WHAT WAS THE GOAL OF THE CAMPAIGN?

The goal of the campaign was to raise a projected $7.22 billion over ten years in revenue for transportation for the ten-county Metro Atlanta region through a one percent sales tax referendum with an estimated $6.14 billion (85%) of the revenue to be set aside for specific regional projects and about $1.08 billion (15%) to be redistributed to individual counties through a population- and road mileage-based formula for use on additional transportation projects. The sales tax prior to the referendum differed by county but was either 6% or 8% in the Metro Atlanta region. A subgoal of the campaign, for one of the primary coalitions behind this effort, was to ensure that 40% to 60% of the new revenue for regional transportation projects would be dedicated to public transportation projects.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THE CAMPAIGN?

The campaign was partially successful, but ultimately failed in the Metro Atlanta region. In October of 2011, a specific transportation project list for the referendum was approved which included $3.2 billion (or ≈52% of the regional funds to be raised) in transit projects, $2.9 billion in road projects (≈47%), $24 million in standalone bike/pedestrian projects (under 0.5%), and $3.2 million in aviation projects (≈0.05%), thereby meeting the subgoal of the campaign.

On July 31, 2012, voters in the Metro Atlanta region, however, defeated the referendum by a margin of 37% to 63%. Similar referendums were held in eleven other regions of Georgia, three prevailed.

WHY WAS THE CAMPAIGN INITIATED?

There seems to be a general agreement in Metro Atlanta that traffic is choking the region and the Texas A&M Transportation Institute recently has estimated the cost of congestion in the Atlanta region to be $2.3 billion per year. People are wasting considerable time in traffic. As a result existing businesses experience a bottleneck in growth and new ones are discouraged from moving to the region.

Georgia currently ranks 48th in per capita transportation spending. Passage of the Transportation Investment Act (“TIA”) in the Georgia Legislature and signing of the bill into law in June 2010 created an opportunity to change these circumstances by allowing twelve regions within the state to levy a special purpose local option sales tax (“T-SPLOST”) to fund desperately needed transportation projects within each region.

WHAT WERE THE REASONS CITED FOR THE CAMPAIGN’S ULTIMATE LOSS?

The reasons for failure cited in the post-vote analysis included a prevalent distrust of government, the bad economy, the primary election date, a perception of the campaign as top-down, as well as the size of the region, its splintered transportation desires, and the lack of a tradition of regional decision-making.

Insufficient promotion of the transit projects on the list has also been raised as a mistake (a poll found that 71% of residents would ride transit if there was more of it), but at the same time a wide-spread anti-mass transit sentiment (a poll found that 42% of residents in the region believed that new public transportation brings crime) has been blamed for part of the reason for the loss.

One analyst pointed out that transportation issues are no longer a battle between the road lobby and transit advocates, but a “kind of three-cornered politics,” in which two groups out of the road lobby, transit/environmental advocates, and
The political climate for the revenue-raising measure was difficult. One of the counties within the region, majority white Cobb County, has vocal, engaged, and well-organized tax opponents. In addition, many residents in Cobb County were opposed to the inclusion of a significant number of transit projects, hearkening back to opposition to Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (“MARTA”) coming into the county decades ago as some residents feared it would bring crime into the suburbs.

Residents in majority African-American DeKalb County, the third-most-populated county in Metro Atlanta and the state, on the other hand, are seeking an extension of a MARTA heavy rail line, but instead only a rapid bus line was included in the list of projects for the referendum. In addition, the five-member executive committee of the Roundtable that drafted the project list was all white, until House Speaker David Ralston intervened and persuaded one member to step aside so Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed could join.

As a result of these concerns, the NAACP’s local chapter came out against the referendum, stating that it included insufficient mass transit for south DeKalb County. The Georgia Sierra Club also opposed the referendum, citing “sprawl-inducing road expansion” as the main reason for its opposition. The almost universal agreement in the region that traffic is unbearable, however, had the potential to bring out voters supportive of the referendum.
What Support from Critical Stakeholders Could Be Expected?

Metro Atlanta contains the country’s third largest concentration of Fortune 500 companies, and is the world headquarters of the Coca-Cola Company, Turner Broadcasting, The Home Depot, UPS, and Delta Air Lines. Large corporations in the region are concerned about losing employees due to the lack of sufficient investment in transportation infrastructure and the region is anxious about large employers relocating and its reduced attractiveness to potential new employers.

As a result, a significant contribution from the business community to the campaign, in terms of funding and political support, was expected and received. As anticipated, the Atlanta-area referendum also enjoyed support from African-American leaders, such as Rep. John Lewis, Ambassador Andrew Young, and the mayor. The Georgia NAACP, however, two months before the vote, announced that it would oppose all transportation tax referendums statewide. The Sierra Club also came out against the initiative.

What Previous Planning or Research Efforts Benefited the Campaign?

The Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce informally sought out advice from chambers of commerce in cities with previous successful transportation funding campaigns including Denver, St. Louis, and Salt Lake City. The Economic Development Research Group assisted the Atlanta Regional Commission, the regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency for the ten-county area around Atlanta, with macroeconomic impact forecasting of the Atlanta metro region under the proposed list of transportation investments.

The macroanalysis considered congestion reduction benefits from the projects, the tax burden, and any stimulus from construction. The net result showed a cumulative gross regional product gain through 2040 for the ten-county region worth $34 billion from the TIA investment.

How Was the Advocacy Campaign Funded?

LCC received another $100,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation for its Fast Track Forward initiative. MAVEN raised approximately $2.2 million for its Transform Metro Atlanta campaign from large donors, including Atlanta’s largest corporations.

How Was the Political Campaign Financed?

The political campaign was financed mostly through contributions from several hundred donors, including the large corporations who make their home in Atlanta, but Untie Atlanta has also received many small donations (around $25 each). CTM raised approximately $6.8 million. The budget of this campaign has been described as comparable to a Governor’s race in Georgia.
HOW WERE THESE CHALLENGES MET?

Georgians tend to have a cautious regard, if not an immense distrust, for government. There was a widespread worry that money raised by the referendum would be wasted.

The campaign benefited from the structure of TIA, which was designed to help address voters' fear that the government will waste their money. TIA requires a specific list of projects to be voted on and has a ten-year sunset provision for the tax. The campaigns used these requirements in their messaging to address this communication challenge. In addition, the campaigns primarily focused on the economic benefits of the tax measure, including the argument that transit is a better investment dollar-for-dollar than roads, and congestion relief.

The campaigns avoided technical and progressive terms, because they did not poll well, but have stressed personal benefits such as more transportation choices and free time, and occasionally also raised the associated air quality benefits, such as the removal of approximately 72,000 cars from the roads. LCC's Fair Share for Transit campaign included earned media, direct emails, phone conversations, and meetings with Roundtable members.

WHO LED THE TRANSIT EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN?

A year after LCC began its Fair Share for Transit initiative, an effort to ensure adequate representation of transit projects on the Atlanta TIA project list, LCC launched the Fast Track Forward campaign. Fast Track Forward was an educational campaign centered on the merits of the more than $3 billion in new transit projects included in the TIA list for the Atlanta region. Fast Track Forward was a collaborative effort led by LCC that focused on the business case for transit and its impact on the quality of life in Metro Atlanta.

As an educational campaign, the initiative could not tell prospective voters how they should vote on the transportation tax; it did, however, educate various constituencies about what projects the tax would fund.

WHO LED THE GENERAL EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN?

MAVEN, a group of civic coalitions, business organizations, and individual citizens, led the Transform Metro Atlanta educational campaign. The Atlanta Metro Chamber was openly behind the creation and implementation of this campaign.

WHO RAN THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN?

The political campaign was run by CTM. The Atlanta Metro Chamber was also openly behind the creation and implementation of this campaign.

POLITICAL STRATEGY

WHAT WAS THE OVERALL POLITICAL STRATEGY FOR THIS CAMPAIGN?

The political strategy of the campaigns was significantly influenced by the primary election date of the referendum, a requirement of TIA. Unlike tax opponents, pro-transit advocates never favored the July 31st date, correctly expecting a lower voter turnout. The 2004 and 2008 presidential elections statewide had a voter turnout of 62.5% and 56.2% respectively, while the T-SPLOST election had one of about 30% across counties, which was 8% to 13% higher than the 2010 and 2008 July elections. As a result of this date, the two educational initiatives and the political campaign decided to target their respective efforts on likely supporters, such as urban dwellers who live and work in high density areas along existing rail lines, young voters, and members of pro-transit groups, with a particular focus on voters who tend not to vote in non-major elections.
LCC's Fast Track Forward educational campaign specifically targeted urban dwellers that live and work in high density areas along existing rail lines with the message that if you want more transit you should learn more about the referendum. LCC also tried to reach “under voters,” those who do not vote during primary or off-year elections, pro-transit groups, and young voters. Untie Atlanta’s television advertisements focused on the personal benefit of reduced congestion, such as an ad showing a mother stuck in traffic, late for picking up her son and a teammate for a baseball game, with the car’s safety belts tightening around her, tying her up and muzzling her. Her son laments that she is “probably tied up in traffic again.”

**How were critical stakeholders recruited into the campaign?**

Relying on the credibility it had built in the Metro Atlanta pro-transit community over the first four years of its existence, LCC convened stakeholders prior to passage of TIA. Out of that group, a smaller subset of experts/progressive thinkers who had the time to meet regularly and shared the mission was formed. The members of this group were asked to get permission from their employers to attend the meetings, but to check their professional credentials at the door, i.e., not to speak for their organizations.

This was required so that members would be able to freely discuss and develop progressive transportation policies that were ambitious but achievable. LCC then incorporated the great ideas that came out of these discussions into its campaigns, but did not attribute them to individual participants. The focus was on the results, not on credit.

After TIA passed, the Metro Chamber of Commerce convened a group that grew to about 150 representatives from industry groups, trade associations, nonprofits, and other civic organizations. Participants from the group meet every first Friday of the month, and informally called themselves the “First Friday Group.”

**What get-out-the-vote methods were used to secure votes?**

CTM relied on a combination of volunteers and computerized autodialers to call potential voters for voter identification. If a person called agreed to participate, s/he was given two questions to ascertain whether s/he supported or opposed the measure. Only people who expressed support received friendly reminders to vote. The phone banking was conducted by volunteers obtained primarily through the companies supporting the measure. Various organizations also held panel discussions leading up to the vote.

**How did the campaign spend its communications resources?**

The campaigns used traditional media, including television ads, radio spots, targeted cable, and earned media, as well as direct mail and social media to get their message across.

**Organization strategy**

**Key lessons**

A multi-step process can help avoid resistance of elected officials to raise taxes or fees

Despite the clear need to invest in Georgia’s transportation system, Republican Governor George Perdue was opposed to signing any legislation that would raise significant revenue and most legislators shared his concern. The term-limited Governor also demanded that no revenue would be raised until after completion of his second and final term in January of 2011. This created a seemingly insurmountable roadblock. However, TIA’s ballot approach, which left the decision of whether to tax themselves directly to voters, allowed the legislature to pass legislation that laid the groundwork for raising revenue for transportation, without having to take the associated heat they feared. TIA’s timeline also pushed the vote into another governor’s tenure.
DISTRUST OF GOVERNMENT INHIBITS TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT BUT SPECIFICS CAN HELP OVERCOME IT

Widespread distrust of government provided a significant challenge for raising revenue in Georgia. Even voters who would be willing to pay for a better transportation system were expected to be reluctant to trust the government with spending the money raised adequately and efficiently. TIA again provided the answer to this problem by requiring the development of a specific list of projects prior to the vote.

To make this approach effective, extensive input from the public and the elected officials of each community was crucial. Unfortunately, there were still counties within the region that felt underrepresented in the list.

REGIONALIZING THE RAISING AND EXPENDITURE OF REVENUE CAN ADDRESS CONCERN THAT ONE GEOGRAPHIC AREA IS SUBSIDIZING ANOTHER, BUT SUCH REGIONS HAVE TO BE DEVISED CORRECTLY

By dividing Georgia into twelve separate tax districts, TIA made it much harder for anyone to perceive the measure as benefitting one part of the state at the expense of another. Considering that the ten-county Metro Atlanta region is home to over 4.1 million people, almost 42.5% of the Georgia population, and hence more likely to require the spending of significant transportation dollars, addressing this problem was crucial. That said, the size and diversity of the Metro Atlanta district as created by TIA and a lack of a tradition of regional decision-making still made it difficult to overcome the criticism that the money would not be spent fairly across the region.

SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL SUPPORT CAN BE SHORED UP BY GIVING BACK SOME REVENUE RAISED TO MUNICIPALITIES FOR DISCRETIONARY SPENDING

Providing municipalities with the discretion to spend 15% of the money raised by the measure on transportation projects was aimed to assist cash-strapped towns and cities meet their transportation needs and made it easier to round up support for the referendum from locally-elected officials, who tend to enjoy greater public support than other politicians.

TAKE RISKS TO GET THE BALL ROLLING

Supporters of the Metro Atlanta T-SPLOST were extremely successful at raising money, a total of about $8 million between the educational and political campaigns, but the effort still failed. The organized opposition included the NAACP, Sierra Club, and the Tea Party, forming a very unlikely coalition, which spent only $30,000 and led a more grassroots effort than the supporters of the initiative.

While at the end of the day one may have to recognize that external factors, such as the economy and the election date, prevented a win of this initiative—rather than any tactical mistake made by its supporters—it is still fair and useful to ask if the money could have been spent better or had anything to do with the loss. The campaign may have failed to build a sufficiently broad civic coalition.

Some natural allies who ended up opposing the initiative have complained about a lack of interaction with the political campaign. More direct contact with opinion leaders may have been needed. Faced with a distrust of government already, the campaign may have hurt itself by not adequately integrating the full range of stakeholders, and potentially, by having corporate supporters play such a visible role, which raised suspicions among voters about the corporations’ motivations and whether real people would benefit from the initiative.

Building a grassroots network of business, labor, municipal, environment, and civil rights leaders may have benefited the initiative.

POTENTIALLY TRANSFERRABLE IDEAS

- Developed campaign strategy by asking participants to check their credentials at the door and focusing on results rather than who gets credit
- Supported balance in project list (i.e., large share of transit projects), rather than specific projects
- Used third-party validators (e.g., used conservative speakers to make case for transit)
- Stressed personal benefits such as more transportation choices and free time in messaging
- Avoided use of technical terms in messaging
- Project list to alleviate voter distrust
The goal of the campaign was to raise sufficient, stable, and sustainable revenue for the Massachusetts transportation system, including funding for roads, bridges, transit and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure statewide. Reasonable estimates of the amount of additional revenue needed ranged from $800 million/year to $1.2 billion/year.

WHAT WAS THE GOAL OF THE CAMPAIGN?

