter and key player in Santa Clara County’s expansion of public transportation for over 20



years. The labor leaders were critical in fundraising, providing volunteers for phone banks and precinct walks, and eliciting buy-in of local politicians.

### *Sponsorship by key elected officials* ⇔

In addition to the VTA board consisting of elected local city council members and county supervisors, two visible supporters of Measure B were San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed and San Jose City Councilmember Sam Liccardo (the latter representing downtown and serving on numerous Bay Area transportation and planning commissions). While Mayor Reed allowed his likeness to be featured in mailers for Measure B and was occasionally quoted in favor of the extension, he did not explicitly champion the proposal, and his political viability was not tied to the measure to the extent seen in other cases studied.

The region's congressional delegation also lent its support to Measure B. Safely situated Congressman Mike Honda (who represents west San Jose and neighboring southwestern cities) was also featured in Yes on B direct mail pieces. In terms of targeted geographical support in a region not expected to receive many benefits from the proposed line, his endorsement may have been important, but again lacks the degree conviction implied by this factor.

### *Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)* ↑

The Yes on B campaign raised just over \$1,000,000.<sup>115</sup>

### *Support from environmental groups* ↓

The local chapter of the Sierra Club opposed Measure B, but mailers highlighting the environmental positives of increased public transit utilization likely mitigated the effectiveness of this largely muted opposition.

### *Consultant with initiative experience* ↑

Three months before the election, SVLG contracted Barry Barnes of TBW&B Public Financing Strategies Inc. Barnes had previously worked on transportation campaigns in Sonoma County in 2004 and Fresno in 2006, as well as been familiar with the failed 2006 general purpose tax proposal. His guided passage of Measure M in Sonoma County was its first approved countywide transportation package in four attempts.

### *Use of media* ↑

In addition to editorials in the *Mercury News*, the Yes on B campaign utilized various forms of media in disseminating its pro-transit message. Its most prominent advertising ploy came in the form of direct mail targeted to: Republicans, women, independent holdouts, seniors and younger voters. Volunteers distributed informational flyers to San José State University students highlighting the BART station planned in the vicinity of the campus. The Yes on B campaign maintained an extensive website featuring testimonials from transit

supporters. The campaign also produced television spots and purchased airtime on cable news outlets such as CNN.

While a by-and-large positive campaign, Barnes acknowledged that two direct mail pieces were produced specifically to rebut opposition arguments.

### *Unorganized, poorly funded opposition* ↑

Opposition mounted against Measure B claiming inaccurate ridership statistics and a waste of taxpayer funds. Opposition came from the Silicon Valley Taxpayer Association and Citizens for Responsible Transit Planning. The No on B camp was somewhat organized, also writing editorials in local papers and immediately seeking legal recourse for perceived inappropriate interaction between VTA and the Yes on B campaign. However, the opposition was only able to raise \$40,000, which included a large donation from Cypress Semiconductor (the only actively opposing member company of SVLG) and a local car salesman. As the group could not afford any form of anti-rail media campaign, it is deemed ineffective for purposes of this study.

### *Congressional or presidential election* ↑

This vote took place on November 4, 2008, simultaneous to the election of Barack Obama. While Silicon Valley is predominately Democratic and of progressive ideological orientation, the Yes on B campaign did not partner with the extensive network of Obama supporters in the region in distributing their pro-transit message.

## **Summation of Factors**

The success of Santa Clara County's Measure B featured a replication of the following positive factors from the 2001 study:

- Extension of existing rail system
- Congestion "crisis"
- Recent initiative experience
- Sponsorship by the business community
- Sponsorship by key elected officials
- Consultant with initiative experience
- Use of media
- Congressional or presidential election
- Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)

- 
- Unorganized, poorly funded opposition

The effects of the following factors are inconclusively present:

- Benefits distributed throughout area
- Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package
- Lack of problems with existing transit system

The following factors, which were associated with success in the earlier research, were not in effect for this election:

- Multimodal proposal
- Highway funding
- Sunset provision of 20 years or less
- Support from environmental groups

This yields a total of ten replications of the apparent effect of factors from the previous study, three inconclusive finding, and four anomalous conditions.

## **Evaluation**

This case study is unique in that the sales tax increase discussed is a supplemental increase designed specifically to fulfill the financial obligations of one project detailed in a prior transit measure. Notably, the need for this supplemental tax was acknowledged at the time of passage of Measure A in 2000. Measure B is also unique in that it features a triggering mechanism in the form of assured state and federal matching funds. Yes on B campaign organizers contribute the measure's narrow passage to ballot language reassuring citizens that Santa Clara County taxpayers would not be funneling additional sales taxes into a non-start project.

The measure passed only by an eyelash, but its success speaks to the effectiveness of Silicon Valley business leaders in corralling support amongst key voting populations.



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### III. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this section, the results of the eight elections detailed in this study are summarized with respect to the performance of the seventeen factors that were identified in the 2001 MTI report as potential predictors. Additionally, the performance of these factors is compared with respect to that identified in the 2001 report, in keeping with the goal of seeking replication of the earlier findings.

This section begins with a description of the possible limitations of the results presented in this report; the case study approach used has serious implications for the degree to which the results may be internally and externally valid. Second, the results of all eight elections are presented in one table and analyzed with respect both to the performance of each factor in (a) “predicting” electoral outcomes overall, and (b) specific elections and types of elections. Third, these same results are compared directly with those obtained in the 2001 study. Finally, because several elections evaluated in the current study were bracketed by similar elections in the same communities within a very short time frame, a circumscribed, exploratory analysis of the outcomes of such “rebound” elections is presented as well. The section concludes with some general observations about the meaning of the results obtained for this study.

