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***Factors Influencing Voting Results of Local
Transportation Funding Initiatives with a
Substantial Transit Component: Case Studies of
Ballot Measures in Eleven Communities***

Mineta Transportation Institute
San José State University
San Jose, CA 95192-0219

MTI Report 01-17

**Factors Influencing Voting Results of Local Transportation
Funding Initiatives with a Substantial Rail Transit Component:
Case Studies of Ballot Measures in Eleven Communities**

October 2001

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a publication of the
Mineta Transportation Institute
College of Business
San José State University
San Jose, CA 95192-0219

Created by Congress in 1991

Technical Report Documentation Page

1. Report No. FHWA/CA/OR-2001-26	2. Government Accession No.	3. Recipient's Catalog No.	
4. Title and Subtitle Factors Influencing Voting Results of Local Transportation Funding Initiatives with a Substantial Rail Transit Component: Case Studies of Ballot Measures in Eleven Communities		5. Report Date October 2001	
		6. Performing Organization Code	
7. Authors Richard Werbel, PhD, Peter J. Haas, PhD		8. Performing Organization Report No. 01-17	
9. Performing Organization Name and Address Norman Y. Mineta International Institute for Surface Transportation Policy Studies College of Business, San José State University San Jose, CA 95192-0219		10. Work Unit No.	
		11. Contract or Grant No. 65W136	
12. Sponsoring Agency Name and Address California Department of Transportation Sacramento, CA 95819 U.S. Department of Transportation Research and Special Programs Administration 400 7th Street, SW Washington, DC 20590-0001		13. Type of Report and Period Covered Final Report	
		14. Sponsoring Agency Code	
15. Supplementary Notes This research project was financially sponsored by the U.S Department of Transportation's Research and Special Programs Administration and by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).			
16. Abstract This publication is a follow-up study to MTI publication 00-01, <i>Why Campaigns for Local Transportation Funding Initiatives Succeed or Fail: An Analysis of Four Communities and National Data</i> . The earlier publication was case studies of four local ballot tax measures for transportation packages. The current study, <i>Factors Influencing Voting Results of Local Transportation Funding Initiatives with a Substantial Rail Transit Component: Case Studies of Ballot Measures in Eleven communities</i> , uses the same case study methodology as the prior study, and is expanded to 11 communities from the past four years. Some of the important conclusions identified by the study are as follows: 1) The combination of an energetic and credible opposition and a questionable reputation of the transit agency or transit system make it extremely difficult for a ballot measure to be successful; 2) When a community has no prior rail transit system, a comprehensive rail-only package is unlikely to be successful; 3) Without \$1 million or more to spend on a combination of direct mail and television advertising it is difficult for proponents to be successful; 4) Developing a consensus transportation package depends on the specific details of the package and it is very difficult to generalize about the needed details; and 5) Under certain circumstances, voters do not appear to place significant importance on the existence or length of the expiration date of the tax used to fund the transportation package.			
17. Key Words Advertising; Advocacy groups; Taxes, Transportation planning; Transportation policy		18. Distribution Statement No restrictions. This document is available to the public through the National Technical Information Service, Springfield, VA 22161	
19. Security Classif. (of this report) Unclassified	20. Security Classif. (of this page) Unclassified	21. No. of Pages 212	22. Price \$15.00

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Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 2001095387

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors of this study would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance in the preparation of this report:

Special appreciation is also due to MTI staff, including Research Director Trixie Johnson, Research and Publications Assistant Sonya Cardenas, Graphic Artist Ben Corrales, and Editorial Associates Catherine Frazier and Susan Sylvia.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The authors of this study participated in a prior project (Haas, Massey, Valenty, and Werbel, 2000) involving case studies of four local ballot tax measures for transportation packages with a substantial passenger rail component. In-depth interviews with knowledgeable individuals were used to obtain information about the process used to determine the transportation package, the nature of the package, and the communications campaigns used by both proponents and opponents. Although the study revealed quite a bit about how these factors influence the results of this type of ballot measure, the conclusions drawn were tentative at best, due in part to the small number of cases studied.