On July 24, 2013, the state legislature enacted a transportation finance bill, overriding Governor Deval Patrick’s veto; the Governor exercised his veto power because he was seeking to shore up additional revenue. The bill raised over $500 million/year on average in new tax revenue. Combined with so-called “own-source targets” in the bill, additional funds to be raised by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and the MBTA through revenue sources and savings under the agencies’ control, $600 million/year over five years are expected to become available for transportation spending.

The new revenues will be generated by increasing the gas tax by three cents and indexing it to inflation ($110 million/year), increasing the tax on cigarettes and tobacco products ($165 million/year), eliminating the utility tax classification ($48 million/year), changing the sourcing of sales for multi-state corporations ($35 million/year), and originally applying the sales tax to software and computer system planning and design ($161 million/year). Out of the estimated $519 million/year in new tax revenue, almost $390 million/year were dedicated to transportation; the remainder of almost $130 million will be added to the state’s general fund. Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) operations is expected to receive about $148 million/year out of the new tax revenue, and the fifteen regional transit authorities (RTAs) around the state $14.8 million/year.

Only two months after the transportation finance law was passed, however, the legislature repealed the software and computer system planning and design tax, filling the hole in the FY14 budget with a surplus. There are no plans yet for how this revenue will be replaced for the following four years of the five-year plan.

In addition, the bill ensured that funds generated from the transportation sector are spent on transportation, such as the sales tax on motor vehicles and a portion of the gas tax that was previously deposited in the general fund. It also ended a number of fiscally irresponsible practices, such as paying for costs associated with MassDOT operation of the transportation system with bonds and requiring RTAs to cover the state-funded portion of their budgets with annual grant anticipation notes, which were born out of the necessity to fill budget holes created by chronic underfunding.

WHY WAS THE CAMPAIGN INITIATED?

As a result of the findings of the Transportation Finance Commission, an independent body created to evaluate the financial health of the state's transportation agencies and authorities, since at least 2007, policymakers had been on notice that the current funding streams for transportation in the state were woefully inadequate. Without additional transportation funding the threat of transit service cuts and the serious deterioration of roads and bridges was unavoidable.

Although the MBTA had already increased fares on average 23% in July of 2012, by the end of the year the MBTA identified an operating budget gap of $130 million for FY2014 and public hearings for another round of service cuts and fare increase were expected. Despite the great success of the state’s Accelerated Bridge Program (ABP), the average age of bridges in the Commonwealth was still forty-three years, i.e., nearing the point at which significant reconstruction can be expected. Even with ABP being brought to a successful conclusion by 2016, it is estimated that Massachusetts will still have over 500 structurally deficient bridges.
Likewise, maintenance of local roads—which is the responsibility of municipalities, but generally funded with state dollars—lagged behind and the long list of projects needed to bring the MBTA’s infrastructure into a state of good repair, was growing, rather than shrinking.

HOW WAS THE CAMPAIGN STRUCTURED?

The campaign has been described as a loose network of coalitions, sometimes coordinated and many times not. A broad-based transportation coalition (Transportation for Massachusetts (T4MA)), a coalition of labor unions and community-based groups (Public Transit-Public Good), a revenue coalition (Campaign for Our Communities (CFOC)), and a collaboration of business associations participated in the campaign. Some of the coalitions had significant overlapping membership.

Other stakeholders included a faith-based coalition (Greater Boson Interfaith Organization (GBIO) and the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA). T4MA convened weekly strategy conference calls in which representatives from some, but not all, coalitions and stakeholders participated. Individual coalitions generally all had good access to and effective working relationships with MassDOT, the Governor’s Office, as well as many members of the legislature, including the leadership. Stakeholders, however, had varying degrees of influence with these decision-makers, with the business community having the most.

WHAT WAS THE POLITICAL CLIMATE AT THE TIME OF THE CAMPAIGN?

Since 2009, the state legislature’s mantra was “reform before revenue.” That year, the General Court could not agree to an increase in the gas tax, as proposed by the Governor, but it passed transportation reform legislation that created a more streamlined transportation department by merging dispersed agencies and an additional sales tax dedicating $275 million/year to transportation as a stopgap measure. To address the continued shortage of funding, MassDOT and the MBTA repeatedly and successfully used refinancing as a way to fill budget holes.

In April of 2011, then General Manager of the MBTA, now Secretary of Transportation, Richard Davey announced that he had “no more rabbits to pull out of [his] hat.” In early 2012, the MBTA proposed two scenarios that included steep fare increases (an average of 35% or 43%) and deep service cuts (including elimination of 101 weekday bus routes). To get input, the MBTA held 30 public meetings throughout its service area. The large public outcry over the proposed fare hikes and service cuts precipitated the acknowledgement by a broader set of policymakers that a larger, structural fix was needed.

On July 1, 2012 the MBTA introduced a lower but still significant fare increase of 23% on average (with a 50% increase of paratransit fares) and a few service cuts. This was possible due to a one-time funding infusion of $60 million from the legislature, which was coupled with a commitment by legislative leaders to seek a long-term, comprehensive funding solution in the next legislative session. Although this created a well-defined window of opportunity, the political climate for raising new revenues was still not good. Massachusetts, while doing better than other states, had not yet fully recovered from the recession, and many elected officials were still voicing strong concerns about raising taxes or fees.

The business community, which had been supportive of the proposed gas tax increase in 2009, was more cautious in articulating its support publicly this time around as a result of that defeat. The Governor, on the other hand, again expressed great interest in addressing the chronic underfunding of the state’s transportation system, albeit with more progressive revenue sources and while also considering seeking significant additional revenue for education, a proposition that was opposed by the business community.

WHAT FORMAL STEPS WERE REQUIRED FOR THE CAMPAIGN TO SUCCEED?

In 2012, when the state legislature provided funding to address the immediate budget gap, the legislature also directed MassDOT’s board of directors to develop and publish a long-term surface transportation finance plan for the Commonwealth—including plans for financing transportation infrastructure projects in all modes of surface transportation and for funding the operational needs of the department and its divisions—and to hold six public hearings to identify the state’s long-term transportation needs. MassDOT was required to provide such a plan to the legislature and the public by January 7, 2013.

In order to raise new revenue to address the chronic under-funding of the state’s transportation system, the Massachusetts state legislature had to enact revenue-raising legislation. To avoid another round of fare increases and/or service cuts at the MBTA and some of the RTAs, new funding was needed by July 1, 2013, the start of fiscal year 2014, or at least early enough in this budget cycle.
WHAT PREVIOUS PLANNING OR RESEARCH EFFORTS BENEFITED THE CAMPAIGN?

The campaign benefited from, and arguably only came into fruition as a result of, an abundance of prior research efforts. In 2007, the Transportation Finance Commission, which was created by the state legislature as an independent body to examine and evaluate the financial health of the state’s transportation agencies and authorities, released its findings and made a set of recommendations. At first, the bipartisan commission’s report became a guide for policymakers on how to achieve reform of the transportation system, which led to the 2009 reform of the Department of Transportation. Policymakers, however, largely ignored or postponed the commission’s revenue recommendations.

In 2009, the MBTA Advisory Board released a report on the structural financial problems of the MBTA called Born Broke, which exposed the transit agency’s financial woes and the fact that they were unavoidable given the funding the agency was provided. In addition, later during the same year, the Governor requested an independent review of the MBTA’s finances, which came to be known as the D’Alessandro Report, named after its principal author David D’Alessandro, former chairman and CEO of John Hancock Financial Services. The review’s mission was to examine the MBTA’s financial condition, operations and organization and to provide a “frank assessment of the MBTA’s condition,” and it reinforced the conclusion that the agency was severely underfunded.

In 2010, the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy at Northeastern University and the Conservation Law Foundation (CLF), a regional environmental organization, convened a Blue Ribbon Summit designed to shape a policy framework for addressing the MBTA’s and RTAs’ financial crisis and securing a sustainable revenue stream to support and expand public transportation in Massachusetts. The organizations also released a report of the findings and recommendations gleaned from the expert panel’s deliberations. A year later, T4MA released a primer on transportation finance in Massachusetts called Maxed Out, which detailed the state’s overall transportation funding crisis.

In 2012, as all signs were already pointing towards the likelihood of transportation funding becoming a legislative priority for the 2013-2014 legislative session, a research collaborative composed of the Dukakis Center, CLF, and A Better City (ABC) formed to help inform the ongoing policy discussion in Massachusetts about opportunities for increasing public investment in the Commonwealth’s statewide transportation system.

The collaborative’s research included a review of recent efforts in metropolitan areas and states around the country to address similar transportation finance challenges and a detailed analysis of potential funding sources. The research collaborative then organized a series of learning conversations in Boston about efforts from across the country to generate new revenues for transportation, inviting a broad range of stakeholders.

CAMPAIGN MANAGEMENT/STRUCTURE

WHO LED THE BROAD-BASED TRANSPORTATION COALITION?

The campaign benefited from active participation from a wide-spectrum of stakeholders, rather than just the usual suspects. T4MA brought many of these stakeholders together under one umbrella. The coalition’s thirty-five members include planning agencies, business associations, transit, pedestrian and bicycle advocates, and environmental, environmental justice, smart growth, housing and public health organizations. This coalition started working together to create safe, convenient, and affordable transportation choices for everyone in Massachusetts for three years prior to the campaign.

T4MA’s goals are to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by providing low-carbon transportation choices throughout the state and to ensure that the transportation system provides a path to economic opportunity for all residents. Throughout the campaign T4MA promoted funding for all modes of transportation, although the coalition specifically supports maintaining and growing an affordable and robust public transportation system, completing streets with bikeways and sidewalks, and developing walkable neighborhoods around transit.

WHO LED THE LABOR AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMUNITIES?

While labor unions and social justice organizations participated in the campaign in a number of ways and through more than one coalition, Public Transit-Public Good was a joint effort of these two stakeholder groups. Public Transit-Public Good was launched as a campaign of the Green Justice Coalition, which is a coalition organized by Community Labor United (CLU). CLU’s mission is to combine the power of community-based organizations and unions in order to protect and promote the interests of low- and middle-income working families in the greater Boston area.
Public Transit-Public Good was formed as a statewide partnership of community-based organizations and labor unions working for a sustainable funding structure for transit throughout the state; fully functional transit service in each of its regions; and public transportation that increases equity across race, class, region, and citizenship status. Members included four local transit unions, Massachusetts Senior Action Council, the Coalition against Poverty/Coalition for Social Justice, the Greater Southeastern Massachusetts Labor Council, the T Riders Union (TRU), the Massachusetts Communities Action Network, and On the Move (OTM), among others.

WHO LED THE BROAD-BASED REVENUE COALITION?

In addition, a broad-based coalition sought to raise new and progressive revenue for unspecified investments. CFOC, which was a campaign of a twenty-year old coalition, attracted more than 125 organizations including unions, community-based organizations, nonprofit advocacy groups, and local legislative bodies. Its focus was on raising revenue generally “for smart investments in people and communities.” To fund these investments, it advocated for tax reforms, specifically an increase in the income tax, which would raise $2 billion per year in new revenues while holding down cost increases for low- and middle-income families and seniors.

WHO LED THE BUSINESS GROUPS?

Stakeholders from the business community did not organize themselves into one coalition for this campaign. A few individual business organizations and associations joined T4MA, but most formed partnerships largely through pre-existing associations. During the campaign, the Boston Foundation (TBF), ABC, and Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation (MTF) each brought together various business associations around different issues. TBF, for example, convened ABC, Alliance for Business Leadership, Boston Chamber of Commerce, Massachusetts Business Roundtable (MBR), Massachusetts Competitive Partnership (MACP), and MTF to make the economic case for transportation investment. ABC provided formal and informal briefings to the business community, including business associations such as Associated Industries of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts chapter of the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties. Business organizations conducted research, released reports, and lobbied the state legislature individually and in various combinations.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

HOW WERE THESE COALITIONS FUNDED?

T4MA relied primarily on private foundation funding with significant in-kind contributions coming from some of its member organizations. Public Transit-Public Good was funded by CLU’s general operating funding, some transit specific grants from foundations, and support from members including labor unions. Both T4MA and Public Transit-Public Good provided funding to many of its individual members. CFOC was in large part funded by labor unions with a small amount of funding from community groups. The business associations obtained funding from private foundations and their member organizations to support work related to the transportation funding campaign. A rough estimate of the total amount of money spent on the campaign regardless of source and target is well over $1 million.

POLITICAL STRATEGY

WHAT WAS THE OVERALL POLITICAL STRATEGY FOR THIS CAMPAIGN?

The political strategy of the campaign was informed by a unique window of opportunity created by several factors, including the work of grassroots and grasstips advocates who had over the previous three and a half years deliberately and actively pushed policymakers to add sufficient revenue for the state’s transportation system to their sole focus on transportation reform.

The campaign particularly benefited from the consistent and conscientious effort of many advocates to raise awareness of the need for a comprehensive funding solution for the MBTA and the statewide transportation system as a whole throughout the response to the MBTAs proposed fare increases and service cuts the previous year. While legislators did not immediately react to this pressure—and instead passed a one-time solve for the MBTA with a small amount of additional resources for the RTA—they openly and publicly acknowledged the need for a comprehensive funding solution for the whole transportation system and committed to taking on that task in the next legislative session.

As a result, the issue of transportation funding was well set up to become a priority in 2013 and the strategy then became to put pressure on the legislature to make good on the promise.
As a result of the Transportation Finance Commission and the steady stream of ensuing research reports, most policy makers in the Commonwealth were well aware of the chronic underfunding of the state's transportation system. The financial problem only increased since the commission's analysis came out in 2007, in part due to the recession, unanticipated increases in costs, and because reauthorization of federal funding for transportation for the first time did not result in an increase but remained constant after lawmakers in Washington had targeted it for serious cuts.

Nevertheless, the public's understanding of the size and seriousness of this problem continued to lag behind, including a widespread belief that the transportation system's red ink is a result of waste and mismanagement rather than insufficient funding, which was at odds with the conclusions of a wide array of experts, analysts, and policymakers. While the public did not follow the full extent of the problem and all of its details, the policymakers' perception of the gap in the public's understanding may have been even greater, which some advocates say was the largest impediment to action.

In addition, despite MassDOT's best efforts to reinvent itself after passage of the 2009 reform legislation, the media continued to reflect a healthy distrust of MassDOT and the transit agencies. Many lawmakers also continued to express concern that money raised for transportation would be spent largely in Eastern Massachusetts, particularly to pay off the Big Dig debt and to fund the MBTA, a perception that played a big role in the state's failure to pass the gas tax increase proposed by the Governor in 2009.

WHAT TACTICS WERE EMPLOYED TO IMPLEMENT THIS POLITICAL STRATEGY?

The tactics used in the campaign included rallies; press conferences; public education; policy analysis of the various administration and legislative proposals; distribution of such analysis, relevant information about funding of the transportation system, and draft language to policymakers and their staff; mobilization of people to contact decision-makers through e-alerts, letters, and in-person contact; town hall meetings and forums; media advocacy; testimony at legislative hearings; and legislative and executive lobbying by representatives and members of stakeholders but not paid lobbyists.

