INTRODUCTION
All across the country, a battle is being waged for increased funding for local and state transportation investments, particularly for transit. Ballot initiatives continue to have a greater-than-expected success rate and 2013 is shaping up to be a monumental year for increasing transportation funding in state legislatures.

In preparation for a legislative effort to increase transportation revenues and funding in Massachusetts in 2013, the Conservation Law Foundation and the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, working together as part of the Massachusetts Transportation Research Collaborative, undertook a research project to better understand both successes and failures from across the country.

The Conservation Law Foundation prepared a series of seven case studies of campaigns from across the country, which can be downloaded at http://www.northeastern.edu/dukakiscenter/transportation/transportation-finance/lessons-learned/.

This summarizing document was prepared with the goal of synthesizing the findings from across the case studies.

LESSON 1: BOTH THE LEGISLATURE AND THE VOTERS MATTER
While many advocates for increased transit and transportation revenue focus on ballot campaigns, both state legislatures and ballot campaigns play important roles in efforts to secure increased funding. Legislatures matter for two reasons: in many states, Governors, special commissions and business groups are calling on legislatures to enact transportation revenue packages. Furthermore, a growing number of states are making the difficult but necessary choice to increase taxes to support increased transportation investment. The case studies from both Kansas and New York document legislative efforts to secure substantial funding. Second, ballot campaigns are frequently preceded by legislative efforts needed to secure the authority to request voter approval for locally imposed transportation taxes. For example, Washington State needed to enact enabling legislation before King County officials could impose a congestion reduction charge. "Also, the Atlanta case study demonstrates how success on the ballot can be adversely affected by the state legislature’s decisions in enacting "enabling" legislation to authorize ballot votes; certain aspects of the 2010 Transportation Investment Act contributed to the subsequent failure of Atlanta area voters to adopt a special purpose local option sales tax (T-SPLOST) to fund desperately needed transportation projects within the region."
Transit users and transit-dependent voter groups rarely have the numbers or clout to win a funding campaign individually. As a result, strong support from voters and stakeholders who will never use transit is critical. Successful campaigns help voters and key stakeholders (such as employers) understand how they will benefit from transit investment even if they never utilize transit. The St. Louis Prop A campaign implemented this strategy by developing the often-copied slogan, “Transit: Some of Us Ride It, All of Us Need It” in order to convince voters to invest in public transit.

Polling the public is crucial in recognizing which transit-based projects will have the most support. Campaigns frequently undertake multiple rounds of polling in order to establish a baseline understanding of public opinion, to test potential campaign messages and messengers, and to track how well voters are responding to campaign efforts in the run-up to the election. Polling can also be important to support legislative efforts to secure transportation funding, by helping legislators understand their constituents’ support for increased transportation investment. However, such polling can be a double-edged sword as voters may well support increased transportation investment while opposing most if not all of the revenue sources most commonly used to generate transportation revenue, particularly gasoline taxes.

One frequently-used technique for securing voter approval of transportation revenue packages involves generating a list of specific projects and guaranteeing voters that those specific projects will be built. While this approach may help secure victory by demonstrating to voters exactly how their tax dollars will be spent, there are also downsides when unpopular projects are included on the list or when popular projects are excluded. Project lists can also create problems years after the referendum if projects fall behind or run over budget and if transportation agencies can’t deliver on campaign promises. An alternative approach, which is best illustrated by the Los Angeles Metro’s Imagine Campaign, builds public support for transportation investment through broad-based planning processes that help cement public support for a portfolio of future investments. Securing funding for plans rather than for project lists can help to gain the public’s trust by providing enough information to understand how tax revenues will be spent without locking agencies into specific project commitments.

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Lesson 4: One Key to Victory in Transit Campaigns is Those Who Will Never Use It

Lesson 3: Understand What the Public Thinks

Lesson 2: Plans are Better than Projects
people who ride transit. In Seattle/King County, one campaign appealed to non-transit users by physically showing the possible impact that a lack of funding could have upon traffic. Without public transit, hundreds of cars would be added onto highways, thus worsening congestion, negatively impacting commute times, and restricting access to area businesses.

**LESSON 5: HUMOR HELPS**

In order to lighten the atmosphere when dealing with a serious subject, many successful campaigns have employed humor to appeal to the public and to legislators. The Keep New York Moving campaign poked fun at proposed increases in the cost of monthly transit passes with ads reading “At $103 a month, you’d expect they’d have a sauna, pool, and pilates classes down there.” The St. Louis educational campaign similarly incorporated humor into its radio ads by featuring nurses who were describing what would happen to patients if their nurses couldn’t get to work due to transit service cuts: “You’d die.”

