

Northeastern University Dukakis Center for Urban & Regional Policy

TRANSIT CAMPAIGNS:
FINANCING CASE STUDY

2012-13 Massachusetts Transportation Funding Campaign

BACKGROUND

WHAT WAS THE GOAL OF THE CAMPAIGN?

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 RESULT 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Only two months after the transportation finance law was passed, however, the legislature repealed the software and computer system planning and design tax, filling the hole in the FY14 budget with a surplus.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.

This case study was prepared between July and November of 2013 by Rafael Mares of the Conservation Law Foundation based on interviews with campaign participants, a review of related documents related, as well as the author's own experience with the campaign.

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 Boston 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.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

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 underfunding 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 grasstops 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 MBTA’s 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.

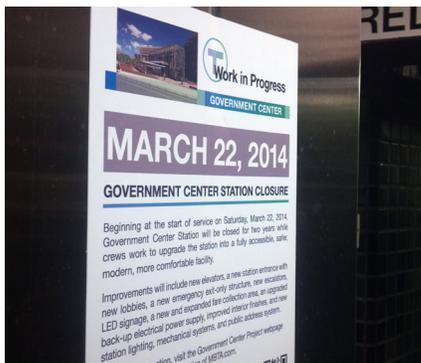
WHAT TACTICS WERE EMPLOYED TO IMPLEMENT THIS POLITICAL STRATEGY?

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.



COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

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).

CAMPAIGNING FOR A BETTER TRANSIT SYSTEM: 10 LESSONS LEARNED

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.

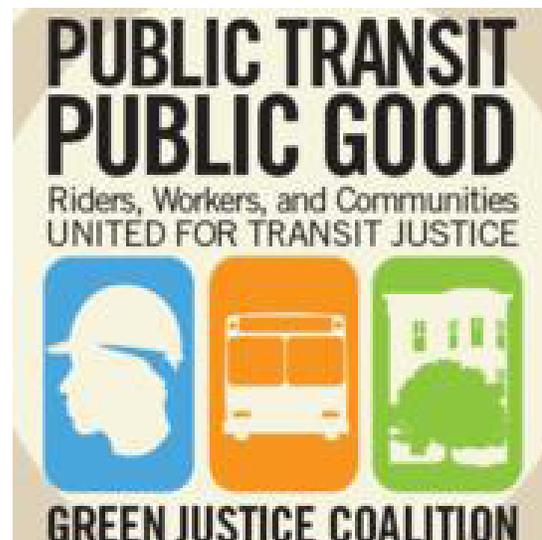
An additional poll was conducted by the business community and shared with legislative leadership but was not made public. It found strong support for the Governor's transportation and education proposal, a poor rating of our transporta-

tion 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.



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, MassCommuter, 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 roundtables. 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 grassstops 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