WHAT POLITICAL CHALLENGES DEVELOPED DURING THE CAMPAIGN AND HOW WERE THEY ADDRESSED?

The biggest challenge was posed by the fact that, to the surprise of many, the Governor proposed a $1.9 billion per year revenue package that tackled not only the transportation finance problem but also K-12 education as well as revising the tax code to make it more progressive. While many transportation advocates were also supportive of these additional goals, most were concerned that the Governor's agenda was too broad to get through the legislature at once. Even some advocates who prioritized revenue for education, who were also supportive of raising more revenue for transportation, disagreed with the Governor's political strategy.

Others, such as the CFOC, pushed for and wholeheartedly supported the broader revenue approach, based on the need for funding and the cover they believed it could provide for any potential challenge at the ballot. While many transportation advocates avoided taking a position on this issue, most business groups actively reinforced the legislature’s intent to focus only on transportation at this time, and community and social justice groups by and large supported the Governor’s approach publicly. Ultimately, a bill was passed that raised new tax revenue for transportation and for the state's general fund, but not education specifically.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN MESSAGING OR COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES OF THIS CAMPAIGN?

As a result of the Transportation Finance Commission and the steady stream of ensuing research reports, most policymakers in the Commonwealth were well aware of the chronic underfunding of the state's transportation system. The financial problem only increased since the commission's analysis came out in 2007, in part due to the recession, unanticipated increases in costs, and because reauthorization of federal funding for transportation for the first time did not result in an increase but remained constant after lawmakers in Washington had targeted it for serious cuts.

Nevertheless, the public's understanding of the size and seriousness of this problem continued to lag behind, including a widespread belief that the transportation system's red ink is a result of waste and mismanagement rather than insufficient funding, which was at odds with the conclusions of a wide array of experts, analysts, and policymakers. While the public did not follow the full extent of the problem and all of its details, the policymakers' perception of the gap in the public's understanding may have been even greater, which some advocates say was the largest impediment to action.

In addition, despite MassDOT’s best efforts to reinvent itself after passage of the 2009 reform legislation, the media continued to reflect a healthy distrust of MassDOT and the transit agencies. Many lawmakers also continued to express concern that money raised for transportation would be spent largely in Eastern Massachusetts, particularly to pay off the Big Dig debt and to fund the MBTA, a perception that played a big role in the state's failure to pass the gas tax increase proposed by the Governor in 2009.

HOW WERE THESE COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES MET?

Despite the lack of a cohesive communications plan across coalitions, ultimately all of the communications challenges of the campaign were deliberately tackled by one or more of the stakeholders. To increase the public's understanding of the problem and help address the misperception that the majority of the dollars raised would be spent in the Boston area, T4MA together with local leaders in different parts of the state organized nine editorial board meetings, which resulted in 14 editorials in regional papers, and drafted and successfully placed 25 supportive op-eds and letters to the editor from different perspectives (public health, economic prosperity, climate change, and economic opportunity).
Stakeholders across the coalitions actively engaged in social media on Facebook, Twitter (including a Twitter town hall meeting) and blogs. Public Transit-Public Good produced three videos to educate the public about the unmet needs of its constituents.

To get their message out, advocates also actively and successfully engaged with newspaper, radio, and television reporters, who showed great interest in the topic. Earned media was also secured through the strategic preparation and release of additional reports. While legislators were considering raising new revenue for transportation, reports were prepared on the consequences of failing to invest in our transportation infrastructure (The Cost of Doing Nothing, published by TBF and MACP, with assistance from ABC), the status of MassDOT’s efforts to achieve reforms and recommendations for further improvements (Delivering on the Promise, produced by MTF in collaboration with MBR), transit funding and reform (Route to Our Future, put together by Public Transit-Public Good), and the importance of investing in RTAs (Reinventing Transit, prepared by MassINC).

The release of the Cost of Doing Nothing report, for example, resulted in a front page Boston Globe article explaining the economic need for additional funding for the transportation system and the business community’s support for bold action at a perfect time, the day before MassDOT’s release of its long-term transportation finance plan for the Commonwealth, The Way Forward.

To obtain an accurate assessment of the public’s view of the state’s transportation challenges and address the misconception lawmakers had of public opinion, MassINC Polling Group conducted a year-long public opinion research project, which included two statewide polls of 1,500 registered voters (in September of 2012 and February of 2013), nine focus groups with registered voters, an online survey of employees in the Longwood Medical area, and interviews with transportation experts across the state.

While the opinion research project confirmed a widespread mistrust of government in spending transportation dollars, it also found that there was significantly less regional variation than expected in support for multi-modal investment. Most significantly, the polls showed that about half of the voters were willing to spend an additional $100/year to create a sustainable funding stream for the roads network and public transportation around the state and 60% were willing to spend an additional $50/year.

An additional poll was conducted by the business community and shared with legislative leadership but was not made public. It found strong support for the Governor’s transportation and education proposal, a poor rating of our transportation system, and support from about half the respondents for an increase in fees or taxes to pay for improvements to their own community’s transportation infrastructure and public transit system, but little agreement on which taxes or fees should be raised.

As the transportation finance legislation proceeded through the legislature, to give decision-makers and stakeholders a better sense of the amount of additional funding being considered and what might be accomplished with it, CLF and T4MA created a Transportation Budget Calculator. Using the higher revenue figure in the Senate bill, the calculator allowed the user to pick state of good repair and expansion projects off of a project list and informed the user if the state could afford the projects selected or not.

**HOW DID THE CAMPAIGN SPEND ITS COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES?**

Much of the campaign communications was handled in-house by various stakeholders. To supplement and guide these efforts, T4MA hired a communications firm (Denterlein), which helped with the day-to-day media work of the coalition. Additionally, the Barr Foundation provided funding for a marketing firm (Robbett Advocacy Media) to develop messaging and some creative concepts that were used by various grantees of the foundation in social media and in their communications with members, policymakers, and the public. Although advocates developed an outline for a paid media campaign primarily for billboards, buses, and trains, it was never implemented due to lack of funding and because time to build public support ran out.
CAMPAIGNING FOR A BETTER TRANSIT SYSTEM: 10 LESSONS LEARNED

ORGANIZATION STRATEGY

HOW WERE CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS RECRUITED INTO THE CAMPAIGN?

Through long-standing transportation coalitions, many stakeholders were already actively involved in efforts to increase funding for our transportation system long before the campaign began. In addition, a few T4MA members had actively encouraged and supported the formation of Public Transit-Public Good as well as GBIO’s involvement.

Public Transit-Public Good succeeded in securing stronger participation from labor and community groups. Through its staff and members, T4MA also reached out to the business community. The business community became engaged through its various associations. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and the Massachusetts Municipal Association brought in the strong voices of municipal leaders.

WHAT ORGANIZING METHODS WERE EMPLOYED?

A diverse group of stakeholders employed a wide variety of organizing tactics to engage the grassroots and grasstops in the campaign. TRU, Public-Transit Public Good, OTM, and CFOC held rallies, organized marches, and coordinated testimony by riders and transit workers. Massachusetts Senior Action Council members blocked Beacon Street right in front of the state house during a rally in order to bring attention to the high cost of transportation for seniors and disabled riders and the deficiencies of the legislature's transportation finance proposal.

TRU and Public Transit-Public Good also conducted outreach to riders, including call-in days on which riders at transit stations were asked to contact their legislators by volunteers with a big phone on their back as a prop and members of local transit unions distributed over 3,000 leaflets on buses and subways. Lobbying days were organized by T4MA, Public-Transit Public Good, and CFOC. MAPC, MassCommute, MassINC, MassPIRG, T4MA, and the 128 Business Council all held events involving local leaders in panel discussions in so-called town hall meetings, forums, or round-tables. Press conferences were held by GBIO, T4MA, and CFOC at the State House and across the state.

In addition, MassBike, WalkBoston, Livable Streets Alliance, and Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations held two summits at the state house and OTM convened an equity summit in the community. At all these events, the transportation funding campaign was an important part of the conversation. Coordinated by MAPC, e-alerts were sent out by many stakeholders through which about 1,600 people took action, resulting in over 5,350 emails being sent to legislators, with every legislator being reached. CFOC generated about 2,000 phone calls, 5,000 emails, and 15,000 postcards to legislators. T4MA facilitated an additional 500 patch-through calls from constituents to legislators in ten key legislative districts.

Through all of these events an estimated 30,000 people were involved directly within three months including municipal leaders, small business owners, transit riders and workers, advocates for equity, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, as well as representatives from community groups, labor unions, and large businesses.

KEY LESSONS

THE IMPORTANCE OF A PENT-UP NEED

The best antidote to a lack of political will is a genuine and recognizable external threat. The fact that chronic underfunding of the Massachusetts transportation system has resulted in the real danger of repeated transit fare increases and service cuts, and crumbling bridges and roads across the state, provided a straightforward messaging opportunity for the campaign.

Because many well-publicized reports had documented the funding shortfalls, and many constituents and lawmakers had already experienced some of the consequences, the problem had been understood by policymakers for at least six years, which helped to move it to the forefront of the legislative agenda. While in an ideal world such problems would be addressed proactively, in reality often there must be an imminent or current crisis before action is taken—it is therefore critical to make the most of such circumstances.

ACTIVE USE OF MEDIA TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ABOUT COMPLICATED PUBLIC POLICY IS CRITICAL

A concerted effort to get the message of campaign supporters out through various forms of media was indispensable to the campaign. Public opinion and lawmakers’ perception of their constituents’ beliefs were formed by traditional and social media efforts. To make sure that messages resonate, the campaign’s communication strategies were informed by the conclusions of the public opinion research project and the wealth of reports documenting the nature and extent of the problem and possible solutions.
CAMPAIGNING FOR A BETTER TRANSIT SYSTEM: 10 LESSONS LEARNED

Much of the communications effort was also professionally managed, and at times used creative wording and images to capture people's attention. Good use of social media allowed the campaign to reach the public directly, but it also served as a great way to keep members of the media informed and engaged.

Due to financial and time constraints, the campaign, however, did not include a paid media campaign, which, if targeted to specific districts in which legislators needed political cover, could have made the effort even more powerful.

SOME GOALS CANNOT BE ACHIEVED ALONE

In the years leading up to the campaign, advocates carefully and deliberately built coalitions of stakeholders. This was a necessary prerequisite for putting the previously intractable issue of chronic underfunding of the transportation system atop the legislative agenda. Most stakeholders agree that collaboration between diverse and broad stakeholders was a key reason substantial funding for transportation was obtained.

The challenge for the campaign was never insufficient participation, but rather the need for coordination and, more importantly, harmonization.

Despite best attempts to bring people together, the strength of individual coalitions and some stakeholders, as well as the decision by many of them to focus primarily on their particular needs rather than the bigger goal to raise sufficient funding for all modes of transportation, may have led to a lack of interest in putting time and effort into tighter coordination with other supporters and such differing objectives resulted in some conflicts.

Looking back it seems that the campaign had close to a full set of instruments, but each musician tried to play as loudly as possible, which resulted in a lot of noise, rather than music. Likewise, the variety of tactics—grassroots organizing, public actions, media, policy development, lobbying, and inside baseball politics—if employed together and synchronized could have been even more powerful.

Although stakeholders from across the network of supporters tried to coordinate campaign messaging and strategy through weekly conference calls convened by T4MA, this effort did not produce sufficient alignment of efforts. Prior to a future campaign, it therefore would be helpful to make sure that high-level representatives of all key constituent groups know each other well, have experience working together on a regular basis, and trust each other despite their differences.

SET REVENUE ASIDE IN A “LOCKBOX”

Although various coalitions and stakeholders took positions on the amount of funding needed for the transportation system, in their call for actions people only on occasion were asked to request that the legislature pass a bill with a certain amount of funding—vague references to a “sufficient” amount of funding were the norm. Considering that not a single person with any expertise in this area argued for a zero increase in funding for transportation, the real dispute between supporters and opponents of addressing the transportation funding problem was about how much revenue should be raised.

One participant described the campaign's public goal as being for “motherhood,” but lacking in specifics. In this context, it may have been more prudent to focus all organizing activity on getting individuals behind a minimum amount of funding to be raised, although it would have been permissible for that amount to differ by coalition (e.g., T4MA described the need as $1 billion and ABC as $900 million per year).

POTENTIALLY TRANSFERRABLE IDEAS

- Publishing a steady stream of thorough research of the issues involved and proposed solutions
- Use of a wide range of tactics that help reach both the grasstops and the grassroots
- Involvement of longstanding coalitions, whose members have experience working together
- Sustained funding from a local funder
- Strategic polling and focus groups
- Development of an interactive online research tools to make complicated numbers come alive
The goal of the campaign was to pass legislation through the Kansas state legislature which would authorize the Secretary of Transportation to initiate a new ten-year transportation program for the state, secure sufficient funding for it, and close a gap between existing transportation revenues and needs estimated to be $640 million per year over ten years by one state task force.

WHAT WAS THE GOAL OF THE CAMPAIGN?

The goal of the campaign was to pass legislation through the Kansas state legislature which would authorize the Secretary of Transportation to initiate a new ten-year transportation program for the state, secure sufficient funding for it, and close a gap between existing transportation revenues and needs estimated to be $640 million per year over ten years by one state task force.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THE CAMPAIGN?

In May of 2010, the Kansas Legislature passed Transportation Works for Kansas (“T-WORKS”), a new ten-year transportation program, which will raise $13.2 billion in state funding for transportation and allows expenditures for the construction, improvement, reconstruction, and maintenance of the state’s highway, rail, aviation, and transit systems. The package did not completely close the estimated funding gap but increased state funding for transportation by more than $4 billion over the last ten-year transportation program and included $8.2 billion for construction and modal programs.

The additional funding, in part, is being raised from a $131 million increase in registration fees for trucks (through an increase of $20, $100, or $135 per year depending on the size of the truck to begin on January 1, 2013), $1.536 billion from a 0.4 cent state sales tax increase (to start on July 1, 2013), and $1.06 billion in bonds over the ten-year period for the Kansas Department of Transportation (“KDOT”) and from higher estimates for future sales tax and motor fuel tax revenues. T-WORKS was a companion bill to Governor Mark Parkinson’s proposed one-cent sales tax increase to fill the state’s budget gap and support education and social services. The one-cent increase started on July 1, 2010 and will remain in effect until 2013 with proceeds going to the state’s general fund. In July of 2013, 0.6 cent of the sales tax will sunset and the remaining 0.4 cent will help to fund T-WORKS.

As a result of T-WORKS, funding for construction increased across modes of transportation over the ten-year period: $4.6 billion for highway preservation projects (up from $3.8 billion), $1.7 billion for highway modernization and expansion projects (new funding), $100 million for an economic development program (new funding), $100 million for transit (up from $60 million), $46 million in aviation projects (up from $30 million), $40 million for rail projects (new funding), and $1.6 billion for local roads (level funding). T-WORKS also requires that KDOT spend a minimum of $8 million in each of the 105 counties of the state during the course of the program. Unlike the two previous transportation programs, T-WORKS does not specify any transportation projects. Rather, it authorizes a new process by which projects are to be selected.