#### **Caveats on Findings**

As it employs the same methods, the current study shares weaknesses in the form of potential threats to the validity of its results with the 2001 project:

1. Possible measurement error and/or bias. Determining whether a given case example exemplifies the existence or absence of a given factor is ultimately often a primarily subjective endeavor, and in any event, one that lacks extreme precision. Although every effort has been made to make unbiased assignments, moreover, the predilections or other mistakes of the research team may affect these decisions.
2. Insufficient number of cases for causal analysis. The number of cases that met the stated criteria for selection is not large enough to support statistically robust analysis. Therefore the results reported must be regarded as at best suggestive of possible predictive and/or causal relationships between the factors analyzed and the outcomes of transit tax elections. However, it bears mention that the cases in this study do comprise the population of the elections of the size and scope of interest during the selected time period and not a sample, meaning that a statistically verifiable sample size is not available in any event. Additionally, as necessity dictated that fewer cases were available for study in the current study, the calculated accuracy of the factors is more sensitive to the outcome a single election.
3. Although the factors selected for analysis represent conceptually separate phenomena, in practice at least some of them may be highly inter-correlated. As noted in the 2001 report, for example, the degree to which the business community supports a tax proposal may be strongly related to its participation in shaping the package, and may affect the amount of money available to fund its campaign, which

in turn may affect the ability to mount a mixed-media campaign. This example illustrates how at least four factors may be to some immeasurable extent related to one another and thus potentially indistinguishable in terms of their impact on the outcome of a single election. Thus, caution must be exercised when considering the ostensible impact of virtually any single factor as a causal or predictive variable.

4. Transportation tax elections exhibit idiosyncratic qualities from community to community that may generate unique circumstances, which may themselves confound the apparent impact of the factors selected here for analysis. As stated in the MTI 2001 report:

The need and importance of having a transportation package that includes a highway component depend on (a) the current status of the highway system (which would influence the priority that voters attach to including highway improvements in the package), (b) the degree of impact that environmental groups may have on voting behavior if they oppose the measure (which they are likely to do if it has a substantial highway component), (c) the degree of importance that environmental groups place on beginning or improving a passenger rail system (which would influence their willingness to accept a highway component because these groups tend to support transit and, more specifically, rail transit), and (d) the extent that environmental groups perceive that an immediate solution is needed to improve the passenger rail system (which also would influence their willingness to compromise and thus support a rail ballot measure with a highway component or with a linked ballot measure with a highway component).<sup>116</sup>

5. The presence and “behavior” of the selected factors may vary over time, and may not be generalizable to future events. However, a major purpose of the current study is to determine to what extent factors identified more than ten years ago are still associated with election outcomes. So at the very least, these results are useful from the perspective of determining the reliability of the 2001 results over time.

In sum, the results of this study ought to be regarded with extreme caution, especially with respect to the extent that they may be easily recreated with policy actions in other communities under different circumstances. They do, however, provide decision makers and others with a basis for comparing the likely associations between specific characteristics of transportation tax elections and outcomes in the communities that are the focus here.

**Table 3. Factors Evaluated with Respect to Expected Outcomes**

	Charlotte (repeal) 2007	Honolulu 2008	Santa Clara County 2008	Los Angeles 2008	Maricopa County 2004	St. Louis 2008	Kansas City 2008	Seattle 2007
	Fail**	Pass***	Pass*	Pass*	Pass	Fail	Fail	Fail
Multimodal proposal	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑
Highway funding	↔	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑
Benefits distributed throughout area	↑	↑	↔	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑
Sunset provision of 20 years or less	↓	N/A	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓
Extension of existing rail system	↔	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↔
Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package	↑	↔	↔	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑
Lack of problems with existing transit system	↓	↑	↔	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓
Congressional or presidential election	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓
Congestion "crisis"	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑
Recent initiative experience	↓	↓	↑	↓	↔	↓	↓	↑
Sponsorship by the business community	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑
Sponsorship by key elected officials	↑	↑	↔	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓
Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑
Support from environmental groups	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓
Consultant with initiative experience	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↔	↑
Use of media	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↔	↓	↑
Unorganized, poorly funded opposition	↔	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↔	↓
Number of factors replicated	9	11	9	15	15	8	11	6
Number of anomalous factors	5	4	4	2	1	8	4	10
Number of ambiguous conditions	3	2	4	0	1	1	2	1

*Notes:*

\* Required 2/3 vote to pass

\*\* Repeal vote, factors evaluated from perspective of positive transit outcome

\*\*\* Affirmation vote of expenditure of Council-mandated increase

*Symbols:*

↑ Condition existed, outcome consistent with expectation

↓ Condition absent, outcome consistent with expectation

↔ Condition inconclusively or ambiguously present

■ Shading indicates anomalous condition, where presence or absence of factor was inconsistent with the expected outcome



The results from all eight case studies are collated in table 3 according to each of the 17 factors that were the focus of the analysis. Summed across all elections and factors, the results in the table indicate that of a total of 122 valid instances of factors and election outcomes (i.e., not inconclusive or ambiguous with respect to the presence of absence of a factor), 84 (or 68.9 percent) of the factors were consistent with the expected outcome of the elections. Therefore, 38 instances (31.1 percent) were inconsistent with outcome of the elections. Overall, this suggests that the factors are reasonably consistent with the election outcomes, although these figures exclude a total of 14 inconsistent or ambiguous instances. Were such instances included, the consistency of the factors with the electoral outcomes would drop to 61.8 percent.

By contrast, the 2001 study identified only 30 anomalous instances out of a total of 155 valid cases, with slightly more than 80 percent of the factor/outcome instances matching their expected outcomes. This finding suggests a notable degradation of the overall accuracy of the selected factors. One election seemed particularly influential with respect to this overall pattern. The outcome of the Seattle election created ten anomalies: despite matching many factors thought to be associated with electoral success, the Seattle proposal was rather easily defeated. The case study method does not enable an easy interpretation of this pattern, but it may be that, at least in this case, ongoing problems with the public perception of the transit agency meshed with a death of support from key political leaders were two factors that could not be overcome by the host of promising conditions.