The current study uses the same case study methodology as the prior study to obtain data on recent ballot measures in eleven communities from the past four years. As in the prior study, each of the ballot measures had a substantial rail transit component. Four of the communities had two similar ballot measures within a three-year interval, with substantially different results between the two measures. The existence of two recent measures in these communities allowed systematic comparisons, facilitating an understanding of how the transportation package and the process used to determine it, as well as how the communications campaigns used by proponents and opponents may influence the outcomes of these measures.

The small number of cases included the qualitative nature of most of the potential explanatory variables, and the interactions and correlations among these variables prevent the use of rigorous quantitative analytical techniques that isolate the quantitative impact of explanatory variables on voting behavior. A simple quantitative analysis was conducted that consisted of identifying instances in which the result of the ballot measure was the opposite of what would have been predicted based upon the value of each of a series of explanatory variables. As an example, extensive stakeholder involvement in the development of the transportation package was predicted to be a component of a successful ballot measure. If a community was found to clearly exhibit stakeholder involvement, and yet the measure in that community failed, an “anomaly” was identified. Similarly, an anomaly was also indicated if a community did *not* clearly exhibit stakeholder involvement, and still managed to pass a measure. The number of anomalies was tabulated separately with each explanatory variable and the number was used as a general indicator of the extent to which each variable was a good predictor of success or failure. Most of the explanatory variables had only a small number of anomalies, suggesting that these variables may indeed have some explanatory and even predictive value. Some of the important conclusions are identified as follows:

- The combination of energetic and credible opposition and a questionable reputation of the transit agency and/or the transit system make it extremely difficult for a ballot measure to be successful.
- When a community has no prior rail transit system, a comprehensive rail-only package is extremely unlikely to be successful.
- Without approximately \$1 million or more to spend on a combination of direct mail and television advertising it is difficult for proponents to be successful. (The amount needed may be less in smaller communities with lower costs of local television advertising.)
- It is extremely difficult to be successful in fundraising without having the business community and key elected officials enthusiastically support the ballot measure.
- The degree of enthusiasm that the business community and key elected officials hold is apparently influenced by the degree to which they are involved in developing the transportation package. They are more likely to be enthusiastic supporters if they are involved in the development of the package.
- Involving the business community, key elected officials, and possibly representatives from environmental organizations can make it difficult to develop a consensus about a specific transportation package that can be enthusiastically supported by all groups and key individuals. Each group often does not have a common vision on the desirability of different modes of transportation, let alone a common vision of the specific aspects of a package.
- Developing a consensus transportation package depends on the *specific details* of the package and it is very difficult to generalize about the needed details. They will vary from community to community. As a general example, the inclusion of a highway component was important with some successful measures but this same component might have hindered success in other communities that were successful when a highway component was absent. An understanding of the importance of the specific dimensions of a transportation package can be gained only from reading each specific case analysis.
- Under certain circumstances, voters do not appear to place significant importance on the existence or length of the expiration date of the tax used

to fund the transportation package. Based upon the results of prior studies, it was predicted that an expiration date of 10 years or less typically was needed for success. This prediction was not valid with any of the successful cases.

Many aspects of the communications campaign do not lend themselves to even the simple analysis method used. As with the nature of the transportation package, the *specific* dimensions of the communications campaigns are extremely important and yet to generalize about the appropriate specific dimensions is very difficult. The information contained in each case analysis may provide ideas about the successful (and less successful) aspects of communications campaigns used by proponents and opponents. Proponents who conduct opposition research prior to the commencement of a campaign to try to predict both the nature of the opposition and the arguments likely to be used are more successful. This research is important largely because the opposition typically relies on communicating its message through the news media and short response times exist in dealing with these media. In addition, because news coverage of these ballot measures tends to be at least moderately intensive even during a general election, some of the more successful proponent campaigns took a proactive and energetic approach with the news media. Conversely, none of the unsuccessful cases took such an approach.