WHY WAS THE CAMPAIGN INITIATED?

The campaign was initiated because the previous ten-year transportation program, called the Comprehensive Transportation Program (“CTP”), was expiring on June 30, 2009. The CTP had raised $9.2 billion in state funding for transportation over ten years. At the same time, the state’s transportation system faced a funding gap between revenues and needs estimated to be $640 million per year over the next ten years.

HOW WAS THE CAMPAIGN STRUCTURED?

KDOT played a central role in the passage of T-WORKS by carefully laying the necessary groundwork for it. The department engaged in a multi-year process to achieve greater public support for infrastructure investments through stakeholder consultation, increased collaboration, and improved and expanded methods for ranking and selecting projects that appeal to broader issues of public concern such as job creation.

Stakeholders such as the trucking industry, contractors, cities and counties, chambers of commerce, and Economic Lifelines, a statewide coalition of business associations, individual businesses, municipalities, labor organizations, and
community groups, advocated for the new transportation program at the Statehouse.

**POLITICAL CONTEXT**

**WHAT FORMAL STEPS WERE REQUIRED FOR THE CAMPAIGN TO SUCCEED?**

The Kansas state legislature had to enact legislation for a new transportation program before the ninety-day 2010 legislative session was scheduled to end, after a brief adjournment, in May of 2010.

**WHAT WAS THE POLITICAL CLIMATE AT THE TIME OF THE CAMPAIGN?**

The political climate for raising revenue through taxes or fees was very difficult. Like the rest of the country, Kansas was in a recession and the state government was reeling from revenue shortfalls. The state legislature approved several rounds of budget cuts to address a $1 billion shortfall in the fiscal year 2010 state budget with cuts to essential programs including transportation.

After these earlier cuts, another $500 million revenue shortfall arose as a result of the continuing decline of state revenues. As a result, the center of attention of the 2010 legislative session was the budget bill for fiscal year 2011. Most media and public attention was focused on the state legislature's struggle to pass a balanced budget, rather than the needs of the transportation system.

These circumstances were mitigated somewhat by a strong baseline of political support which transportation has enjoyed in Kansas over the years. After T-WORKS passed, supporters believed that while T-WORKS may not have passed on its own, without transportation, a general revenue tax increase would not have passed either.

**WHAT PREVIOUS PLANNING OR RESEARCH EFFORTS BENEFITED THE CAMPAIGN?**

The campaign benefited enormously from a multi-year effort by KDOT to reinvent transportation planning and address public uncertainty over transportation investments. In 2003, KDOT took on an effort called the Partnership Project ("P2") to identify ways the agency could improve.

In 2006, putting the lessons learned from P2 into effect, KDOT engaged in a transportation planning effort during which the department involved more than 120 stakeholders and held over forty meetings in the creation of the state's twenty-year, long-range transportation plan ("LTRP"). In addition, these stakeholders developed recommendations for policy and business model changes to build upon the cultural changes that resulted from P2.

In 2008, Governor Kathleen Sebelius appointed a thirty-five member task force, T-LINK, to create a new transportation framework for Kansas building upon the LRTP. T-LINK, which included business leaders, local officials, an economist, chamber representatives, and interest group representatives, conducted a series of local consultation meetings around the state in which more than 850 people participated. The task force developed a set of recommendations, which provided the foundation for T-WORKS.

As part of T-LINK, an economic working group was assembled to determine ways to carry out the LRTP recommendation to link transportation investments to economic priorities. At the same time, KDOT organized road rallies where citizens were randomly recruited to ride in vans along predetermined routes and to rate their satisfaction with the performance of various highways.

**WHAT SUPPORT FROM CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS COULD BE EXPECTED?**

Due to KDOT’s multi-year effort, it was able to reach many critical stakeholders, get feedback, and use what it learned to fine-tune the project selection process. As such, critical stakeholders, such as local officials, felt that they were involved in developing the decision-making process of project selection and could therefore trust and support the new transportation program. Likewise, Economic Lifelines, which had worked to advocate for the previous two transportation programs in 1989 and 1999 and was involved in the project selection process, was supportive of efforts for a new program from the outset.
CAMPAIGN FINANCE

HOW WAS THE CAMPAIGN FUNDED?

KDOT used staff time to advance its efforts. Economic Lifelines, a 501(c)(4), almost doubled its budget in 2010 to nearly $200,000 through increased contributions from members in order to sufficiently increase its lobbying and outreach efforts around T-WORKS.

CAMPAIGN MANAGEMENT/STRUCTURE

WHO LED THE CAMPAIGN?

KDOT took the lead on all planning and educational components of the campaign. Economic Lifelines and other stakeholders lobbied for passage of the legislation.

POLITICAL STRATEGY

WHAT WAS THE OVERALL POLITICAL STRATEGY FOR THIS CAMPAIGN?

The overall political strategy was to focus the debate about a new transportation program on the need for preservation of the transportation system, increased safety, and economic growth, all themes developed through KDOT’s LRTP stakeholder process.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN POLITICAL CHALLENGES OF THIS CAMPAIGN?

In addition, to the overall difficult economic climate, there was a lack of public understanding of the need for increased transportation funding, since the state’s roads were in relatively good shape after two successful previous transportation programs. There was also a tension resulting from the competition for funds between the transportation goals of rural and urban areas.

HOW WERE THESE CHALLENGES MET?

To address these challenges head on, KDOT focused on job creation and preservation of the existing transportation system. One of the stakeholder working groups formed during the development of the LRTP urged KDOT to define economic impact in terms of jobs as opposed to travel time savings.

KDOT followed that recommendation. Since the state’s transportation system was considered to be in relatively good shape—Kansas had recently received the number one ranking for highways and bridges by Reader’s Digest—KDOT focused on the recent budget cuts to demonstrate the impact lack of funding had on preserving its highway system and the need to raise revenue in order to avoid losing the ground gained and to protect the state’s investment.

KDOT also directly confronted the perceived competition for funds between rural and urban areas. Secretary Miller made a point of speaking about the interdependence of the rural and urban parts of Kansas at every meeting. She stressed that while it may not seem that an investment in a transportation project 200 miles away matters, it actually does, and then showed skeptics how it does.

KDOT also avoided setting up committees based on rural or urban issues. Rather, every committee was carefully designed to have representation from both rural and urban leaders.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

WHAT WAS THE OVERALL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR THIS CAMPAIGN?

Through KDOT’s LRTP stakeholder process, three major themes emerged:

1) preservation of the existing transportation system at its current performance level is a top priority
2) transportation investments need to support the economic priorities of the state
3) travel safety needs to be improved

KDOT then replayed these themes back to stakeholders again and again, both to ensure that KDOT accurately understood their priorities as well as to anchor support for those themes. KDOT then developed consistent language to describe those themes to the general public and remained focused on this message.
HOW DID THE CAMPAIGN SPEND ITS COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES?

KDOT had no budget for paid advertising. Its communication strategy relied heavily on earned media with a strong focus on the innovative use of technology. In January of 2009, the department launched the Kansas Transportation Online Community (“K-TOC”), which served as a public forum for discussion of the state’s transportation issues and, at the time, was the nation’s first externally-facing online community operated by a state government agency.

KDOT then used K-TOC for testing the acceptability and credibility of its project selection scoring approach by posting preliminary scores for more than 140 proposed projects. The project pages attracted more than 3,000 unique visitors in less than ninety days. Later, KDOT produced its first-ever video news release. The video was posted to the agency’s YouTube channel in April 2010, while the Kansas state legislature was still debating the transportation plan and the funding package. The video, which illustrated that failure to adequately fund transportation has a profound impact on the preservation of the transportation system and job creation, was extremely successful, generating more than 4,500 views on YouTube and media coverage including in newspapers, on television, and on blogs.

In addition, throughout the 2010 legislative session, KDOT staff live-tweeted multiple sessions of the state Senate transportation and budget committees, as well as the final debates in the House of Representatives on the proposed transportation program and associated revenue package and attracted 700 followers. KDOT’s governmental affairs staff also posted weekly blogs on K-TOC describing events at the Statehouse and distributed information through the email lists of its supporters.

ORGANIZATION STRATEGY

HOW WERE CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS RECRUITED INTO THE CAMPAIGN?

The process for enlisting key supporters for T-WORKS really began long before the time for a new transportation program came. In 2003, although KDOT’s customer satisfaction ratings were at 91%, the department under the leadership of Secretary Deb Miller initiated a deliberate process to find out how the agency was performing in the eyes of critical stakeholders. To this end, KDOT kicked off P2 through which the department surveyed over 900 stakeholders—residents, local officials, legislators, and contractors—to identify ways the agency could improve. The results of the survey indicated that while people were satisfied with the condition of the transportation system, they were not pleased with how KDOT delivered its services. Those surveyed, particularly local officials, perceived KDOT to be rigid and inflexible when working with communities with little interest in making decisions in a collaborative fashion.

KDOT then set out to change its culture in a way that would create a more transparent and collaborative environment for residents, local officials, legislators, and contractors. For example, project teams that used to be led by a design engineer at headquarters were decentralized and expanded to be multi-disciplinary.

KDOT employees were expected to use more collaborative decision-making approaches and asked to focus on “nurturing” relationships with local officials. As a result of this drastic internal cultural shift, relationships between KDOT and the people with whom the department interacts improved significantly. KDOT brought this approach into its long-term transportation planning process in 2006 and to the T-LINK task force in 2008 through which the department in all collaborated with nearly 1,000 stakeholders.

These stakeholders, and the local partnerships KDOT formed, provided an incredible foundation of support for the agency and a new transportation program in the 2010 legislative session.

WHAT METHODS DID THE CAMPAIGN USE TO SECURE PUBLIC SUPPORT?

Building public support for the new transportation program, like the recruitment of stakeholders, required years of foundation building by KDOT. Public support only followed after KDOT engaged in an intentional effort to build public trust in the agency first. As an outgrowth of KDOT’s cultural shift that improved how the department delivered its services, KDOT started to rethink its decision-making process and project selection.

Through its close work with stakeholders KDOT learned that, to be effective, planning the Kansas transportation system would require greater public involvement than before. Until that point, an objective, data-driven computer application called the “priority formula” entirely drove the selection of projects for the KDOT transportation program. The priority formula was the only way KDOT identified road sections most in need of improvement based on a state law that had sought to take politics out of transportation planning. Although over time the priority formula had been tweaked to make it more responsive, it still failed to provide meaningful opportunities for dialogue among stakeholders, hindered the
EVALUATE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY, EVEN WHEN IT IS DOING WELL

In 2003, when the perception of the Kansas transportation system was arguably at an all-time high, rather than resting on its laurels, KDOT embarked on a process to evaluate its own performance. As a result, the agency learned how it can improve. KDOT took those lessons and implemented a completely new approach to project selection and decision making, which ultimately provided the solid foundation needed to raise funding for the transportation system during the recession.

DEVELOP AND USE OBJECTIVE DATA TO PROMOTE CHANGE

KDOT relied on a detailed survey of 900 stakeholders to convince its technical staff that an internal shift in culture was necessary. As a result of the survey, KDOT’s workforce could understand and support the need for a more collaborative and expanded project selection process. Likewise, KDOT used economic impact analysis to evaluate the job creation potential of individual transportation projects to help local stakeholders make decisions based in reality rather than on long-held, unevaluated beliefs.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO TRANSPORTATION PLANNING HELPS BUILD SUPPORT FOR FUNDING

KDOT early on made the connection between the ability to fund the department’s work and the need for a collaborative approach to transportation planning. Through development of meaningful opportunities for stakeholders to be involved in decision making, KDOT built a base of critical stakeholders for its effort to secure funding for a new transportation program. These stakeholders later became active supporters and advocates for T-WORKS.

RELATING THE NEED FOR TRANSPORTATION FUNDING TO THEMES THAT RESONATE WITH THE PUBLIC

KDOT’s collaborative approach to transportation planning involved listening to stakeholders and communicating in terms that resonate with them. While the themes that emerged—preservation, safety, and jobs—may be worth emulating, the process that resulted in their identification is even more important. The result of this approach was that the communications plan to advocate for a new transportation program practically wrote itself.
CAMPAIGNING FOR A BETTER TRANSIT SYSTEM: 10 LESSONS LEARNED

ADDRESS GEOGRAPHIC TENSIONS HEAD ON

KDOT did not shy away from addressing one of the underlying challenges of raising funding for transportation faced by most states—the dynamic between rural and urban transportation needs. Instead, it brought up the issue affirmatively and regularly with stakeholders and, rather than accepting divisive rhetoric, challenged the underlying assumptions. KDOT also made sure that rural and urban leaders had the opportunity to engage with each other on transportation issues by nominating them to the same committees.

POTENTIALLY TRANSFERRABLE IDEAS

- Careful, deliberate, and persistent stakeholder involvement
- Experiential surveys where residents provide feedback as they use the transportation system
- Live-tweeting from legislative hearings
- Video press releases
- Requiring a minimum amount of the transportation program funding to be spent in every county

Photo Source: Transit Action Network
WHAT WAS THE GOAL OF THE CAMPAIGN?

The goal of the campaign was to raise revenue for transportation projects in Los Angeles ("LA") County, including the expansion of subway lines and bus service, in order to relieve traffic congestion.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THE CAMPAIGN?

On November 4, 2008, voters in LA County approved a half-cent sales tax increase (from 8.25% to 8.75%) together with an expenditure plan on a ballot with a 67.22% supermajority that will raise an estimated $40 billion over its thirty-year life for specified transit and roadway projects. The voter-approved expenditure plan for the measure allocates 40% of the funding for specific transit capital projects, 25% for transit operations, 20% for specific highway capital projects, and 15% to local jurisdictions for discretionary use such as street resurfacing, signal synchronization, and bike and pedestrian improvements. While the completion of each project in the expenditure plan is not guaranteed, the levels of distribution of funding across programs are. Changes to the projects in the plan can be made only by a two-thirds majority of the Board of Directors of the LA County Metropolitan Transportation Authority ("Metro"), the regional transportation planning and public transportation operating authority of LA County. The measure also suspended a planned general fare increase for one year and prohibited the increase of fares for students, seniors, and riders with disabilities for five years.

WHY WAS THE CAMPAIGN INITIATED?

State budget shortfalls in the years leading up to Measure R resulted in the diversion of transportation revenues from the state sales tax on gasoline, as well as from transportation bonding authority, to other, non-transportation uses. This growing inability to rely on state revenue sources for transportation projects caused many advocates, elected officials, and Metro to conclude that non-federal funding for transportation would have to be raised locally. Separately, Metro had originally forecasted the availability of $4 billion for transportation projects over the next thirty years. Due to projected cost increases in a short period of time that amount was adjusted down to zero, indicating no funding for new projects.