The factors are noticeably more accurate in the context of successful elections than in failing ones. The five successful measures include a total of only 14 anomalous instances, or 19 percent of the valid instances, compared to the 23 (48 percent) inconsistencies identified in failed ones. This implies that, taken as a whole, the factors identified in this research are now more strongly related to success than they are to failure, a fact that perhaps dampens their overall utility. The three losing campaigns included the presence of several factors that were theorized to be associated with success, whereas relatively few of the winning campaigns were characterized by the absence of such factors. For example, the losing campaigns in St. Louis and Seattle both featured multimodal proposals that benefitted a broad geographical spectrum and were guided by experienced tax initiative consultants. One possible interpretation is that these anomalous factors act as necessary but not always sufficient forces.

A similar, but much less pronounced pattern is present in the 2001 data; the six successful campaigns examined in that study included a rate of 16 percent anomalous instances, compared to a 24 percent rate among the four unsuccessful ones. Thus, to a modest extent, this pattern in the current data represents replication of the original findings, albeit in a manner that seems to undercut the general consistency and utility of the findings.

**Table 4. Accuracy of Individual Factors Compared, 2001 and Current (2011) Study**

Factor	2001	2011	Trend in Accuracy
Multimodal proposal	8/9 89%	4/8 50%	Weaker
Highway funding	6/10 60%	4/7 57%	About the same
Benefits distributed throughout area	9/10 90%	5/7 71%	Weaker
Sunset provision of 20 years or less	1/8 12.5%	3/7 43%	Stronger
Lack of problems with existing transit system	10/10 100%	5/6 83%	About the same
Congressional or presidential election	7/10 70%	5/8 63%	About the same
Congestion "crisis"	8/9 89%	7/8 88%	About the same
Recent initiative experience	7/10 70%	3/7 43%	Weaker
Sponsorship by the business community	6/7 85%	7/8 87%	About the same
Sponsorship by key elected officials	9/9 100%	7/8 87.5%	About the same
Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)	8/9 89%	6/8 75%	About the same
Support from environmental groups	5/9 55%	5/8 63%	About the same
Consultant with initiative experience	8/9 89%	5/7 71%	Weaker
Use of media	9/10 90%	7/8 88%	About the same
Unorganized, poorly funded opposition	7/7 100%	4/6 75%	Weaker

*Note:* Ratios refer to number of accurate outcomes out of total number of valid cases, upon which percentages were calculated

## CONSISTENCY OF INDIVIDUAL FACTORS WITH OUTCOMES

The results presented in table 4 contrast the calculated accuracy of individual factors in "predicting" the outcome associated with each in both the 2001 and present studies. On the whole, the results in the final column suggest that, despite the overall decline in accuracy noted earlier, many of the factors are either about as accurate (i.e., within 15 percentage points) as they were in the 2001 study with respect to being associated with electoral success or failure. More specifically, ten of the factors remained within 15 percentage points of accuracy (plus two that grew more accurate) and five weakened by more than that margin. The following section contains a more detailed examination of the results associated with each factor in both the current and 2001 studies. In this context, accuracy is associated with the presence or absence of a factor coinciding with expected

outcome. Thus, an election wherein a given factor did *not* exist would be proscribe an accurate outcome if the measure failed (and vice versa).

### *Factors that most closely replicate earlier findings*

#### Highway funding\*

The presence of funding for highway in transportation packages was only inconsistently associated with passage or failure of tax measures. It was accurate in four of seven cases (57 percent), nearly identical to the 60 percent rate estimated in the 2001 study.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011, weak; 2001, weak.

#### Benefits distributed throughout area\*

A reasonably accurate factor, having benefits of the transportation distributed throughout the voting jurisdiction was consistent with the election outcome in five of seven valid cases (71 percent). This factor was even more consistently accurate in 2001 (90 percent).

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011, strong; 2001, strong.

#### Sunset provision of 20 years or less\*

The existence or lack of a sunset provision is only weakly associated with electoral outcomes; it is accurate in just three of seven valid cases (43 percent). The factor was less accurate in predicting outcomes in the 2001 study (12.5 percent), but that is in part due to the use 10 years as the cut-off point for existence of the factor in that study. In any event, sunset provisions do not appear to be closely linked to the outcome of this kind of election.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011, weak; 2001, weak.

#### Congestion “crisis”\*

Perhaps the most consistently accurate predictor over the course of the two studies was the existence of a perceived or real traffic congestion “crisis.” In both studies’ data, only one anomalous valid case was identified, resulting in approximately an 88 percent accuracy rate in each. Essentially, locales that can make a strong case for a transportation problem are much more likely to succeed than those that cannot, and vice versa.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011, strong; 2001, strong.

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\* *Note:* Factors marked with an asterisk are those that seemed to most closely replicate the findings in the 2001 study.

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Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package\*

As was the case in 2001, extensive stakeholder participation (or lack thereof) was quite consistent with the outcome of transit tax elections. Five of valid six cases (83 percent) were consistent with the expected outcome; in 2001, 90 percent were consistent.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011, strong; 2001, strong.

Sponsorship by the business community\*

In the data presented in both studies, sponsorship by the local business community seems to be critical with respect to electoral success or failure. In both, the factor was consistent with electoral outcomes in approximately 85 percent of the valid cases (6/7 in 2001, 7/8 in 2011).

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011 strong; 2001, strong.