INTRODUCTION AND DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF REPORT TOPIC

This research project seeks to identify factors contributing to the success, as well as those contributing to the failure, of local transportation ballot measures with a substantial passenger rail component. More specifically, the focus is on *actionable* success and failure factors related to the transportation package and the process used to develop it, and the communication campaigns employed by both proponents and opponents of each measure.

Recent ballot measures in eleven different communities have been studied, with data collected through interviews and written documentation. The communities are listed below, with both the result and year of the election in parentheses.

- Alameda County, California (approved, 2000).
- Austin, Texas and other smaller communities in the Capital Metro Transit District (rejected, 2000).
- Charlotte, North Carolina and other smaller communities in Mecklenburg County (approved, 1998).
- Columbus, Ohio (rejected, 1999).
- Denver, Colorado and other smaller communities in its Regional Transportation District (approved, 1999).
- Phoenix, Arizona (approved, 2000).
- St. Louis County, Missouri (rejected, 1997).
- Salt Lake, Davis, and Weber Counties, Utah (approved, 2000).
- San Antonio, Texas and other smaller communities in its metropolitan transit district (rejected, 2000).
- Santa Clara County, California (approved, 2000).
- Sonoma County, California (rejected, 2000).¹

¹Approximately 60% of voters supported a sales tax measure to fund a rail transit system, which is the fifth highest supporting percentage of all cases studied. However, since California requires a supermajority two-thirds voting percentage for specific purpose local tax measures, the Sonoma County measure did not receive a sufficient approval percentage for passage.

Four of these eleven communities presented a prior measure to voters within three years of the most recent measure. Adding these four ballot measures results in a total of 15 ballot measures studied, with seven of the measures receiving support from over 50% of voters and eight receiving support from less than 50% of voters.

This study is a follow-up to a prior study conducted by Haas, Massey, Valenty, and Werbel (2000). Part of this prior study, which is briefly summarized later in this chapter in the “literature review” section, had essentially the same objectives as this current study. However, because the prior study included only four ballot measures, with two of them being in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, the current study includes a larger sample of ballot measures, with the hopes of identifying more nationally relevant findings.

IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH TOPIC

The study of factors influencing voting patterns on local ballot measures involving funding for transportation improvements with a substantial rail component is important for two reasons. First, based upon prior voting results, it is difficult to obtain voter approval of these ballot measures, particularly on the first attempt, with the success rate being less than 50% on first-attempt measures. Those considering such measures need to have a good understanding of things to both do and avoid doing when only a few mistakes possibly can cause a measure to fail. Second, for reasons discussed below, it is likely that a large number of communities will attempt to obtain voter approval of ballot measures to provide funding for transportation packages with a substantial rail component in the next ten years or so.

A number of factors, including typical linking of federal funding to local matching of funding, have contributed to the need for a local funding source for transit improvements. Although a number of communities were able to obtain a dedicated source of transit funding a number of years ago, most of these communities did not have sufficient funding to construct, let alone operate, a substantial rail transit component prior to 1990.

Rapid population growth, particularly in many Sun Belt communities during the past ten or twenty years, has resulted in rail transit becoming a feasible option in a larger number of communities. This increased feasibility of rail transit in a larger number of communities, combined with the need to provide additional local funding for the construction and operation of rail transit systems, has resulted in a relatively large number of recent ballot measures. For example, based upon the above list, at least nine communities had a ballot measure to provide funding for a transportation package with a substantial rail transit component in 1999 or 2000 alone. Continued population growth in

other communities, combined with successful ballot measures in midsize but high growth communities, such as Salt Lake County and Phoenix, probably will result in additional communities attempting to obtain voter approval of funding for rail transit systems. In addition, communities, such as Austin, San Antonio, Columbus, and Sonoma County, which have been unsuccessful with recent ballot measures, probably will attempt to obtain voter approval in the future. Even communities, such as Denver, which have been successful in the past, probably will try to obtain future funding to expand their current rail transit system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature search identified only three prior studies that have studied factors that influence voting behavior in local ballot measures providing funding for transportation. Each of these three prior studies is discussed in the remainder of this section.