At the same time, LA County, with 10.3 million inhabitants in 2008 the most populous county in the nation, continued to suffer from its infamous traffic congestion problem, which has always been dire but recently had grown even worse ("from icy slush to frozen") as experienced by its residents and documented by the Texas Transportation Institute. The combination of these developments provided the motivation for many to participate in a campaign to raise transportation revenue on a local basis.

HOW WAS THE CAMPAIGN STRUCTURED?

Measure R benefited from three separate, but coordinated, efforts: a coalition of environmental, labor, and business groups called "Move LA," whose enthusiasm got the ball rolling for the ballot measure, a public information campaign called "Imagine" run by Metro around the development of its Long Range Transportation Plan ("LRTP"), and an official political campaign, "Yes on Measure R" managed by a team of professionals who had been involved in LA Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's election.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

WHAT FORMAL STEPS WERE REQUIRED FOR THE CAMPAIGN TO SUCCEED?

Since the late 1960s, individual counties in California have the specific authorization from the state to impose regional sales taxes to fund transportation projects and services.
Measure R was the seventh attempt since the 1960s by LA County to avail itself of this option and the third one that was successful. First, the Metro Board of Directors had to vote to place the question on the ballot for November of 2008. After the Metro Board of Directors decided to do so with a 9-2 vote in August of 2008, the county supervisors needed to agree to consolidate the ballot question with the county election process.

This is usually thought of as a ministerial act in practice, but legally discretionary. In the case of Measure R, the county supervisors—led by three of their colleagues who were also Directors of the Metro board and opposed to the measure—initially refused to put the question on the ballot due to disagreement about the funding distribution, a first in the county’s history. Ultimately, after a change of heart by one of the three supervisors, the measure was allowed to proceed.

In addition, a legislative extension of how long the sales tax could last, from six and a half years to thirty years, was necessary. The State Legislature approved this change in August of 2008. The measure was required to pass on November 4, 2008, with a supermajority of 66.67%, as a result of a 1995 California Supreme Court ruling. The ballot question titled “Traffic Relief. Rail Extensions. Reduce Foreign Oil Dependence” was: “To: Synchronize traffic signals; Repair potholes; Extend light rail with airport connections; Improve freeway traffic flow (5, 10, 14, 60, 101, 110, 138, 210, 405, 605, 710); Keep senior/student/disabled fares low; Provide clean-fuel buses; Expand subway/Metrolink/bus service; Dedicate millions for community traffic relief; Shall Los Angeles County’s sales tax increase one-half cent for thirty years with independent audits, public review of expenditures, all locally controlled?”

WHAT WAS THE POLITICAL CLIMATE AT THE TIME OF THE CAMPAIGN?

The political climate for a revenue-raising measure was difficult due to the national economic situation, but advocates also recognized some clear opportunities. Advocates realized early on that the probable Democratic presidential nominee, either Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton, would bring new voters to the November election and that those voters would be more likely to support a transportation tax measure. What we now call a recession had already started when the campaign was under consideration late in 2007.

In September 2008, shortly before the vote, the economy took a particularly sharp downward turn, which conventional wisdom says should hurt a tax measure. Looking back, some believe that voters may not yet completely have been able to gauge the full impact of the economic crisis, but that sentiment is somewhat belied by the fact that a Measure R follow-up survey, conducted seven months following the election, still indicated that overall support had not declined. Between 2002 and 2008, the public approval ratings of Metro had increased by over fifty percent, which has been attributed to the completion of major rail and bus rapid transit projects and the strong ridership associated with them.

WHAT PREVIOUS PLANNING, RESEARCH, OR ADVOCACY EFFORTS BENEFITED THE CAMPAIGN?

In early 2008, Metro published a draft of its LRTP that provided a list of significant rail, bus, highway, and other transportation improvements and expansions, for which later examination showed that no funding was available. The list ultimately became the major source of projects ideas for the expenditure plan associated with Measure R. The campaign also benefited from regular polling Metro had conducted tracking the public interest in new funding options over several years prior. In June of 2008, Metro also commissioned the LA County Economic Development Corporation to examine the economic impacts of the proposed measure.

CAMPAIGN MANAGEMENT/STRUCTURE

WHO LED THE MOVE LA COALITION?

Denny Zane, a former Santa Monica mayor, turned transit advocate, successfully pulled together a coalition of environmental, labor, and business leaders, who had never worked together in support of raising revenue for transportation in LA County. Other leaders of the coalition included Dan Rosenfeld, a real estate developer at the time and chair of the LA Chamber of Commerce Land Use Committee, Gary Toebben, president and CEO of the LA Chamber of Commerce, and Maria Elena Durazo executive secretary–treasurer of the LA County Federation of Labor.

WHO RAN THE IMAGINE INFORMATIONAL CAMPAIGN?

The purpose of the Imagine Campaign, which predated the existence of Measure R, was not to develop support for the ballot question. Metro designed this informational campaign to solicit public input for the LRTP. It asked county residents to imagine what a future with better transportation options could look like. This civic engagement process, however, has been credited with helping to build support for Measure R.
WHO LED THE YES ON MEASURE R CAMPAIGN?
The official public campaign in support of Measure R began only in September of 2008. Metro, as a publicly funded agency, was limited in advocating or campaigning for a measure, although it was permitted to provide information. A plan by Metro staff to continue a proactive informational campaign was cancelled by the board. A privately-financed campaign managed by a team comprised of professionals who had been involved in Mayor Villaraigosa’s election took over. This change brought with it the leadership of key political figures, including Mayor Villaraigosa and County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

HOW WAS MOVE LA FUNDED?
Move LA was largely funded by individual and corporate donations.

HOW WAS THE IMAGINE CAMPAIGN PAID FOR?
The Imagine informational campaign associated with the LRTP plan was paid out of Metro’s budget for the planning process and cost over $4 million.

HOW WAS THE YES ON MEASURE R CAMPAIGN FUNDED?
The Yes on R campaign, which raised about $4 million, benefited greatly from the Mayor’s fundraising efforts, who may have raised as much as 80% of this amount, and continued to fundraise successfully even after the economy crashed. A significant portion of these funds came from labor unions.

WHAT WAS THE OVERALL POLITICAL STRATEGY FOR THIS CAMPAIGN?
The campaign’s political strategy was premised on the opportunity provided by the presidential election. The assumption was that the election, regardless of the Democratic candidate, was going to have large turnout and pull in low-propensity voters from demographics such as people of color, women, youth, and those with lower income, who are more likely to support a transportation tax measure.

WHAT WAS THE MAIN COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES OF THIS CAMPAIGN?

While there was close to consensus in LA County about the need to invest in transportation, some felt their municipality, region, or constituents would not get their fair share of the funding as set forth in the expenditure plan.

HOW WERE THESE CHALLENGES MET?
Although not formally a part of the Measure R communications strategy, Metro’s Imagine Campaign played an essential role in addressing the communication challenges. The Imagine Campaign focused its message on improved mobility. Through the Imagine Campaign, Metro was able to engage LA County residents not only in envisioning a better transportation system, but in developing a specific list of projects.

During the Imagine Campaign, Metro attracted sixty million hits to its website. Understanding how the money would be spent convinced many voters that the sales tax increase would be a worthwhile investment and that they would benefit personally. The campaign in favor of Measure R continued to use maps and lists to illustrate and publicize the proposed projects.

At the beginning of the public campaign, Metro sent out county-wide a sixteen-page informational mailer that included project lists and maps. Mobility for everyone was also the focus of the Measure R communications campaign, which dubbed the ballot question “The Roadmap to Traffic Relief” and interchangeably any of the other issues of specific concern identified such as rail safety, low transit fares, road safety, and cleaner air.

Imagine the freedom to go anywhere.
Job creation was not a central theme. Trusted experts, such as a Don Sepulveda, president of the LA Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers, Jonathan Stewart, a UCLA Civil and Environmental Engineering Professor, and Trisha Murakawa, the chair of the American Lung Association of California, served as unpaid spokespeople for the campaign, while politicians were intentionally not used in any of the campaign’s advertisements due to fear of public cynicism about their motivations.

HOW WERE CRITICAL StakeHOLDers RECRUITed INTO THE CAMPAIGN?

Mayor Villaraigosa during his 2005 election campaign had made the extension of the Purple subway line from Wilshire/Western to Santa Monica, the so-called “Subway to the Sea,” one of his key objectives. Early in 2007, Zane, in consultation with others, decided to help make the Mayor’s vision a reality by pursuing funding of the Subway to the Sea, with a portion of the $4 billion that had originally been identified by Metro as part of its LRTP process and the hope that such an advocacy effort would also increase funding for other transit projects.

In November 2007, after Metro adjusted the estimate of available funding over the next thirty years down to zero, the Subway to the Sea Coalition under Zane’s leadership called a meeting at the Bradbury Building, an architectural landmark, which attracted representatives from thirty-four organizations representing the labor, environment, and development communities. The main conclusion of the meeting was that the primary focus of the coalition had to be about broadly raising money for transportation, rather than one particular transit project.

Building on the success of the November 2007 meeting, in January of 2008 the coalition held a “Time to Move LA” conference. Zane as a mayor of Santa Monica had made a lot of connections with people in government, and the environmental, labor, and development communities. He used this occasion to bring them together turning out 350 stakeholders, including advocates, experts, and political leaders, and representatives from additional business, civic, and transportation-related organizations. As a result of this meeting, which was held at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, a modern Roman Catholic church building downtown, participants formed “Move LA,” a new coalition with a multi-modal mission, which ultimately provided the necessary momentum for Measure R.

HOW DID THE CAMPAIGN SPEND ITS COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES?

The Measure R campaign used cable advertisements, radio spots, and earned media, but little social media. All of the communications were carefully targeted to focus scarce media resources on areas that were closely contested. The campaign relied on cable for its advertising to take advantage of the ability to select zip codes specific to the areas it wanted to target.

Voters in areas of strong support for Measure R were not a priority to the extent that people living in those areas are unlikely to be able to recall the television commercials if asked today. The majority of the campaign’s $3 million budget was spent on television. Helpful to the campaign was that the opposition relied on earned media, spending no money on commercials or direct mail. Polling was used extensively throughout the development and implementation of the Measure R campaign.

It was used to monitor interest in new funding options for transportation (by Metro), to test the viability of a sales tax measure prior to its approval by the Metro board (by Move LA, Metro, and the Mayor), as well as to fine-tune the ballot language and the commercials determining which words and in what order they should be used (by Yes on Measure R).
HOW WAS SUPPORT SECURED FOR THE EXPENDITURE PLAN OF THE MEASURE?

Staff of the Mayor and Metro, and a Metro board member, engaged in a shuttle diplomacy process around the region to secure support for the expenditure plan. The existence of councils of government within the region facilitated the negotiation process in the development of the expenditure plan. Move LA did not get involved in selecting individual projects but helped negotiate the general categories and priorities of expenditures. From the perspective of the business community, it was important that the expenditure plan included investment in expansion, not just state of good repair and operations, since nobody wanted to spend money simply to fill an existing gap.

While this process garnered wide support for the expenditure plan, including ultimately a supermajority of the voters, some stakeholders decided to sit out the campaign or oppose the ballot. For example, the environmental justice community mostly did not participate in the campaign and the Bus Riders Union of the Labor/Community Strategy Center rejected Measure R consistent with its long history of opposing rail transit investment, because it generally requires a higher subsidy than bus transit, which can cause an overall increase in fares and Metro’s tendency to favor it over maintaining and improving the bus system.

WHAT METHODS WERE USED ON THE GROUND TO SECURE VOTERS?

The campaign intentionally refrained from spending resources on phone banking and door-knocking, since large turnout was assumed. Instead, it used press conferences with labor and environmental leaders, and elected officials around the county to generate local earned media coverage.

SUPPORT FOR TRANSIT PROJECTS IN LARGE GEOGRAPHIC AREA REQUIRES BUNDLING WITH ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

To elicit broad-based support for Measure R, participants in the campaign early on decided that a mix of rail and bus transit and highway projects was necessary. A multi-modal approach made it possible to provide benefits across LA County, since not all areas could benefit from the transit improvements. The expenditure plan was carefully calibrated to make sure that no part of the county could say that they were not receiving any benefit.

COALITIONS OF UNUSUAL BEDFELLOWS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE NOT JUST THE DIRECT USERS

Zane’s success in bringing together representatives from the environmental, labor, and business communities, who had never worked together before and literally had never visited each others’ offices, and getting them to agree to collaborate, sent a powerful signal to decision-makers. As a result, elected officials, including the Mayor and Metro board members, realized that tackling the transportation revenue problem in 2008 had legs, which brought to the table not only their support but also their leadership.

POLLING IS A CRUCIAL TOOL IN CAMPAIGN DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The various polls conducted by Metro, the Mayor, Move LA, and Yes on Measure R helped convince Metro and others to initiate the campaign, shaped the exact language of the ballot question, and perfected the public message used to round up support for the measure. County Supervisor Yaroslavsky, whose support was seen by many as critical, remained non-committal until Move LA conducted a poll and Metro confirmed its results with its own poll. The Mayor, in turn, conducted a third poll, before he got on board. Likewise, the carefully crafted public message, that took into account voters interests and concerns and was so important to the close result, could not have been developed without polling.
A CHARISMATIC LEADER CAN GET THE BALL ROLLING AND HELP OVERCOME ADVERSITY

While the circumstances in 2007 clearly were ripe for a transportation finance campaign, someone had to convene the stakeholders. It is fair to say that without Zane there would not have been a Measure R campaign. Zane’s ability to bring people together and his willingness to take a risk kick started this effort and likely carried it through.

LEGAL HURDLES CAN BE OVERCOME DESPITE A TIGHT BALLOT TIMELINE

Leaders did not give up when faced with hurdles ranging from LA County’s refusal to consolidate the ballot to the legislative changes required to allow the duration of the sales tax to be extended and to permit Metro to collect taxes. While these obstacles seemed insurmountable on a tight deadline, the time constraints ultimately worked in the campaign’s favor, motivating the legislature to respond quickly.

POTENTIALLY TRANSFERABLE IDEAS

- Use of interesting meeting space to attract stakeholders initially
- Involvement of high level representatives of key constituents early on
- Separation of the advocacy, informational, and official political campaigns
- Extensive use of polling
- Development of specific expenditure plan prior to vote
- Regional agencies can play crucial role in developing list of projects
- Supporters refraining from developing list of projects but helping to negotiate general expenditure priorities
- Engagement of professionalized, seasoned campaign team with experience in the region
- Targeted cable advertisement buys
- Use of spokespeople, other than politicians, as transit champions
WHAT WAS THE GOAL OF THE CAMPAIGN?

The goal of the campaign was to raise revenue for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority ("MTA"), the public entity responsible for public transportation, toll bridges, and tunnels in the New York City ("NYC") area, to address a $1.2 billion deficit in its $10 billion operating budget for 2009 and a budget gap of at least $17 billion for its upcoming 2010-2014 capital program.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THE CAMPAIGN?