Sponsorship by key elected officials\*

Similarly, the data in both studies bear out the consistency of the importance of sponsorship by a key official or officials. In the 2011 data, the outcomes six of the seven cases (85 percent) were consistent with factor; in the 2001, all of the valid cases exhibited the same pattern (10/10).

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011 strong; 2001, strong.

Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)\*

Once again, fundraising is consistently associating with election outcomes. Among the 2011 cases, the outcomes of six of the eight (75 percent) cases match the presence or absence of fundraising at or above the targeted one million dollar total, compared to 89 percent in the 2001 study. In the current study, only the results from Seattle and Charlotte counter the expectation that raising a million dollars or more will help foster success. In Charlotte, this may be explained by the fact that the opposition to transit taxation unexpectedly withered in the context of a repeal referendum. The Seattle example is much more complex and certainly proves that effective fundraising, especially in the face of organized opposition is no panacea for passage.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011 strong; 2001, strong.

Support from environmental groups\*

In both the 2001 and 2011 data, support from environmental groups is only modestly associated with success or failure of transportation tax measures. In the 2001 study, nearly every campaign boasted support from environmental groups, meaning that failing elections also boasted such support. Thus only five of a valid nine cases (58 percent) were consistent with the expectation associated with this factor; in the current study, that ratio

increases very slightly to five of eight (63 percent). Yet the outcome of the Seattle case reminds us that in some circumstances, opposition from environmental groups can be associated with electoral failure for tax proposals. Very few campaigns face this challenge, so further generalization is difficult to support.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011 weak; 2001, weak.

#### Consultant with initiative experience\*

The data from both studies is fairly consistent with respect to the outcomes associated with having an experienced initiative consultant on board a pro-transit campaign. In 2001, the outcome of 89 percent of the cases were consistent with this factor; that percentage slipped to 75 percent (six of eight valid cases) in the 2011 cases.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011 moderate; 2001, strong.

#### Use of media\*

Use of a mixture of campaign was more consistently aligned with transit tax election outcomes in 2001, when nine of ten elections (90 percent) were consistent with expectations, compared to just six of eight cases (75 percent) in 2011.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011 moderate; 2001, strong.

#### Congressional or presidential election\*

In both the 2001 and 2011 data, whether an election was held during a major (presidential or congressional) election cycle was only moderately linked to the tax measure's success. In the current study, the electoral cycle was an accurate predictor of electoral outcomes in five of eight cases (63 percent), compared to a 70 percent rate in the 2001 study. Notably, in 2008 neither St. Louis County nor Kansas City found success despite the ostensible coattails of the Obama presidential candidacy, although measures in Santa Clara and Los Angeles counties were indeed successful, both meeting a  $\frac{2}{3}$  supermajority requirement.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011, moderate; 2001, moderate.

#### *Factors that least closely replicate earlier findings*

##### Multimodal proposal

The results presented in table 4 indicate that of eight valid cases analyzed in the current study, the presence or absence of a multimodal proposal in the transportation package was consistent with the expected outcome of elections only half of the time (4 of 8 cases). This 50 percent rate of accuracy is notably weaker than that identified in the 2001 study (89 percent, of eight of nine cases). Note that this finding does not necessarily connote that multimodal projects are not currently associated with success, but it does suggest that they neither guarantee success and nor does their absence guarantee failure.

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Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011, weak; 2001, strong.

#### Extension of existing rail system

Transportation packages extending to an existing system – or failing to do so – was an accurate predictor of four of six valid cases (66 percent). In 2001, it was accurate in only half of the cases.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011, moderate; 2001, weak.

#### Lack of problems with existing transit system

In 2001, problems or the lack of problems with the existing transit system was extremely consistently linked to the expected tax election outcome (in ten of ten valid cases). In 2011, this factor was somewhat less consistent with respect to transit tax election outcomes, accurate in 71 percent (5/7) of the valid cases.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011, moderate; 2001, strong.

#### Recent initiative experience

Possession (or lack) of recent experience with a similar measure was associated with the expected outcome in just three of seven valid cases (43 percent), whereas this was found to be accurate in 70 percent of ten cases in 2001. This finding, however, needs to be evaluated in the light of data presented in the following section on “rebound” elections.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011, weak; 2001, moderate.

#### Unorganized, poorly funded opposition

In the 2001 study, all seven valid cases were consistent with the expectation associated with this factor. However, in the current study, the outcomes from two cases ran counter to a valid prediction, resulting in only four of six valid cases (75 percent) consistent with expectations. In Maricopa County, an unexpectedly well-funded opposition (that emanated from a single opponent) was crushed with a far better funded supporting campaign; in St. Louis, the lack of an organized opposition did not prevent the failure of that community’s measure.

Evaluation of fit with election outcomes: 2011 moderate; 2001, strong.

### **Summary of consistency of individual factors with election outcomes over time**

In the current study, several factors seem to be notably less consistent with their expected outcomes than in the 2001 study, including: (1) multimodal proposal; (2) benefits distributed throughout the area; (3) lack of problems with existing transit system; (4) recent initiative experience; and (5) unorganized, poorly funded opposition. However, in nearly all of these instances, the factor remained at least moderately consistent with the election outcomes.



Several factors were of relatively little value in terms of their consistency with expected electoral outcomes in both studies, including: (1) highway funding; (2) sunset provisions of 20 years or less; (3) extension of existing rail system; (4) recent initiative experience; and (5) support from environmental groups.

Several factors stand out as consistently accurate with respect to “predicting” the outcome of local transportation tax elections in both the 2001 and 2011 data: (1) extensive stakeholder participation in development of package; (2) congestion “crisis”; (3) sponsorship by the business community; (4) sponsorship by key elected officials; and (5) total fundraising (near \$1 million?), consultant with initiative experience, and use of media all met or exceeded 75 percent agreement in both studies. These five factors would seem to represent bedrock of conditions that are seemingly consistently linked to the success of transportation tax initiatives. However, careful perusal of the narratives behind each case yields several key exceptions even to these more reliable factors.