The Prior Study (Haas, Massey, et al., 2000)

The prior study, upon which this project is based, consisted of both a case analysis approach, primarily using qualitative depth interviews with key participants, and regression analysis, using secondary data, to study factors influencing voting results with local transportation ballot measures.

The case analysis portion of the study included ballot measures in four communities. Each of the four communities had ballot measures with a substantial rail transit component, with the proposed funding source being a sales tax increase. Variables pertaining to a) the transportation package, b) the process used to determine the transportation package, with a focus on both the roles of research and coalition building, and c) communications campaign approaches used by proponents and by opponents. The four communities are listed below, with the year of the ballot measure and the result included in parentheses.

- Denver, Colorado Regional Transportation District (1997, rejected).
- Santa Clara County, California (1996, approved).
- Seattle, Washington greater metropolitan area (1996, approved).
- Sonoma County, California (1998, rejected).

Two different datasets were used in the regression analysis. One was a national dataset consisting of 57 local transportation ballot measures between 1990 and 1998. The second was a California only dataset consisting of 63 local ballot measures between 1980 and 1998. Only a limited number of the ballot measures in each dataset had a substantial rail component and some did not

have a transit component. A wide variety of funding sources were used, and significant variance existed in the costs of the transportation packages. Of the nine independent variables included in the national dataset, only one involved a characteristic of the transportation package (the number of modes included in the transportation package). The remaining variables measured a) demographic characteristics, such as the percentage of people over sixty-five years of age in the community, b) transportation characteristics, such as travel time, and c) size of the community, population growth, and population density. The eight independent variables used in the California dataset were similar to those used in the national dataset with the biggest difference being the omission of the one variable in the national dataset that measured a characteristic of the transportation package.

Of the two approaches, the case analysis approach appears to generate more significant results because it focuses on variables that appear to have a greater impact on voting behavior than the variables studied with the regression approach. More specifically, voting behavior appears to be more sensitive to differences in both the *transportation packages* and the *communication campaigns used by proponents* studied with the *case* approach than to differences in *community characteristics* studied with the *regression* approach. The Seattle case study was particularly useful in demonstrating that characteristics of the transportation package, the process used to determine it, and the communications campaign used have a significant impact on results. This case allows a *within* community comparison, since a measure somewhat similar to the 1996 measure had been defeated in 1995. The 1995 measure received support from 47% of voters compared to a supporting percentage of 56.5% with the 1996 measure. Since the community characteristics in Seattle were virtually identical in 1996 as in 1995, this moderately large difference in results could not have been caused by community characteristics. Rather, the difference in results appear to have been caused by a combination of some differences between the 1995 and 1996 transportation packages and differences between the 1995 and 1996 communication campaigns used by proponents. Four communities included in this current project also allow a within community comparison because each one had two ballot measures within a three year time frame. As identified in Table 1-1 below, the within community difference between two ballot measures in the percentage of voting support is larger in each of the four relevant communities in the current project than the difference in Seattle. Thus, the results in Table 1-1 demonstrate that

voting behavior is quite sensitive to differences in both the transportation packages and the communication campaigns used by proponents.

**Table 1-1. Within Community Differences in Voting Results
(In communities with two ballot measures within a three year period)**

	Supporting Percentage in First Ballot Measure	Supporting Percentage in Second Ballot Measure	Difference in Supporting Percentage Between Two Measures
Alameda County	58% (1998)	81.5% (2000)	23.5 percentage points
Denver	42.2% (1997)	66% (1999)	23.8 percentage points
Phoenix	49.9% (1997)	65% (2000)	24.9 percentage points
Sonoma County	47.6% (1998)	60.2% (2000)	12.6 percentage points
Seattle	47% (1995)	56.5% (1996)	9.5 percentage points

Although the differences in Table 1-1 above cannot be explained by community characteristics, none of the cases in the table were structured in a manner to measure the impact of community characteristics on voting results. An *across* community study would be needed to accurately assess the degree of impact of community characteristics on voting results. The regression analyses used in the prior study did allow such an across community analysis, but the only variable that appeared to be correlated with voting behavior with both datasets was the percentage of the population in each community consisting of people at least sixty-five years of age. Moreover, the direction of the correlation with the California dataset was opposite the direction found with the national dataset.