On May 6, 2009, the New York State Legislature approved a $1.8 billion per year rescue plan for the MTA, which raises revenue from a broad base of fees and taxes including a 0.34% payroll tax, a 50 cent taxi fee, a $25 vehicle registration fee, a $2 license fee, an additional 5% car rental tax, and a 7.5% fare increase which was set by the MTA, thereby avoiding major service cuts and a 23% fare increase.

The plan included funding to cover the operating budget deficit and debt service on sufficient bonding for the first two years of the gap in the MTA 2010-2014 capital program. It also mandated a series of aggressive reforms to improve efficiency, transparency and accountability of the agency including an annual audit of the agency by the state Legislature and a clear and public policy on the granting of privileges and benefits to employees such as agency-owned vehicles.

WHY WAS THE CAMPAIGN INITIATED?

The campaign was initiated to avoid major service cuts and a large fare increase set to take place in 2009. By 2008 the deteriorating economy had decimated some of the MTAs most important revenue sources, while rising debt service and pension benefits had increased the agency’s costs. Specifically, the slowdown in residential and commercial property sales due to the recession resulted in declining revenue from the Mortgage Recording Tax ("MRT"), a tax collected within the MTA service area on all mortgages secured, as well as the urban tax, a property transfer tax based on the assessed value of a property collected within NYC, both important sources of MTA revenue.

The MTA received $1.6 billion from the MRT and urban tax combined in 2007 but only $597 million in 2008. After NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s legislative proposal to charge a traffic congestion fee for vehicles traveling into or within Manhattan failed in June of 2008, there was no relief for the MTA in sight. In November of 2008, the MTA therefore announced a $1.2 billion operating deficit for 2009.

To balance its budget without new revenue, the MTA revealed its “doomsday” plan which proposed to eliminate 2,700 jobs, two subway lines, and overnight bus service on twenty-five routes, decrease frequency on all trains, and increase fares and tolls by 23% by June of 2009 and to put in place regular alternate year fare and toll increases to start in 2011.

HOW WAS THE CAMPAIGN STRUCTURED?

In 1998, the Regional Plan Association ("RPA"), an independent regional planning organization, established the Empire State Transportation Alliance ("ESTA"), a coalition of leaders in the business, civic, labor and environmental communities to support robust MTA capital investments.

In 2008, ESTA joined forces with Campaign for New York’s Future ("CNYF"), another diverse coalition that advocates for New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s sustainability effort, PlaNYC, to form the Keep New York Moving ("KNYM") coalition.

HAVE THE RESULTS OF THE CAMPAIGN LASTED?

In March 2010, less than a year after the rescue plan was passed, the MTA put in place extensive service cuts, layoffs, and elimination of free student MetroCards to close a new $750 million operating budget gap which had arisen as a result of direct cuts to state aid and underperforming tax revenue.

This case study was prepared in September of 2012 by Emily Long, Rafael Mares, and Aviva Rothman-Shore of the Conservation Law Foundation based on interviews with Robert D. Yaro, President of RPA and Richard Barone, Director of Transportation Programs of RPA, as well as a review of documents related to the campaign.
Thirty-four bus routes and two subway lines were eliminated and seventy-six bus routes were reduced. More than 1,000 employees were laid off. The service cuts were comparable to those proposed in the original “doomsday” plan but the layoffs were fewer and fare and toll increases were avoided. Absent the rescue plan, fare increases would likely have been necessary.

The payroll tax, now an important source of revenue for the MTA, continues to be a top target for elimination by Senate Republicans and several Democrats.

Delegates from suburban areas within the MTA district were able to scale back the tax by $250 million in 2011 by exempting small businesses in addition to schools. Several Long Island municipalities have filed suit challenging the constitutionality of the payroll tax. In 2012, one such challenge prevailed at the trial court level (it is now being appealed), while all six previous cases were dismissed (two of which are being appealed together), and one additional case is still pending.

In July 2012, the MTA announced a balanced budget and stated that due to increased ridership and internal cost-saving efficiencies, the agency will be able to restore about one-third of the cut bus routes and subway lines and add some new routes and extensions, starting in October. Earlier in 2012, Governor Andrew Cuomo and the legislature approved a deal to fund the remainder of the five-year capital program by committing an additional $770 million to the MTA and increasing the bond cap by $7 billion.

In 2008, ESTA joined forces with Campaign for New York's Future (“CNYF”), another diverse coalition that advocates for New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s sustainability effort, PlaNYC, to form the Keep New York Moving (“KNYM”) coalition.

The New York state legislature had to enact legislation by the end of the 2009 legislative session in June or the MTA would have had to implement its “doomsday” plan. In January 2009, Governor David Paterson requested that the legislature draft a bill implementing a financial strategy for the MTA based on the recommendations of a blue ribbon commission which had just concluded its work.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith introduced two different proposals in March of 2009, the major difference being that one proposal included funding for capital needs while the other only included revenue for MTAs operating budget.

The Assembly’s plan, which included increasing bridge tolls to fund transit, was not received well by the Senate. After much debate, Governor Paterson released a plan on May 2, 2009 largely based on the Senate's plan, which included a payroll tax instead of increased bridge tolls and no funding for the capital program, and announced that he would force a vote the following week, at which time the final rescue plan, which added two years of capital funding, was adopted by the legislature.

What was the political climate at the time of the campaign?

The political climate for a revenue-raising measure was not great. Like the rest of the country, New York was entering a recession and the anti-tax movement was growing. Mayor Bloomberg’s congestion pricing proposal had just been defeated due to opposition from both houses. Voters outside of the MTA service area were averse to funding a system they did not perceive as providing a benefit to them.

What formal steps were required for the campaign to succeed?

The leaders of NYC’s business, civic, labor, and environmental communities that make up ESTA have worked together in the past to support MTA capital investment and were eager to support new efforts to rescue the agency.
WhAt PREvIOUs PlANNING OR REsEARCh EffORts BENEFITEd thE CAMPAIGN?

In June 2008, Governor Paterson appointed Richard Ravitch, former Chairman of the MTA, who has been widely credited with rescuing the New York transit system in the 1980s, to lead a blue ribbon commission with the task of developing a financing strategy addressing the MTA’s capital and operating needs over ten years.

Ravitch was not provided with the financial support or staff necessary for such an undertaking. He therefore asked RPA, of which he has been a board member since 1987, if it would staff the commission. RPA readily agreed. ESTA and CNYF members began testifying at Ravitch Commission hearings and urged others to submit their own testimony, focusing on the message that everyone who benefits from transit—drivers, riders, businesses—would have to help rescue it.

The Commission’s Final Report, dated December 2, 2008, included recommendations consistent with this message and addressed MTAs long-term needs. Its release gave KNYM a concrete plan to rally around.

CAMPAGN MANAGEMENT/STRUCtuRE

WHO LED THE CAMPAIGN?

RPA and AECOM, a global provider of professional technical and management support services, served as co-chairs of ESTA. RPA staffed and led the KNYM campaign. Neysa Pranger, who was Director of Public Affairs, ran the campaign with support from Rich Barone, Director of Transportation Programs. Coalition members of ESTA and CNYF were crucial for rallying grassroots support.

ESTA originally was focused only on capital needs and there was disagreement among KNYM members whether to broaden the goal to include the operating deficit. Recognizing that money is ultimately fungible, the coalition decided to support raising revenue for both the MTAs operating budget and its capital needs.

To be better prepared for potential future disagreements, KNYM then developed a platform statement of agreement, which gave members something positive to reference and fall back on.

POLItIcal STRAtEGY

WHAT WAS thE OVERALL POLItIcal STRAtEGY fOR thIs CAMPAIGN?

Subway riders in New York in 2008 paid 69% of the operating costs at the fare box, one of the highest in the nation. The “doomsday” plan would have had riders pay 83% of the operating costs. In other words, public subsidies would account for only 17% of the costs. As such, KNYM members worked vigorously to educate the public and more importantly lawmakers on the need for all sectors who benefit from the system to help support it. Members regularly traveled to Albany and wrote letters to educate lawmakers.

They testified at public hearings and meetings, urging legislators to adopt the Ravitch Plan. They created district-by-district Assembly and Senate maps showing the specific impacts of the pending cuts on their constituents, which were distributed at meetings and even used during closed door sessions of the legislature.

WHAT WERE thE MAIN POLItIcal CHAllENGEs Of thIs CAMPAIGN?

To fund the MTA, the Ravitch Plan recommended a twelve-county MTA District payroll tax, tolls on the East River and Harlem River Bridges, as well as regular and predictable fare
and toll increases. The tolls became a contentious issue in the Senate (Democrats held a 32-to-30 majority), when six Democrats and all thirty Republicans opposed the tolls, thus blocking the rescue plan.

Senate Majority Leader, Malcolm Smith, originally supportive of the tolls withdrew his backing. The Commission offered various compromises on the tolls but many Senators dismissed them as gimmicks.

In addition, suburban Democrats were wavering in their support due to pressure from their school districts worried about the rise in expenses from the payroll tax. After months of debate and lack of progress, and despite his earlier support, Governor Paterson announced his own plan in May 2009 proposing to raise significantly less money than the Ravitch plan and failing to commit any funding for capital needs.

HOW WERE THESE CHALLENGES MET?

To broaden the dialogue about bridge tolls, RPA collaborated with CNYF and Tri-State Transportation Campaign to hold two forums, one in Nassau County and the other in Westchester County. In addition, due to significant concern for how the tolls would physically work, RPA together with the Environmental Defense Fund and other campaign members held a forum in Albany on tolling techniques.

Though several labor unions were not a part of KNYM due to a falling out the previous year, three of the state’s biggest unions along with business interests, good government groups, social justice and transit advocates including ESTA, sent a letter to every member of the legislature, although clearly aimed at the Senate, urging legislators to immediately adopt the Ravitch plan.

When Governor Paterson offered a new plan which included a payroll tax reimbursement for school districts but no tolls and no capital funding, KNYM penned a strong letter to key officials, made a well-timed visit to the Capitol, issued a media statement, and initiated round of calls to key reporters and legislative staffers.

KNYM was able to secure lead editorials in the NYC “trifecta” of media (the New York Times, the Daily News, and New York Post) criticizing Governor Paterson for caving to the Senate. As a result, the coalition was able to salvage funding for the first two years of the MTA’s five-year capital program. Tolling was, however, left out of the final rescue plan.
CAMPAIGNING FOR A BETTER TRANSIT SYSTEM: 10 LESSONS LEARNED

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HOW WERE CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS RECRUITED INTO THE CAMPAIGN?

Both coalitions involved had leaders across sectors who had recently collaborated on advocating for congestion pricing. With the defeat of congestion pricing and the increasing urgency of the MTA’s financial troubles, these leaders were ready to work together again to support the Ravitch Plan.

WHAT METHODS DID THE CAMPAIGN USE TO SECURE PUBLIC SUPPORT?

Though the legislature was the ultimate target of the campaign, the public was needed to put on pressure. Starting in November 2008, before the official launch of the campaign, members conducted a “Keep New York Moving Day” and members, joined by an elected official, were posted at subway stations throughout the city distributing leaflets and asking riders to sign giant postcards to send to the Governor with the message “I ride the subway and I vote.”

In the months prior to the MTA public hearings on fare increases and service cuts, members handed out nearly 200,000 leaflets to riders directing them to an action website where one could sign a petition to send to the state legislature. The “Pilates” subway advertisement reached millions of riders. Many media events were also staged to drum up publicity on the issue. ESTA member Straphangers Campaign held “transit funerals” at stations slated for elimination.

On April Fools, KNYM distributed invoices for riders to send in and “invoice” the state for the added costs of transit. They also held several rallies that were widely promoted online and on social media sites. Over the course of the campaign, the City Council, State Senate, State Assembly, and the MTA held dozens of well-attended public hearings. Coalition members testified at every one with a consistent message supporting the Ravitch plan stating that all sectors of society needed to participate in rescuing the transit system.

KEY LESSONS

TAILORING THE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY TO FIT THE AUDIENCE

To mobilize straphangers, KNYM used social media, fun advertisements, and outreach events, such “transit funerals.” To convince legislators to act, KNYM used direct communication methods such as testimony, letters, meetings, and district-specific maps of service cuts as well as indirect approaches such as earned media.

KNYM’s purchase of drive-time radio advertisements in Albany allowed the coalition to reach legislators as they drove to the Capitol. When funding for capital needs was dropped by Governor Paterson’s plan, the direct and indirect communication methods employed by KNYM helped salvage funding for two years of the five-year capital plan. Most significant were the lead editorials of the “trifecta” of media in New York on May 4, 2009, all highly critical of the Governor’s plan’s shortcomings.

Though legislators were in disagreement as to how the revenue should be raised, in large part thanks to KNYM’s strategic messaging, they ultimately understood the value of a healthy transit system and that it needed the legislature’s help.

REGIONALIZING THE RAISING AND SPENDING OF REVENUE CAN OVERCOME PERCEPTION THAT REST OF THE STATE IS SUBSIDIZING ONE REGION

Although passed by the state legislature, all the fees and taxes in the rescue plan are being raised and spent in the MTA region. The taxi surcharge, for example, applies only to trips that begin within NYC and end within the twelve counties. Even prior to the 2009 rescue plan, New York levied certain taxes and fees only within the twelve counties that are served by the MTA to help fund the system including the MTA district sales tax, a corporate franchise tax surcharge, and the mortgage recording tax.

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RAISE REVENUE FROM A BROAD BASE OF SOURCES

The final rescue plan enacted by the legislature includes fare increases, a payroll tax, three car-related fees, and a taxicab fee. Thus, a variety of beneficiaries—drivers, businesses, and straphangers—are helping to pay for the system. This combination not only made the plan more politically palatable, but MTA’s new diverse portfolio of revenue also reduces the risk that future financial volatility affects the MTA’s budget as significantly. Before the recession, a large portion of MTA revenue came from real estate taxes.

When the real estate bubble burst, tax receipts fell dramatically and the MTA faced a huge operating deficit. In addition, the diverse set of new revenue options is more resilient to potential future political attacks.

SET REVENUE ASIDE IN A “LOCKBOX”

After the rescue plan, the legislature redirected $260 million in dedicated transit funds. This might have been avoided through inclusion of lockbox language in the legislation that prevents such raids. Although no law short of a constitutional amendment can completely stop future legislatures from redirecting dedicated funds, a set of disclosure requirements to make the impact of a raid clear can help prevent it.

WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE IS IMPERATIVE TO A SUCCESSFUL COALITION

A broad coalition is clearly more powerful. However, since it by definition has members across the political spectrum, disagreements have to be expected. Compromise is the price members of successful coalitions are willing to pay for the increased likelihood of success.
WHAT WAS THE GOAL OF THE CAMPAIGN?