## OUTCOMES OF “REBOUND” ELECTIONS

A number of the cases included in the current study recount one of a series of two transportation tax elections that occurred in quick succession within a given jurisdiction, termed “rebound elections.” This section will provide a brief exploratory evaluation of factors that appear to have swayed voters between the two elections in each community. These findings extend to potential factors outside the 17 emphasized within this study that may also be efficacious in the success of ballot measures in similar communities in the special context of a brief interlude between elections.

**Table 5. Voting Outcomes in “Rebound Elections”**

	Date of First Ballot Measure	Supporting Percentage in First Ballot Measure	Date of Second Ballot Measure	Supporting Percentage in Second Ballot Measure	Difference in Supporting Percentage Between Two Ballot Measures
Sound Transit District (Seattle)	Nov 2007	44.8%	Nov 2008	57.1%	12.3%
St. Louis County	Nov 2008	48.5%	April 2010	62.9%	14.4%
Santa Clara County	June 2006	42.9%	Nov 2008	66.8%	23.9%
Kansas City	Nov 2006	52.9%	Nov 2008	45.0%	-7.9%

### Seattle (Sound Transit District)

- 2007: 44 percent to 56 percent defeat of \$18 billion (construction year dollars- \$47 billion with inflation) package for 50 miles of light rail and 186 miles of highway construction.
- 2008: 57 percent to 43 percent passage of \$13.5 billion (construction year dollars – \$22.8 billion with inflation), proposal for 36 miles of light rail, additional 100,000 bus service hours



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In 2007, well-funded opposition in Seattle successfully attacked a regional history of questionable transit financing and piqued concerns regarding environmental impacts of roadway expansions. However, these conditions do not obviate the acknowledged need for more public transportation as the Sound Transit District population grows and congestion worsens.<sup>117</sup> Immediately after the failed 2007 measure, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels urged Sound Transit, now free of its legislated obligation to the highway-planning Regional Transit Investment District, to return to the ballot in 2008 in an effort to capture the expected higher turnout of younger, more liberal voters.<sup>118</sup> Sound Transit conducted polling that led the organization to believe that a smaller overall package with a smaller price tag stood a better chance of passage.<sup>119</sup> By July 2008, the package featured the buy-in of the Sierra Club and included various regional sweeteners, securing the vote of the required number of Sound Transit board members to appear on the November ballot. The 2008 measure featured a smaller slate of strictly transit projects, including only those expected to reap the greatest return on investment in the near term.

Seattle area interviewees indicated that substantial political support and uniform endorsement from environmental groups were key differences between the 2007 and 2008 campaigns. Rather than actively opposing the package (as it did in 2007) The Sierra Club provided 200 volunteers to the “MassTransitNow” campaign in 2008. Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels was an ardent supporter of the transit-only package, even suggesting incentives for light rail riders.<sup>120</sup> He and the MassTransitNow campaign successfully rode the coattails of progressive Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama. The pro-transit campaign logo, in fact, featured a layout mimicking Obama’s “O” emblem. MassTransitNow worked with Democratic precinct captains to distribute pro-transit brochures with pro-Obama leaflets.<sup>121</sup> This strategy served the dual purpose of being a cost-saving measure for the campaign. Transit advocates and opposition forces tacitly agreed to not expend the enormous sums of the 2007 campaign in an environment of recessionary circumstances and well-established discourse. NoToProp1.org once again sought to advance a catastrophic financing scenario and emphasize cost effectiveness of proposals. However, gasoline prices of over \$4 a gallon appear to have assisted transit advocates in the impact of their economic arguments. Proposition 1 (2008) passed 57 percent to 43 percent.

**Table 6. Sound Transit District “Rebound” Factor Analysis**

	Sound Transit Dist. Prop. 1 (November 2007)	Sound Transit Dist. Prop. 1 (November 2008)
	Fail	Pass
Multimodal proposal	↑	↑
Highway funding	↑	↓
Benefits distributed throughout area	↑	↔*
Sunset provision of 20 years or less	↓	↓
Extension of existing rail system	↔	↔
Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package	↑	↑
Lack of problems with existing transit system	↓	↓
Congressional or presidential election	↓	↑
Congestion “crisis”	↑	↑
Recent initiative experience	↑	↑
Sponsorship by the business community	↑	↑
Sponsorship by key elected officials	↓	↑
Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)	↑	↑
Support from environmental groups	↓	↑
Consultant with initiative experience	↑	↑
Use of media	↑	↑
Unorganized, poorly funded opposition	↓	↓
Number of factors replicated	6	11
Number of anomalous factors	10	4
Number of ambiguous conditions	1	2

*Note:*

\* The sub-area equity rule would still have applied, but fewer residents will reap the benefits of improved access

## St. Louis County

- 2008: Measure M to fund operations shortfalls and expand light rail services fails 48.5 percent to 51.5 percent in a general election
- 2009: Metro severely cuts bus services, decreases light rail frequency and slashes Call-A-Ride services for disabled
- 2010: Measure A passes in April county election 62.9 percent to 37.1 percent

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St. Louis County's Metro agency suffered a number of financial difficulties in the years leading up to the November 2008 presidential election, resulting in a \$45 million deficit. Measure M, a ½ cent countywide sales tax increase, sought to meet this operations shortfall and fund future (unspecified) extension of Metrolink light rail services.

As discussed in the earlier case study, campaigners in St. Louis did not target messages to all affected bus-riding constituencies. The measure sat at the end of a long ballot and was marginally defeated.