In sum, the campaign and proposal characteristics appear to have more impact on voting behavior than do community characteristics. In addition, because the transportation package, the process used to formulate it, and the communications campaign used all are largely *actionable*, focusing on the impact of these characteristics on voting behavior will provide more useful information to those communities developing transportation ballot measure and attempting to obtain their passage than focusing on the impact of uncontrollable community characteristics on voting behavior. Accordingly, it appears to be more important to study the impact of transportation package and communications campaign characteristics on voting behavior than to study the impact of community characteristics on voting behavior.

Beale, Bishop, and Marley (1996)

These researchers also studied the impact of the transportation package and the process used to formulate it, along with the impact of the communications campaigns used, on voting results with local transportation ballot measures, using onsite visits to 22 sites. In addition to these 22 cases, the authors listed 82 additional cases that were included in the study. The authors did not describe the nature or amount of the information collected with these 82 additional cases.

The conclusions of the Beale, Bishop, and Marley study helped identify relevant variables for questioning in both our prior (Haas, Massey, et al., 2000) and current studies. Beale, Bishop, and Marley presented only two conclusions related to the nature of communications campaigns used. One of these conclusions discussed the conditions in which a special election is more likely to succeed vs. the conditions in which a general election is more likely to succeed. The second conclusion focused on ballot language recommendations. Our prior study, as well as the current one, have been designed to break more new ground concerning communications campaigns than Beale, Bishop, and Marley apparently learned about the nature of the impact of these campaigns on voting behavior.

Since Beale, Bishop, and Marley did not provide a categorization of the nature of the transportation options involved, the number of cases they studied that did not involve a substantial rail component cannot be identified. However their discussion suggests that many of their cases did not have a substantial rail component, or even a transit component. Some transportation package and funding issues probably are more difficult to resolve with transportation packages involving a substantial rail component. For example, since many communities considering a rail system have no current rail system in place and since rail systems are expensive to construct, it is difficult to propose a rail system that provides benefits to a majority of voters while not significantly increasing taxes for a lengthy time period. In contrast, many of the cases studied by Beale, Bishop, and Marley apparently involved funding only for road maintenance and improvements. It is relatively easy to provide these benefits at a low cost while, at the same time, making improvements throughout the community. In addition, the communication campaigns used by opponents, as well as the nature of the opposition itself, tend to be different when rail is a substantial component of the transportation package than when it is not a component. Since some of the issues involving ballot measures with a substantial rail component are different than the issues involving measures without this component, the Beale, Bishop, and Marley study has limited relevance to the focus of our research project.

Middleton (1998)

Unlike Beale, Bishop, and Marley's study, Middleton focused exclusively on ballot measures with a substantial rail component. Middleton's approach involved asking approximately six transit officials to identify the factors influencing voting behavior and to make recommendations likely to increase the chances of voter approval. The 1995 and 1996 ballot measures in the Seattle metropolitan area are the only ones described in any detail. The primary problem with Middleton's approach is that the recommendations are not systematically tested against actual ballot measures. In addition, the recommendations do not discuss a number of critical issues such as the existence and length of expiration dates, magnitude of tax increase, whether and how to respond to opposition, what combination of media and messages to use for advertising, and when and how to combine rail and highway components.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature review has demonstrated the need to generate a larger number of actual ballot measures with a substantial rail component than has existed in prior studies. In addition, as demonstrated previously by the large difference in the results of two ballot measures within a short time period in the *same community* (see Table 1-1), characteristics of the transportation package, the process used to formulate the package, and the communications campaign used by proponents can have a significant impact on voting results.

DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

The two primary methodological decisions with this study were a) the number and identity of the ballot measures selected, and b) the nature of the information collected and the means of collecting it. Each of these two decision areas is briefly described below.