**LESSON 6: THE AGENCY NEEDS TO BE RESPECTED - OR INVISIBLE**

When the public does not trust the transit agency or state transportation agency to use fare, toll and/or taxpayer dollars efficiently and well, campaigns have a far more difficult time convincing voters or legislatures to provide additional resources to the suspect agency. Two approaches have been used to address agency credibility head on. The first is best illustrated by the efforts of the Kansas Department of Transportation, which spent years making deliberate efforts to improve its public credibility by creating surveys that specifically asked for ways to improve its services. Over the seven years that the surveys were sent out, KDOT implemented many of the changes requested, thus earning trust from the public. The Los Angeles Metro similarly managed to improve its public standing in the years leading up to the successful Measure R campaign. Yet, in other instances, polling and other intelligence indicates that the transit agency is unpopular, distrusted or both. In such cases the most effective strategy is that adopted by advocates in St. Louis. Faced with polling data that unequivocally established problems with the transit agency’s credibility as a campaign messenger, the campaign focused on the need for better transit without mentioning the agency by name.

**LESSON 7: SERVICE CUTS AND FARE INCREASES ARE A STRONG MOTIVATOR, BUT MAY NOT BE ENOUGH**

Service cuts and fare increases are a surefire way to emphasize the need for increased funding for transit service. Funding campaigns benefit from a sense of urgency created by real-world, imminent funding needs. The campaigns profiled in the case studies benefitted from service cuts that had already happened (2010 St. Louis County),
imminent service cuts (2009 New York and 2011 Seattle/King County), and the fast approaching end of a ten-year state transportation program (2010 Kansas). However, as the recent loss in Atlanta demonstrates, even highly publicized service cuts may not be enough to convince voters to authorize new taxes to pay for restoring transit service. In addition, many campaigns focus on funding for new capital projects because voters and legislatures may prefer to support new revenues for new projects and services, rather than to simply continue or restore existing services.

**Lesson 8: Include Funds for Operations - Including Buses**

Some communities rely entirely on buses for transit; others have both trains and buses, but buses frequently account for a substantial number – even a majority – of transit trips. However, many funding campaigns focus primarily on securing capital funds to construct new rail projects, a strategy that can engender opposition from those more concerned about the operating needs of the transit system, including both the new projects and the existing buses. This tension has been particularly visible in Los Angeles, where the Bus Riders Union has opposed ballot revenue measures perceived to provide disproportionate support to subway expansion projects. But the need to balance existing bus service – including restoring service cuts – while providing funding for equally important expansion of rail systems has also been an issue in places like St. Louis and Atlanta.

**Lesson 9: Don’t Neglect Transit Allies**

While campaigns need to focus on gaining support from those who do not necessarily think much about the needs of the transit system, they should not overlook the need to reach out to transit advocates and other natural allies. With support for new taxes hard to muster among voters, campaigns can not afford to catalyze opposition by pro-transit groups due to differences of opinion about spending or project priorities. The absence of a united front among those who ostensibly should support increased transit investment appears to have been a factor in two campaign defeats in 2012, those in Los Angeles on Measure J and in Atlanta. In Los Angeles the opposition came from the Bus Riders Union; in Atlanta, the belief that the funding package did not provide enough support for existing services and for preferred transit expansions resulted in opposition from both the Sierra Club and the NAACP.

**Lesson 10: If at First You Don’t Succeed, Try, Try Again**

Many bills and propositions fail for a multitude of reasons beyond the control of campaign organizers. Two frequent challenges are the poor state of the economy and the public’s general distrust of government and opposition to taxation. Losing a funding campaign can be demoralizing, but cities like Seattle and St. Louis have taken their defeats and have turned them into victories. In King County/Seattle, despite the defeat of a state legislative effort to increase transportation funding, advocacy efforts ultimately secured both state legislation needed to authorize revenue raising by King County and the county’s approval of a congestion reduction charge.

St. Louis’s Prop M was also defeated in 2008, but advocates nevertheless moved to get Prop A on the ballot for 2010 and demonstrated that the combination of better transit planning and outreach by the transit agency and creative and coordinated education, get-out-the-vote, and political campaigns could secure a ballot victory only two years after the 2008 defeat and in the midst of a major economic downturn.