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.
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.

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 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.

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
CAMPAIGNING FOR A BETTER TRANSIT SYSTEM: 10 LESSONS LEARNED

KEY LESSONS

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.

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state’s ability to take advantage of emerging opportunities, and excluded the consideration of economic and other social impacts.

KDOT therefore developed the concept of a “local consult” which continued to apply the priority formula to create a set of transportation projects but only to provide the starting point for input from the local community and region. In addition, KDOT, following the recommendation of the T-LINK economic development working group, adopted an economic model, the Transportation Economic Development Impact System (TREDIS), to evaluate the economic impact of individual transportation projects.

TREDIS portrays the Kansas economy based on customized county-level economic data about employment patterns, business activity, and freight movements by type, amount, and value. KDOT engineers collect information on local conditions from local officials and economic development experts and combine it with projections based on regional travel model data as an input for the economic model to evaluate transportation projects.

This new, on-the-ground approach to project selection, which involved local stakeholders in a meaningful way and broadened relevant considerations, helped solidify public support for a new transportation program.

HOW DID THE CAMPAIGN Respond TO OPPOSITION?

KDOT resolved to sit down with everybody and anybody who disagreed with or was concerned about the department’s new approach to project selection or to securing funding for the next transportation program. KDOT aspired to be very transparent, direct, and up-front from the beginning. If the first meeting was not sufficient to resolve any concerns, KDOT insisted on a second and, if necessary, third meeting. Most of the time, opponents were moved by KDOT’s openness, persistence, and research and frequently became partners.

KANSAS T-LINK
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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 TRANSFERABLE 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