The Identity and Number of the Ballot Measures Selected

Each ballot measure selected had to meet three criteria. The first two of these three criteria were based upon the focus of this project, which is on ballot measures that involve funding for transportation packages with a substantial rail component. Thus, any ballot measure selected had to a) have a substantial rail component, and b) have a funding component. The third criterion, which involved eliminating any ballot measure prior to 1997, was needed because much of the information has been collected through qualitative depth interviews. Since a failure of interviewees to accurately recall all relevant information would compromise the integrity of the information, it was necessary to eliminate ballot measures prior to 1997. A systematic search of

ballot measures identified 11 communities with ballot measures meeting these three criteria.

As a group, the ballot measures and communities included in this project have a number of desirable characteristics that make them appropriate for in-depth study.

- As discussed previously, four of the eleven communities have had two ballot measures since 1997. Since this characteristic allows community characteristics to be held constant, it facilitates an understanding of the extent that changes in the nature of the transportation package, and/or changes in the communications campaign used by proponents can influence voting behavior.
- A wide range of voting results exists. Supporting percentages range from a low of 30% in San Antonio to a high of 81% in Alameda County. Since the percentage of voters supporting a measure essentially is the dependent variable in this study, variability with the dependent variable is needed to derive an understanding of the variables that influence voting behavior.
- More than token opposition existed to the ballot measure in eight of the eleven communities. Since opposition to passenger rail often exists, much can be learned from the strategies and tactics employed by opposition. In addition, much can be learned about the effectiveness of various means that proponents employ in attempting to counter opposition.
- Variance exists in both the nature of the transportation packages and the process used to determine them. Some of the measures consisted only of passenger rail transit, other measures had both a passenger rail and a bus component, and still other measures had a passenger rail and/or bus component combined with a highway component, with the highway component either being in the same measure or in a companion measure. In terms of the process used to formulate the package, significant differences in the degree of both public and political involvement exist across measures. This variance is required to understand how the nature of the transportation package and the process used to formulate it influence voting behavior.
- Variance exists in the communications campaigns employed by proponents across measures, particularly in the approaches employed to deal with opposition. In some instances the opposition was essentially ignored, and in other instances the opposition was attacked with differences in both the

nature and intensity of these attacks.

Means of Collecting Information

The information to be collected included a) the process used to formulate the transportation package along with the characteristics of the package itself, b) the communications campaign used by proponents, c) the communications campaign used by opponents, d) relevant background information on the transportation system, the political and legal environment, and characteristics of the population, e) the nature and extent of coverage by the mass media, particularly local newspapers and radio stations, and f) research results identifying voter attitudes and voting motivations.

Much of the information could be collected only through qualitative in-depth interviews with different people within each community. Although the nature of the people interviewed varied somewhat from community to community, at least one person typically was interviewed from:

- The transit agency;
- The transit Board;
- An ad hoc committee or task force involved in formulating the transportation package if such an organization existed;
- The business community, typically a Chamber of Commerce;
- An environmental organization;
- The group responsible for developing the proponents' communications campaign,;
- The leaders of the opposition;
- The local newspaper, and
- The political structure, typically a local elected official.

Unless a person interviewed was a prominent elected official, the name of the person typically has been omitted from the case discussions in the remaining chapters.

In addition to the interviews with people from most or all of the above categories, documentary information was collected. Much of the documentary information was collected prior to conducting the interviews, since this information often was helpful in identifying specific interview topics and issues. The different types of documentary information collected were:

- Newspaper articles and editorials;

- Copies of ads used by proponents and opponents;
- Long range transportation plans;
- Major investment/corridor studies and other similar studies conducted. (For example, opponents often prepare reports or studies that discuss costs and ridership of light rail systems.);
- The actual ballot measures;
- Ballot arguments in voter information pamphlets;
- Population, demographic, and transportation statistics; and
- Survey and/or focus group results of citizen attitudes toward the transportation system, and the ballot measure.

The last item in the above list is one of the most useful types of information. In a study, such as this one, which attempts to understand voting behavior, information obtained directly from the voters, such as exit polling, is extremely useful. Results from surveys and tracking studies conducted prior to the election often were conducted and were provided to the researchers involved in this project. Unfortunately, exit polling and other types of post election voter research were not conducted with the vast majority of the ballot measures studied.