Without the approximately \$40 million Measure M would have funneled into maintaining transit service levels, Metro was forced to drastically reduce operations in 2009. The St. Louis County Council, mindful of citizen recognition of tangibly declining transit services, placed an identical proposal on the April 2010 county election ballot. County Measure A was part of a short ballot in an election featuring just a 22 percent turnout.

Addressing shortcomings of 2008, the 2010 Vote Yes campaign, Citizens for Modern Transit, and The Transit Alliance, (guided by consultants R&R Partners), embarked on a more grassroots effort that focused on activating students and religious leaders. The campaign was co-chaired by Mark Wrighton, chancellor of Washington University. The university mobilized students and contacted alumni in the area.<sup>122</sup> Catholic Archbishop Robert J. Carlson endorsed the tax increase, numerous *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* articles referenced citizen inability to travel to church due to service cuts, and African American churches were crucial in community organizing and hosting campaign events.

In addition to the continued support of County Executive Charlie Dooley, the Vote Yes campaign prominently featured John Nations, the Republican mayor of Chesterfield, who continually contended that the image of the region depended on an excellent public transportation system.<sup>123</sup> The sentiment of modernization was echoed in numerous opinion articles in the months leading up to the election.

Furthermore, the various pro-transit organizations spent in excess of \$1.5 million.<sup>124</sup> Weakly organized Tea Party opposition argued that Metro's lack of fiscal responsibility should not be rewarded, but the group was ultimately outspent "1,000-to-one."<sup>125</sup> Measure A passed 62.9 percent to 37.1 percent.

**Table 7. St. Louis County “Rebound” Factor Analysis**

	St. Louis (November 2008)	St. Louis (April 2010)
	Fail	Pass
Multimodal proposal	↑	↑
Highway funding	↓	↓
Benefits distributed throughout area	↑	↑
Sunset provision of 20 years or less	↑	↑
Extension of existing rail system	↑	↑
Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package	↓	↓
Lack of problems with existing transit system	↓	↓
Congressional or presidential election	↑	↓
Congestion “crisis”	↓	↓
Recent initiative experience	↓	↑
Sponsorship by the business community	↓	↔ <sup>a</sup>
Sponsorship by key elected officials	↔	↔ <sup>b</sup>
Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)	↓	↑
Support from environmental groups	↑	↑
Consultant with initiative experience	↑	↑
Use of media	↓	↑
Unorganized, poorly funded opposition	↑	↑
Number of factors replicated	8	11
Number of anomalous factors	8	5
Number of ambiguous conditions	1	2

*Notes:*

<sup>a</sup> Business contributions and support increased between the elections, but a uniform voice of support from the business community was not seen.

<sup>b</sup> While Nations was prominently featured, no research was conducted as to his popularity in the region. Notably, Nations headed St. Louis Metro at the time of this writing.

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## Santa Clara County

- 2006: Measure A, a ½ cent sales tax increase for general county purposes including (technically) unspecified transit projects is rejected 43 percent to 57 percent
- 2008: Measure B, an eight cent sales tax increase dedicated to fulfilling VTA's obligation to BART operations and maintenance (contingent on receipt of matching funds) passes 66.8 percent to 33.2 percent

In January of 2006, the experienced pro-transit stalwart Silicon Valley Leadership Group (SVLG), an association that features heavy hitters of local high-tech industry, spearheaded efforts to configure further public financing of the planned BART extension to San Jose. Cash-strapped Santa Clara County (feeling the effects of a number of underperforming revenue streams after the burst of the high tech bubble circa 2001) was simultaneously contemplating a sales tax increase for underfunded health and housing services. The SVLG conducted polling testing ballot language, and found that Santa Clara County voters would likely not support “competing” measures requiring two-thirds majorities, but that a simple majority required for a general tax increase was attainable.

This information led the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors to place the general tax increase on the June 2006 Primary Election ballot. The measure gained modest political support, but San Jose City Hall was the target of much negativity following a series of scandals revolving around outsourced contracts and subsidies to perceptibly extravagant events, leaving Measure A without a trusted champion.

Furthermore, as the measure was a general tax increase, transit proponents were limited in their ability to promote specific projects. Fact sheets stating the cost of extending BART and widening expressways were distributed in an attempt to reassure the public of priority projects, but the County could not legally propose an expenditure breakdown. Combined with a history of poor management of VTA services and associated distrust, this lack of specificity (or timeline of expected benefits) led citizens to reject Measure A, 43 percent to 57 percent.

In 2008, SVLG returned to the Board of Supervisors after polling indicated Santa Clara County voters would likely support a BART dedicated ⅛ cent sales tax increase. The language of Measure B was carefully crafted to include a matching funds trigger mechanism to reassure citizens both of what specifically they were receiving and “that they wouldn't be left holding the bag” in the event of future VTA financial shortfalls.<sup>126</sup>

**Table 8. Santa Clara County “Rebound” Factor Analysis**

	Santa Clara County (June 2006)	Santa Clara County (November 2008)
	Fail	Pass
Multimodal proposal	↑ <sup>a</sup>	↓
Highway funding	↑	↓
Benefits distributed throughout area	N/A <sup>b</sup>	↔
Sunset provision of 20 years or less	↓	↓
Extension of existing rail system	↑	↑
Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package	↑	↔
Lack of problems with existing transit system	↓	↔
Congressional or presidential election	↓	↑
Congestion “crisis”	↑	↑
Recent initiative experience	↔ <sup>c</sup>	↑
Sponsorship by the business community	↑	↑
Sponsorship by key elected officials	↔	↔
Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)	↑	↑
Support from environmental groups	↓	↓
Consultant with initiative experience	↑	↑
Use of media	↑	↑
Unorganized, poorly funded opposition	↑	↑
Number of factors replicated	4	9
Number of anomalous factors	10	4
Number of ambiguous conditions	3	4

*Notes:*

- <sup>a</sup> The measure included a component for “transportation improvements” generally defined. However, there was widespread understanding that the transportation portion of the tax would finance an extension of BART to Santa Clara County and roads projects.
- <sup>b</sup> As routes were not specified and spending proportions to be at the discretion of County Supervisors, it is impossible to determine whether benefits of transportation improvements would have been distributed equally.
- <sup>c</sup> Santa Clara County last voted on a transit measure in 2000, but as that campaign was led by the same organization and individuals in an area well accustomed to transportation measures, the “past two years” logic may not apply in this case.