The goal of the campaign was to avoid a 17% cut to King County Metro Transit (Metro) bus service by building sufficient support for a local option fee in the form of a two-year $20 vehicle-tab (an extra vehicle license fee), which would close a $60 million per year budget gap through 2013.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THE CAMPAIGN?

On August 15, 2011, the King County Council passed a two-year $20 vehicle license fee dubbed “congestion reduction charge” with a vote of 7-2. Car owners who pay this fee automatically also receive $24 worth of Metro bus tickets, which they can choose to donate to a pool of human-service agencies. At the same time, the vote phased out an existing subsidy of $2.4 million per year from the city of Seattle and King County that paid for the free-ride zone in downtown Seattle.

WHY WAS THE CAMPAIGN INITIATED?

Metro provides the city of Seattle and King County with bus service and is run by the county. It is the largest transit agency in Washington with more than 386,000 unlinked trips per weekday in 2009. Over the years, Metro’s funding base had been eroded in various ways. Previously, the state had levied a motor vehicle excise tax (“MVET”) and allowed for a local option MVET for mass transit systems. In 1999, the MVET was repealed and replaced with a much smaller annual license fee (down to $30 from about $200). In 2002, legislation clarified that the legislature also intended to repeal the local option MVET. As a result, Metro’s operations since then had been largely financed by 0.9% of the county sales tax. Prior to the campaign, approximately 65% of the transit agency’s operating budget relied on this portion of the sales tax. Falling sales tax revenues—as a result of the recession and growing internet sales—left Metro with a $60 million per year funding gap, necessitating a 17% service cut.

HOW WAS THE CAMPAIGN STRUCTURED?

The campaign to close Metro’s funding gap through a congestion reduction charge had two consecutive stages: a lobbying effort led by Transportation Choices Coalition (“TCC”) to pass state legislation and a grassroots campaign directed by TCC through the Transit Rescue Coalition (“TRC”) targeting the county council.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

WHAT FORMAL STEPS WERE REQUIRED FOR THE CAMPAIGN TO SUCCEED?

Because transit agencies in the State of Washington are legally limited to receiving no more than 0.9% of the sales tax, increasing the allocation—as had been done in other parts of the state—was not an option in King County. The Washington State Legislature therefore first needed to pass
What previous planning, research, or advocacy efforts benefited the campaign?

In March of 2010, King County formed the Regional Transit Task Force (RTTF), made up of elected officials, representatives from labor and business, and other community stakeholders from throughout the county, to provide a transit vision. The RTTF was formed as Metro was facing competing pressures: on one hand, strong demand for transit services countywide; on the other, rising costs and a steep decline in sales-tax revenues.

In this context, the RTTF was asked to identify short- and long-term objectives for transit service investment and to formulate a service implementation policy based on those objectives. One of the recommendations coming out of the RTTF was for Metro and a broad coalition of community and business interests to pursue state legislation to create additional revenue sources that would provide a long-term, more sustainable base of revenue support for transit services. At the same time, during the failed attempt to pass a larger transportation bill in 2010, TCC and its coalition partners were able to generate significant media attention and develop the legislative champions necessary to create a better political space and momentum for the congestion reduction charge.

The proposed legislation therefore sought to provide King County with the opportunity to impose a temporary congestion reduction charge on top of the existing state-based motor vehicle license fee. After a broader transportation bill had failed, the King County-specific legislation was passed, but only with an amendment that required the county council to approve the fee with a super-majority.

The King County Council has nine members, so six favorable votes were required. At the time the Council was made up of five Democrats and four Republicans; in order to impose the fee advocates expected they would need to convince all five Democrats and at least one Republican member. With a simple majority of five votes (instead of six), the council could have sent the proposal to voters for approval in November of 2011.

What was the political climate at the time of the campaign?

While both chambers and the executive branch in the state of Washington are controlled by Democrats, the balance in the Senate has been tenuous for a while, and the Governor has never been thought of as strong on transit issues. Senator Mary Margaret Haugen, the chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, is a rural legislator who wields a lot of power and is openly opposed to transit. An effort to pass a larger transportation bill with four local revenue options failed in 2010.

King County is considered a major center for liberal politics, but some portions of the county tend to be more conservative, even to the extent that residents of the eastern part have expressed interest in seceding. Since the 1990s, initiatives and legislation that reduce revenue for transportation and other government services and limit the ability of local government to raise revenue have passed in Washington.

Of late, however, ballot initiatives which proposed to raise the local sales tax to make additional revenue for transit available passed in other parts of the state. In addition, recent efforts by Metro to improve its efficiency and cut its costs increased the transit agency’s credibility and provided a good foundation for making the case to the legislature that the budget gap was a real problem.

Campaign Finance

How was the legislative campaign funded?

The legislative campaign did not have a budget. Representatives from various stakeholders lobbied at their own expense. TCC used its general operating and program funds.
**CAMPAIGNING FOR A BETTER TRANSIT SYSTEM: 10 LESSONS LEARNED**

**HOW WAS THE TRANSIT RESCUE COALITION CAMPAIGN FUNDED?**

The TRC mobilized for a discreet goal of convincing the King County Council to vote in favor of the congestion reduction charge. Because this was conducted in a short timeframe, over two and a half months, TCC self-funded their organizing and coalition coordinating efforts out of general operating and program funds since this campaign was consistent with their overall programmatic goals. Other coalition members also donated their time in-kind. For other similar-sized, i.e., small, campaigns around the state, TCC usually raises about $100,000 on top of its general funding from labor, local businesses, and transit contractors.

**WHO LED THE LEGISLATIVE CAMPAIGN?**

TCC co-chaired a campaign called Transportation for Washington (T4W), modeled after Transportation for America, to pass the larger transportation bill. When that effort failed, TCC continued to lead T4W’s lobbying efforts to convince the legislature to pass the bill allowing King County Council to adopt a congestion reduction charge.

**WHO LED THE CAMPAIGN TO CONVINCE THE KING COUNTY COUNCIL TO VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE CONGESTION REDUCTION CHARGE?**

TCC created and led the TRC including coalition of businesses, human service agencies, environmental groups, and labor. This group mobilized its diverse array of members in a large grassroots effort to convince the King County Council to vote in favor of the congestion reduction charge.

**POLITICAL STRATEGY**

**WHAT WAS THE OVERALL POLITICAL STRATEGY FOR THIS CAMPAIGN?**

The legislative authority for King County to adopt a temporary vehicle license fee was obtained at the tail end of a failed effort to pass a larger, state-wide transportation funding bill. Legislators in favor of such a bill recognized the importance advocates from King County will play during the next attempt to seek broader funding for transportation, which is most likely in 2014, and therefore wanted to provide help to this particular county, although the broader legislative effort had failed. Advocates for King County were able to capitalize on that sentiment, although the downside of this strategy was that the authorization was intentionally limited to two years in order to keep King County, and its transit advocates, hungry for more in 2014. For the second phase of the campaign, advocates focused on convincing individual King County Council members to vote in favor of the congestion reduction charge. The goal was to produce such an overwhelming response from the public from all parts of the county that county council members could not ignore the need to act.

**COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

**WHAT WERE THE MAIN COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES OF THIS CAMPAIGN?**

A major challenge was that the media’s initial coverage centered on the increased costs to car owners during an economic downturn, rather than the disproportionately higher impact on transit riders if the initiative failed. A second challenge was that several King County Council members representing communities outside of Seattle did not initially support the congestion reduction charge because they viewed it as a concern specific and limited to Seattle.

**HOW WERE THESE CHALLENGES MET?**

The TRC created a powerful public face of who would be impacted by mobilizing thousands of people who depended on the bus system to commute to their jobs. The campaign highlighted three key impacts of what would happen if the congestion reduction charge was not implemented. First, bus riders would be left stranded at bus stops, unable to get to work. Second, hundreds of thousands of cars would be added to the local streets and freeways, thereby compounding congestion problems. Third, the economy would suffer if people were not able to commute to jobs and access retail stores.

To this end, TRC, for example, organized the public delivery of a petition with 10,000 signatures at a 1,000-car park-and-
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TCC was able to call on the significant ongoing relationships it had developed with transportation stakeholders over the eighteen years of its existence. TCC was also able to build on the connections Rob Johnson, TCC’s executive director, had formed as a member of the RTTF. For the legislative lobbying campaign, TCC worked with the lobbyists for King County to bring together the business, labor, environmental, and social justice coalition needed to make the congestion reduction charge authorization a top-priority for the legislature. TCC organized an advocacy day on which between 200 and 300 people lobbied their legislators to support the bill.

For the grassroots campaign, TCC formed the TRC, which 130 business, environmental, community, and human services organizations, and important individuals joined. These members signed on to letters. A smaller steering committee of twenty to thirty active partners from labor, business, social justice, and environmental groups played a more active role in the grassroots campaign.

Each of TRC’s steering committee member organizations mobilized their constituents to write letters, sign petitions, and testify at hearings in support of the congestion reduction charge. Puget Sound Sage (PSS), a coalition of community, labor, and faith organizations, became one of the key members of the TRC. PSS was critical in providing the public with a face of who would be impacted by the cuts through its ability to turn out members of labor unions and residents from Rainier Beach, a set of transit-dependent, low-income neighborhoods.

On July 12th, over 1,000 people attended a hearing on the proposed service cuts, and more than 300 people waited in line outside the building for hours to testify. While TRC is not taking the credit for turning out all people who testified, the coalition is responsible for harnessing their energy and focusing it to exert continued pressure on the county council members.

WHAT ROLE DID BUSINESSES PLAY IN SUPPORTING THE CAMPAIGN?

Aside from adding powerful voices to the campaign, businesses made significant tangible contributions to the effort. The Downtown Seattle Association, for example, created maps showing where the service cuts would have the biggest impact. This allowed individual business owners and council members to see how the commutes of employees and customers would be affected. Likewise, Swedish Hospital played a particular important role in convincing a council representative from South King County, who had previously regarded the service cuts as a Seattle-only issue, that his own constituents would be negatively impacted if they were unable to commute to their jobs.

More importantly, when the county council considered leaving the decision to adopt a congestion reduction charge to the voters through a ballot initiative at a later date, the Downtown Seattle Association wrote a strongly-worded letter to the Council urging members to vote on the matter directly, suggesting that the business community would not fund a ballot campaign, leaving the Council on the hook to either pass the initiative or be responsible for the repercussions.

INVolVING COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING IS CRItICAL FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The RTTF was tasked with developing a strategy to address the funding shortfall, including improving operating efficiency, service cuts, and potential additional source of revenue. RTTF consisted of a broad range of stakeholders,
including not just transportation experts and elected officials, but also riders, and members of the social service, economic development, labor, education, and environmental communities. All meetings were open to the public, and time was set aside at each meeting to for public comment. This helped to build trust in Metro’s decision making process and direction, which in turn was vital to building the broad-based support necessary to prevent the service cuts.

MESSAGING MUST CONVEY THE IMPACT ON EVERYONE, NOT JUST THE DIRECT USERS

The campaign built the support by focusing on how a wide range of constituents would be affected by service cuts. The Downtown Seattle Association showed businesses how their employees would be adversely affected, which would in turn affect their bottom line. Leaders in outlying communities heard about how their residents depended on the transit system to get to work in downtown Seattle. Commuters realized that transit reductions would result in a flood of new cars on the roads, making their trips longer and more frustrating. Everyone had a stake.

FOCUSING ON THE IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES -- RATHER JUST THE FUTURE -- MATTERS

The coalition was able to focus on a specific event in the immediate future—an impending 17% cut in service that would have a specific effect on virtually every community member. Rather than being an abstract future impact, such as an operating deficit that would delay infrastructure maintenance, everyone understood exactly what the service cut would mean. People were able to make the connection to exactly what the added fee would pay for and how they would benefit. This was vital to galvanizing community support for the congestion reduction charge and outrage if it did not pass.

WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE IS NECESSARY AT THE RIGHT TIME

At the end of the day the grassroots effort mobilized by the TRC created the political environment that gave the King County Executive the leverage he needed to negotiate with the two Republican Council members and obtain the necessary votes. This resulted in the approval of the congestion reduction charge but the compromise included the removal of the ride free zone in downtown Seattle, a concession that TRC advocates did not support, but understood was necessary under the circumstances.

Likewise, as part of the larger transportation funding bill the legislature had considered, but rejected, more equitable local revenue options than the vehicle license fee that was ultimately adopted which TCC and many of its coalition partners preferred. The coalition, however, accepted the vehicle license fee, which had been deemed more politically feasible by the legislature, as an acceptable compromise.

POTENTIALLY TRANSFERREABLE IDEAS

• Recruiting companies by creating maps showing where the transit service would be cut and making employers aware of what percentage of their employees rely on transit to get to work

• Public actions designed to gain media attention can help shift the story to how everyone is impacted rather than what the policy change will cost

• Developing support for the transit agency through collaborative planning before funding decisions are made

• Building on previous relationships to support the campaign

• Finding appropriate spokespeople to explain to surrounding communities how they are affected by transportation problems in a central municipality

• Including free transit rides, which can be donated, as part of automobile user fees

Photo Credit: Transportation Choices Coalition
2010 St. Louis County Initiative to Pass a Transit Tax (Prop A)

BACKGROUND

WHAT WAS THE GOAL OF THE CAMPAIGN?

The goal of the campaign was to raise revenue for Metro Transit - St. Louis ("Metro") to restore service previously cut, to avoid the reinstatement of significant service cuts which had been temporarily avoided, and to expand its bus, light rail, and paratransit systems.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THE CAMPAIGN?

On April 6, 2010, voters in St. Louis County approved a half cent sales tax increase for transit on a ballot with a 63% majority that now raises $75 million per year to maintain and expand the region’s transit system. As a result, St. Louis County, which has almost a million residents, raised a little over $75 per capita/year for transit. In addition, the new tax triggered another $8 million per year for transit from the City of St. Louis, which borders but is independent from St. Louis County. This additional funding stems from a quarter cent sales tax increase which was approved by City voters in 1997 but could not be collected or distributed until the County passed its own increase.

WHY WAS THE CAMPAIGN INITIATED?

In 2008, Metro was facing a 30% shortfall ($45 million) for its next operating budget, in part as a result of a balloon debt payment coming due. To fill this gap and to allow for some light rail expansion, the St. Louis County Council voted to place a question on the ballot (Prop M) that sought voter approval to increase the sales tax within the county by half a cent. In November 2008, Prop M was defeated by a margin of 48.5% to 51.5%.

As a result, early in 2009, Metro was forced to increase fares, lay off 550 workers, cut one-third of its bus routes, suspend service on 2,300 out of 9,000 bus stops, reduce its paratransit program, and decrease service on its light rail system. In August of 2009, Metro received a one-time appropriation from the state and additional federal stimulus dollars totaling about $12 million that helped to temporarily restore many of the service cuts, but this infusion of money was only expected to last until May of 2010 at which point service cuts would have had to be reinstated.