To insure that the description of each case is accurate and complete, at least two people interviewed were sent drafts of each onsite case for review and feedback and at least one person interviewed was sent a draft of each telephone case.

ORGANIZATION OF REMAINDER OF THIS REPORT

Chapters two through eight each focus on a single case with which onsite interviewing was used. Chapter nine includes four cases with which telephone interviewing was used. The results of the cases are integrated and synthesized, and conclusions are stated in chapter ten. Since insights can be drawn through contrast, the chapters are sequenced by whether or not they were successful, alternating between an unsuccessful one and a successful one.

To facilitate reading, the organization of each chapter is the same. After a short introduction, relevant background information is described about the transportation system, past ballot measures, population and demographic statistics, geography, and the political/legal environment. Following this background information, the process used to develop the transportation package along with a description of the package and its funding is discussed. The communications campaigns and strategies, along with the coverage of the

measure in the media are then described. Each chapter concludes with an evaluative discussion of important and unusual issues involved with the case and a concluding discussion of factors contributing to the success or failure of the measure.

Since this is a lengthy report, readers will be tempted to read only the final chapter. This approach is not recommended as many specific ideas and insights will be lost with this reading approach. At a minimum, readers are encouraged to read the evaluation and conclusion sections of each chapter.

ST. LOUIS: A SETBACK FOR MEASURE M AND METROLINK (1997)

In November of 1997, voters in St. Louis County rejected, by a 58% to 42% margin, a 1/4-cent sales tax increase that would have primarily funded additional lines for an existing light rail system known as MetroLink. Voters in St. Louis County voted “no” on Proposition M, 58% to 42%. Although voters in St. Louis barely passed the measure, 50.4% to 49.6%, both jurisdictions needed to pass it for the tax increase to occur. Supporters of the measure estimated that the tax hike would have brought in about \$43 million a year. They claimed that two thirds of the money would have gone to MetroLink expansion; the remainder would have helped fund existing bus and light rail service. Adding to the failure was the defeat of a similar measure in neighboring Madison (Illinois) County that would have funded expansion eastward. (See Table 10-1 in the last chapter).

For supporters of the measure, the defeat was ironic in that MetroLink is considered a popular and successful light rail system. Tracking polls conducted prior to the vote suggested that public support for the measure was substantial. How and why was the measure rejected by a substantial majority of the voters? This case represents an example of how fragile support for public transportation projects can be, and how proposals to improve transit can become mired in petty political squabbles.

BACKGROUND: TRANSPORTATION AND TRAFFIC

Located in both Illinois and Missouri, the St. Louis metropolitan region has a population of nearly 2.5 million people, including 1,324,442 registered voters. Eight major jurisdictions comprise the region, which covers 4,487.3 square miles. Within the region there are 904,743 households whose average size is 2.6 persons. 8.1% of the region’s families have incomes below poverty level and 10.8% of the total population has incomes below the poverty level. There are 17,662 miles of roads in the region including 490 miles of interstate highways. There are 9,850 miles of urban roadways and 7,812 miles of rural roadways. Most people in the region drive to work and 79.9% of them drive to work alone. About 3% of the workforce uses public transportation to get to work. The region is home to 21 Fortune 1000 companies and ranks sixth in the United States as a headquarters location for Fortune 500 companies (East-West Gateway Coordinating Council, 2000a).

The City of St. Louis includes a population of 341,869. The City is poorer than the surrounding County, with a median household income of just \$19,458

annually, versus \$31,837 annually in the County. 20.6 percent of City families and 24.6% of the total population have incomes below poverty level. 66.5% of workers drive to work alone in the City and about 12.2% take public transportation. The City of St. Louis voted to separate itself from St. Louis County in 1876 and is the only city in Missouri not within a county. (East-West Gateway Coordinating Council, 2000b).