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## Kansas City, MO

- November 2006: disregarded citizen-led \$1 billion (or more) initiative for light rail, electric shuttles, and gondola system surprisingly passes 53 percent to 47 percent
- October 2007: Due to extensive and harmful financial assumptions, the proposal is officially deemed infeasible (after near-immediate post-election recognition of this assertion in November 2006)
- November 2008: plan for a 14-mile starter rail system is rejected 45 percent to 55 percent

The citizens of Kansas City have contemplated light rail for over a decade, voting down a plethora of initiatives. November 2006 featured a seventh such ballot item, fostered and advanced by a lone enthusiast, which was all but dismissed by the Kansas City establishment. Ballot Question 2 did not receive the support of the mayor, business leaders, or other typically influential groups key to the success of transit measures. The pro-light rail campaign consisted of this enthusiast and his associates utilizing free media to advocate their cause. Favorable ballot language, combined with generally pro-rail coverage in *The Kansas City Star* and lack of formal opposition to a seemingly far-fetched proposal, contributed to a startling 53 percent vote in favor of Ballot Question 2.

The proposal was a detailed plan for 27 miles of light rail, 60 electric shuttles and a gondola system connecting Union Station and Liberty Memorial. The price tag of \$1 billion was not included in the ballot language, which would have permitted an extension of a  $\frac{3}{8}$  cent sales tax that had previously been used to fund bus services, and was planned for renewal and continued application to the bus system on a later ballot. As the redirection of funds would have led to a 40 percent cut to bus services, and the liberal financial assumptions of the plan relied on extensive state and federal commitments, the City ruled the proposal infeasible.<sup>127</sup> Recognizing the support for rail transit, new Mayor Mark Funkhouser vowed to return to the ballot with a workable light rail initiative.

In April 2008, the people of Kansas City voted to renew the  $\frac{3}{8}$  cent sales tax to be dedicated to bus services. In November of 2008, they voted to defeat a proposed further  $\frac{3}{8}$  cent sales tax increase to fund a 14-mile starter light rail line. The new plan's financing similarly relied on matching state and federal commitments, but saw much broader support from elected leaders, championed by Mayor Funkhouser and eliciting the support of African-Americans on the City Council.<sup>128</sup> *Kansas City Star* articles from the summer of 2008 illustrate the message of regional pride in modern transit stirring in discourse. However, a poorly funded pro-rail campaign, relying largely on social media sites and other untested ploys allowed substantially funded opposition forces to fill the news vacuum with messages of lingering uncertainty as to the financing and true benefit of the scaled-back plan. It was defeated 45 percent to 55 percent.



**Table 9. Kansas City “Rebound” Factor Analysis**

	Kansas City (November 2008)	Kansas City (November 2006)
	Fail	Pass
Multimodal proposal	↓	↑
Highway funding	↓	↓
Benefits distributed throughout area	↓	↔
Sunset provision of 20 years or less	↓	↓
Extension of existing rail system	↓	↓
Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package	↓	↓
Lack of problems with existing transit system	↑	↑
Congressional or presidential election	↑	↑
Congestion “crisis”	↓	↓
Recent initiative experience	↓*	↓
Sponsorship by the business community	↓	↓
Sponsorship by key elected officials	↑	↔
Total fundraising (near \$1 million?)	↓	↓
Support from environmental groups	↑	↓
Consultant with initiative experience	↔	↓
Use of media	↓	↓
Unorganized, poorly funded opposition	↔	↑
Number of factors replicated	11	4
Number of anomalous factors	4	11
Number of ambiguous conditions	2	2

*Note:*

\*See case study for rationale.

### Conclusions from “Rebound” Case Studies

In many ways this section is a more detailed exploration of the “recent initiative experience” factor as it applies to the voting populace and changing political climates. Once more, the number of examples is too minute for firm inference, but three of the four cases presented demonstrate other factors may loom in the context of previous failures. The last case, while showcasing a loss following a success, likewise affirms likely decision-making criteria when voters consider ballot measures with substantial rail transit components.

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These analyses touch upon the individual voter's desired assurance that a measure will be implemented as proposed. This assurance appears to be jeopardized by lack of specificity of voter benefit, associated lack of justification of expenditure, lack of trust of establishment presenting or sponsoring the measure, and negative messaging in predominant news media messaging. These factors are encompassed or at least alluded to earlier under broader headings of "benefits distributed throughout area," "lack of problems with existing transit system," "sponsorship by key elected officials," "sponsorship by the business community," and "use of media." Delving to a more individual level of analysis, the lessons from these cases point to more specific conditions that may make a measure "feel right" to the average voter. Conditions paramount in these cases included:

- Positive news coverage from a region's major newspapers (such as was the case in Kansas City in 2006) seemingly lent to success after a stream of failures, and coverage with a negative slant (Sound Transit District 2007 and Santa Clara County 2006) seemingly contributed to defeat.
  - Negative news messaging typically cast doubt on deliverability of proposal at estimated cost and timeframe, or linked proposals to unpopular political figures; it also speaks to perceptions about the management of the local transit system
- The presence of "competing measures" may be hurtful (St. Louis 2008) or desirable in hindsight (Sound Transit District 2007, Santa Clara County 2006).
  - Non-general election timing equates to shorter ballots, the items of which are generally subject to a greater share of news coverage- not always positive
  - General election long ballots run the risk of not focusing enough attention on the importance of the transit measure and suffering roll-off effects
- Assured financing and specified benefit may justify voter expenditure, overcoming historic distrust in transit providers and recessionary economic circumstances (Sound Transit District 2008 and Santa Clara County 2008). Of note, as can be seen in both cases, smaller tax increases on the second attempt may also be linked to this financial justification.
  - Conversely, plans relying heavily on federal and state matching funds and not delineating specific routes (individual voter benefits) may suffer after previous passage of more specific proposals (Kansas City 2008). Of note, the second proposal represented a  $\frac{3}{8}$  cent tax increase in the same calendar year as a  $\frac{3}{8}$  cent tax renewal, whereas the first vote represented redirection of the  $\frac{3}{8}$  renewal.
- The tangible realization of service cuts can lead to an outpour of support from affected groups, overcoming lack of faith in transit provider, and/or lukewarm support from elected leaders and the business community (St. Louis).

Many of these conclusions seem relatively intuitive, and (especially in the case of print media effects) are possibly becoming less relevant as voters continue to diversify their sources of news intake. Contextual pocketbook considerations, while important, were not paramount criteria in a number of “rebound” cases from the deep recessionary period of autumn 2008 individual level cost/benefit analysis seemingly trumped. (The non-rebound case in Los Angeles supports this notion.)

Lastly, a number of rebound cases point to the importance of respectable coalition building and consistent messaging in successfully campaigning for transit measures with substantial rail components. These sponsors may represent varying levels of conviction from elected, business and environmental interests, but as this section on rebounds has acknowledged, further consideration may be due to the effects of coverage by predominant news media in all such cases, especially those in rapid succession.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The primary objective for this study was to replicate the 2001 MTI study on the same subject; more specifically, to determine whether certain factors or conditions that had been associated with the outcomes of transit tax elections (that involved a substantial rail component) continue to be. In large part, all limitations and caveats on the case study methodology that have been noted aside, the results presented in this report are certainly far more corroborative of than in substantial conflict with the earlier ones.

As noted earlier, five factors that were particularly consistent with the outcomes documented in the 2001 study were also found to be consistently associated in these elections: (1) extensive stakeholder participation in development of package; (2) congestion “crisis”; (3) sponsorship by the business community; (4) sponsorship by key elected officials; and (5) total fundraising (near \$1 million?), consultant with initiative experience, and use of media all met or exceeded 75 percent agreement in both studies. In retrospect, the salience of these five factors is hardly surprising. In the chronology of a tax ballot initiative, they range from the initial phases of meeting a documented or perceived need, involving a significant number of stakeholders in developing the plan, to attracting the support (financial and otherwise) of the local business community, and thereby collecting sufficient donations to fund the campaign that can be guided by an experienced consulting team. The process is often tied together by the leadership of a key political figure or figures. In these data, projects that, by plan or fortune, managed to embrace all of these factors were likely to succeed, and those that omitted one or more were more likely to fail. But even the presence of all of these particular factors was not sufficient to enable passage of the Seattle measure.

That stated, the performance of several of the factors identified in the 2001 study – individually as well as collectively – seems a little less impressive in the later elections chronicled in this study. As noted earlier in this section, the factors as a group in the current research were less accurate “predictors” of electoral outcomes than in the earlier study. Perhaps more troublesome, the tendency of the factors collectively to be more closely associated with winning rather than all campaigns was more pronounced in the current

data. Bearing in mind that most proposals succeed anyway, it would be more helpful to identify factors whose absence seems to breed failure.

Although prior experience with initiative campaigns (“recent initiative experience”) was found to be very weakly associated with success or failure in this study, by looking more closely at the experience of several communities that conducted efforts in rapid succession, it seems that many transit planning agencies demonstrate impressive learning curves in evaluating missteps and curtailing future efforts to the desires of their communities. The section on “rebound” efforts denotes areas of voter consideration of transit packages, among them financing, specificity and foreseeable benefit of proposed projects, and effects of news media.

The message from these results for practitioners, therefore, is somewhat mixed. Certain factors (detailed earlier) seem almost necessary – but not sufficient – to assure success, but it is difficult to say which will likely doom a failure by its (or their) absence. In this regard, however, the importance of high-profile support from both political leadership and the business communities may be the most likely candidates. The impact of several other factors that seemed stronger in 2001 still seems likely, but is also less reliable in the more recent examples. Of course, many other idiosyncratic factors are likely to be at play in any future campaign, so practitioners would be wise to use these results with extreme care and awareness of the complexity of local political conditions.



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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

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<b>AAA</b>	American Automobile Association
<b>AGC</b>	Association of General Contractors
<b>BART</b>	Bay Area Rapid Transit
<b>BRT</b>	Bus Rapid Transit
<b>BRU</b>	Bus Riders Union
<b>CATS</b>	Charlotte Area Transit System
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>GET</b>	General Excise Tax
<b>HOV</b>	High-Occupancy Vehicle
<b>LACMA</b>	Los Angeles County Museum of Art
<b>LRT</b>	Light Rail Transit
<b>MPO</b>	Metropolitan Planning Organization
<b>MTA</b>	Metropolitan Transportation Authority
<b>MTC</b>	Metropolitan Transit Commission
<b>RTA</b>	Regional Transit Authority
<b>RTID</b>	Regional Transit Investment District
<b>SCAT</b>	Sensible Charlotte Area Transportation
<b>ST</b>	Sound Transit
<b>SVLG</b>	Silicon Valley Leadership Group
<b>VTA</b>	Valley Transit Authority

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