HOW WAS THE CAMPAIGN STRUCTURED?

The Prop A campaign has been described as a three-legged stool, consisting of an educational campaign (run by Citizens for Modern Transit (“CMT”)) designed to frame the issue around the value of public transit to the region, a political campaign called “Vote Yes on A” (lead by Advance St. Louis), and a get-out-the vote (“GOTV”) campaign (coordinated through the Greater St. Louis Transit Alliance).

POLITICAL CONTEXT

WHAT FORMAL STEPS WERE REQUIRED FOR THE CAMPAIGN TO SUCCEED?

First the St. Louis County Council, which at the time consisted of four Democrats and three Republicans, had to vote to place the question on the ballot for April 2010. Facing a tough reelection campaign in 2010, County Executive Charlie Dooley, who had been very supportive of the 2008 Prop M campaign, was lukewarm about the idea of another transit tax proposition, but did ultimately help to get Prop A on the ballot.

After the question was placed on the ballot through a vote along party lines, the proposition had to pass with a simple majority vote on April 6. The ballot question was: “Shall the County of St. Louis impose a countywide sales tax of one-half of one percent for the purpose of providing a source of funds for public transportation purposes including the restoration, operation and expansion of MetroLink, MetroBus, disabled and senior transportation, in addition to an existing sales tax of one-quarter of one percent for the same purpose?”

This case study was prepared in June of 2012 by Rafael Mares and Aviva Rothman-Shore of the Conservation Law Foundation based on interviews with Thomas R. Shrout Jr. of Avvantt Partners LLC, former executive director of CMT, Nancy Cross, Vice President of SEIU Local 1, as well as a review of documents related to the campaign.
WHAT WAS THE POLITICAL CLIMATE AT THE TIME OF THE CAMPAIGN?

The political climate for a revenue-raising measure was terrible. Along with the rest of the country, St. Louis was in a deep recession. The anti-tax Tea Party movement was gaining momentum. Metro's last rail project had been more than $100 million over budget. A poll showed only 55% support for a transit tax, well short of the 60% generally thought to be necessary to prevail on election day. A very similar ballot initiative had failed in 2008.

WHAT SUPPORT FROM CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS COULD BE EXPECTED?

Initially, due to the poor political climate, the business community was not supportive of the Prop A campaign. Civic Progress, an association of the thirty largest corporations in metropolitan St. Louis, and the Regional Business Council, a consortium of many of the region’s mid-cap companies, which had both been prime funders of Prop M, opposed putting the initiative on the ballot because of concerns that voter support was weak and that Metro had not completed sufficient reform efforts to warrant another attempt to raise revenue in 2010. This was a terrible blow for the campaign since conventional wisdom on winning a ballot initiative in St. Louis suggests that one needs the leadership of the business community, and political campaigns are traditionally run by a small group of insiders.

WHAT PREVIOUS PLANNING OR RESEARCH EFFORTS BENEFITED THE CAMPAIGN?

In 2009, Metro embarked on an extensive process to engage members of the St. Louis region in creating a thirty-year plan. This plan, Moving Transit Forward, articulated a regional vision for transit that everyone could benefit from and promised future expansions according to a timetable and outlined various alternative options for such growth. The extensive civic engagement initiated through the creation of Moving Transit Forward helped to undercut the prevailing criticism that Metro could not be trusted and was not accountable to the public.

HOW WAS THE EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN FUNDED?

To fund the educational campaign prior to Prop A, CMT, a pro-transit nonprofit organization which leads advocacy efforts for an integrated, affordable, and convenient public transportation system in the St. Louis region, withdrew $300,000 from its endowment. The St. Clair County Transit District in Illinois, which contracts through Metro for services, stood to benefit from passage of Prop A since about a third of St. Clair County’s residents work in downtown St. Louis.

It contributed an additional $100,000 to the educational campaign. CMT received $15,000 to $20,000 in unsolicited donations in response to its television advertisements. In total, counting cash and in-kind expenses, CMT spent about $525,000 on the educational campaign.

HOW WAS THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN FINANCED?

Advance St. Louis, organized as a campaign committee which explicitly advocated voting yes on the proposition, raised a total of $1,030,391 with almost $400,000 (38%) coming from business groups, almost $170,000 (16%) from Washington University and health care institutions, a little over $20,000 (2%) from local unions, and another $20,000 in individual contributions of $500 or less. With in-kind services included, the campaign estimated that it spent about $1.1 million on the Vote Yes on A campaign. A little over $600,000 of this money was spent on media.

HOW WAS THE GOTV CAMPAIGN SUPPORTED?

The Greater St. Louis Transit Alliance, a coalition of over fifty organizations working to improve and expand public transit through the St. Louis region, was started and staffed by CMT. Its short-term goal was to mobilize voters in support of Prop A. Only $50,000 of the money raised for the Prop A campaign was devoted to the GOTV operation. The Greater St. Louis Transit Alliance relied mostly on volunteers to accomplish its goal.
WHO LED THE EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN?

CMT originated and led the educational campaign, developed before Prop A was approved to go on the ballot. Since CMT was making the decisions about how to run the educational campaign and how to spend the money they invested in it alone, they had control over deciding who to hire to create the materials. Despite pressure from the Mayor’s Office to use local St. Louis political consultants, CMT hired R&R Partners from Salt Lake City who previously had created public relations materials for multiple other successful transportation campaigns.

WHO LED THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN?

Advance St. Louis was led by Republican Mayor John Nations of Chesterfield, a suburb which had lost all its bus service as a result of the service cuts. Nations was able to activate officials from both parties to support Prop A. Advance St. Louis was overseen by a forty-member steering committee co-chaired by Dr. Donald Suggs, publisher of the St. Louis American, the leading African-American newspaper, and Washington University Chancellor Mark Wrighton.

This triad was able to mobilize the diverse array of supporters needed to pass Prop A, including businesses, universities, the African-American community, faith-based organizations, and some Republican elected officials. The steering committee helped to coordinate the political campaign with the GOTV effort.

WHO LED THE GOTV CAMPAIGN?

Greater St. Louis Transit Alliance was led by Nancy Cross, Vice President of SEIU Local 1. The union had great interest in this campaign because many of its members had to leave full-time jobs in the suburbs for lower paying part-time jobs in the city due to the service cuts. The coalition attracted a wide range of groups, including the Regional Chamber of Commerce and Growth Association, Metropolitan Congregations United (“MCU”), and Jobs with Justice.

The GOTV campaign was almost entirely volunteer driven with specific members offering unique contributions—the union had the facilities to do phone banking as well as access to voter lists, MCU tapped into the extensive faith-based network in North Country, where many African Americans live, who formed an important voting bloc for the success of Prop A, and Washington University students excelled at responding instantaneously to criticisms of Prop A through social media. At one point the GOTV campaign for Prop A reached 5,000 likes on Facebook.

WHAT WAS THE OVERALL POLITICAL STRATEGY FOR THIS CAMPAIGN?

There were no high-level partisan contests on the ballot in April of 2010 and no other county-wide issues. Unlike the 2008 presidential election, low election turnout was therefore expected. In low-profile elections, the electorate has tended to be whiter and higher income, which means that voters are less inclined to support either transit or a tax increase.

The premise of the campaign’s political strategy was that there are sufficient supporters of transit to win in an off-year election, but the challenge is how to turn them out without increasing turnout among opponents. As a result, the key strategy of the educational, political, and GOTV campaigns became to put all resources into mobilizing supportive voters without alerting opponents at the same time.

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WHAT WERE THE MAIN COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES OF THIS CAMPAIGN?

Metro had a negative public image. In addition, since only about 3% of workers in the region use public transportation to get to work, in order to win, voters who do not use transit had to be convinced that they should care about the outcome of the proposition.

HOW WERE THESE CHALLENGES MET?

CMT’s educational campaign set up a solid foundation for the political and GOTV campaigns that were to follow. The educational campaign intentionally shifted attention away from Metro and its perceived and real deficiencies to the broader need for public transit in general. None of the advertisements ever mentioned Metro or the proposition.

To convince voters who do not use transit, the educational campaign focused on the indirect benefits of transit demonstrating that everyone depends on people who ride transit. For example, the campaign’s advertisements featured nurses. This approach helped to put a face on public transportation. The centerpiece of the campaign was the slogan: “Some of us ride it. All of us need it.” The CMT educational campaign also identified transit champions, trusted faces who could deliver the pro-transit message.

Transit champions included civic leaders from a broad spectrum of the community, such as Washington University Chancellor Mark Wrighton, Chancellor of St. Louis Community College Zelema Harris, Pastor Tommie Pierson,
and Fredbird (mascot of the St. Louis Cardinals) and they were all featured in television advertisements declaring how public transportation benefits the people they serve and that they support transit. In addition to these television advertisements, the award-winning educational campaign included radio spots, billboards, advertisements on Metro, social media, the web, and direct mail.

**HOW DID THE CAMPAIGN SPEND ITS COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES?**

Consistent with the overall campaign strategy, all of the communications efforts were carefully targeted to reach only voters who most likely were supportive of Prop A. CMT selected cable television for its advertising to take advantage of the ability to select zip codes specific to the areas it wanted to target.

For example, South County which consists of largely white, German, older, and more conservative neighborhoods never saw any of the educational campaign’s advertisements. On the other hand, North County, a predominantly African-American area with many transit riders, and St. Louis County’s central corridor, which is known to have more liberal affluent, and frequent voters, saw a lot of the educational campaign’s television and radio advertisements.

The political campaign also targeted its cable television advertising to zip codes that were served by light rail or had historically voted for transit taxes, while avoiding advertising in large swaths of the county with less supportive voters to avoid stirring up opposition among anti-tax groups. A later analysis of the campaign concluded that the directed media buys increased the turnout rate of infrequent voters in the zip codes targeted from 13% to 20%.

**HOW WERE CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS RECRUITED INTO THE CAMPAIGN?**

Rose Windmiller, a long-time CMT board member and senior member of Mark Wrighton’s staff, approached the Washington University Chancellor to see if he would be interested in co-chairing the political campaign’s steering committee. Washington University relies heavily on transit; it has five MetroLink stations that serve the main and medical campuses and three bus routes that are specifically designed for the university community.

The university provides free Metro passes for all of its full-time students, benefits-eligible faculty and staff, and full-time employees of qualified service providers who perform daily tasks on campus. Wrighton, who understands the importance of transit, agreed to take on the role. His willingness to chair the steering committee helped reassure other corporate stakeholders, particularly in the wake of the initial business opposition to Prop A. Wrighton took it upon himself to recruit the business community.

To this end, he held a dinner in October of 2009 in his home to which he invited individual business, labor, and community leaders to make a pitch to get them behind Vote Yes on A and he succeeded. Wrighton was successful in getting business leaders to join the campaign by picking them off one at a time.

Wrighton then asked one of them, Dr. Donald Suggs, publisher of the St. Louis American, the region’s leading African American newspaper, to serve as co-chair of the campaign. Dr. Suggs agreed and invited a dozen of the leading African American clergy to meet with Prop A campaign leaders to discuss voter outreach. The clergy agreed to bring the proposition to the attention of their members and to lend their support and prestige to the campaign.

**WHAT METHODS DID THE GOTV CAMPAIGN USE TO SECURE VOTERS?**

Based on research that showed that face-to-face communication is more effective than mass media at stimulating voter participation, the Greater St. Louis Transit Alliance ran phone banks, conducted door to door outreach, delivered presentations, and held rallies. Hundreds of volunteers from unions and civic groups made the phone calls, hung leaflets on doors, spoke to voters at churches and in union halls.

The phone banking relied on lists of likely voters and concentrated its efforts on areas that had provided majorities for Prop M in 2008. The phone bank operation contacted almost 20,000 households with registered voters who were likely supporters of transit. The volunteers made sure to never contact households who disagreed with the ballot question twice. A later analysis of the campaign concluded that the phone banking boosted the turnout rate of infrequent voters but likely supporters from 19% to 29%.

In addition members of the coalition reached out directly to their constituents, for example, African American pastors incorporated Prop A into their sermons. The weekend before the vote, the campaign also hired constituents of the pastors to knock on doors of likely yes voters in North County to urge them to vote, as part of a so called “knock and drag” effort.
Liz Kramer, a Washington University graduate led a college campaign on a number of campuses. The students conducted T-shirt painting parties, organized transit flash mobs, baked cookies shaped like buses, and rapidly responded to any attacks on Prop A online or on talk radio.

TARGETED TURNOUT STRATEGIES WORK

Putting initiatives up in low-visibility elections can succeed, if proponents focus on carefully turning out supporters, without mobilizing opponents. Turnout in the April 2010 election was higher than any April election in St. Louis County in more than ten years. The average turnout for the ten previous April elections was just under 105,000. Turnout in the April 2010 election was 151,613, 44% higher. Part of the reason such a strategy can be effective today, is that modern technologies enable campaigns to target much more precisely than was possible with earlier mass media. Coordination between the GOTV and media campaigns is also required.

A BROAD CIVIC COALITION IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN A PURE CHECKBOOK CAMPAIGN

Participants in the Prop A campaigns attribute their success in large part to the broad coalition that stretched across economic, racial, and civic divides, and included people who cared most about the issue. While the campaign depended on business involvement and large corporate contributions, the participants stress the importance of a true coalition, which included not just the usual suspects, and was led by a representative steering committee. The key for St. Louis was not only to invite a broad coalition to support the campaign that has already been formed, but to actually engage people in framing the reform agenda in the first place. One of the main differences between the failed Prop M attempt in 2008 and the success in 2010 was the combination and coordination of top-down and bottom-up approaches.

TARGETED MESSAGING IS KEY

A carefully crafted message that took into account which voters needed to be turned out proved to be a crucial ingredient in the campaign's recipe for success. CMT hired R&R Partners, with a proven track record in transit ballot initiatives, to develop the messaging that continued to set the tone throughout the campaign. Well-known transit champions were enlisted to deliver the message.

TAKE RISKS TO GET THE BALL ROLLING

CMT, under the longstanding leadership of Tom Shrout, made the risky decision to tackle the issue of raising revenue for Metro again in 2010, soon after the 2008 Prop M defeat. Against the advice of many, CMT not only pushed for putting the transit tax on the ballot again, but invested $300,000 of the organization's endowment in the campaign. This investment helped attract others, including the original skeptics, to the ultimately successful campaign. This demonstrates that not all of the pieces of the campaign have to be in place when it gets started.

POTENTIALLY TRANSFERREABLE IDEAS

- Targeted cable advertisement buys
- Targeted GOTV outreach, such as hiring local church members to knock on doors
- Separation of the educational, political campaign, and GOTV campaigns
- The potential of attracting donations to, not just votes for, the campaign as a result of advertising
- Recruiting companies by showing employers what percentage of their employees rely on transit to get to work
- Use of well-known spokespeople as transit champions
- Involvement of students who can rapidly respond to negative comments online, social media or on talk radio
- Diverse and shared leadership