Other important components of the metropolitan area include St. Charles County in Missouri and Madison and St. Clair Counties, both located in Illinois across the Mississippi River. Thousands of workers commute into and around the metropolitan area from these jurisdictions and beyond. As the population and economy of the region continue to expand, traffic and congestion have worsened. Among the factors contributing to the region's traffic woes are the following:

- St. Louis residents make 6 million vehicle trips each day. Of these 6 million trips, 5 million are single occupancy vehicle trips.
- 80% of the St. Louis workforce drives alone to work. In the City of St. Louis, 66.5% of all workers drive alone to work. In St. Louis County, 84.3% of all workers commute alone to work.
- Only 3% of the work-related trips are made on local transit.
- On average, people make 3.9 vehicle trips per day. (Citizens for Modern Transit, 2000)

However, St. Louis has been proactive in attempting to ameliorate its traffic problems. In 1994, MetroLink, the light rail system, was opened. Voters at that time approved a 1/4-cent sales tax increase, which helped to fund the system. Additional funding came from the Federal Government. MetroLink presently consists of an 18-mile line that runs from East St. Louis (across the Mississippi from St. Louis) to Lambert Field, the St. Louis airport. An expansion into St. Clair County opened in May of 2001; in 1993 St. Clair County voters approved a 1/2-cent sales tax to help pay for the new line, which is also receiving federal funding. In 1995, voters in St. Charles County (west of St. Louis) twice voted down proposals to fund a light rail extension into that part of the area.

In many ways, the MetroLink and the St. Louis area Bi-State transit system exemplify success in American mass transit. In 1995, MetroLink became the most popular light rail line in the United States; 54.2 million St. Louis residents rode public transportation in 1997-1998. MetroLink ridership continues to grow, and now averages 44,500 riders per day. On a single day (July 4, 1999) 160,883 rode MetroLink. The American Public Transit Association selected

MetroLink as the first recipient of its Outstanding Achievement Award for Light Rail. The number of riders has exceeded projected ridership from the start, increasing every year.

Thus, when community figures began plans to ask voters for an additional 1/4-cent sales tax increase that would have helped expand the MetroLink system, optimism about the proposal's chances for success was justifiably widespread.

BACKGROUND: POLITICAL HISTORY

Transit in the St. Louis area is the responsibility of the Bi-State Development Agency, which operates the MetroLink system, as well as bus and paratransit van transportation. "Bi-State" refers to the States of Missouri and Illinois. In St. Louis (both the City and the County), Bi-State services are funded via the sales tax; in Illinois, individual counties contract with Bi-State for the provision of transit services.

A Mayor and a 28-member Board of Aldermen govern the city. A seven-member County Council governs surrounding St. Louis County. Local elections are partisan, meaning that partisanship can and does enter into public debate about local transportation issues. Additionally, the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the area. Its six-member Board of Directors represents eight area counties, as well as the City of St. Louis and the State of Missouri. Additionally, Citizens for Modern Transit is a nonprofit organization that provides campaign support for transit-related issues. On the whole, according to interviewees, elected officials—as opposed to transit agency staff—have tended to be the instigating forces behind the push for expanded rail transit. Particularly, the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council has played a leadership role in developing plans for the transit system, although as a federally funded agency, its role in ballot campaigns is circumscribed.

According to interviewees, the original 1/4-cent sales tax for the MetroLink system (passed in 1994) was inadequate for the planned expansion of the system. The increases in the proceeds from the tax that had been projected were not materializing. In fact, the system was generating a shortfall in operating expenses without expansion. Additionally, federal funding for MetroLink operations had been slated to be drastically curtailed.

Discussions about the need for an additional source of funding for MetroLink expansion began in earnest early in 1997. Impetus for the tax increase proposal came from a variety of civic leaders, spearheaded by the St. Louis business community. Civic Progress, a group of the region's largest firms, bankrolled much of the pro-proposition campaign.

Focus groups and public opinion surveys were commissioned, both initially revealing reasons for optimism about the prospects for such a proposal. Although the proposal had the nominal support of the Mayor, he did not wholly embrace or actively campaign for it. The nonelected County Executive also supported the measure.

Public transit, and specifically MetroLink, is very popular in St. Louis. The existing MetroLink line is extremely accessible and useful to many areas of the city – it provides a direct link between the airport and downtown St. Louis, including the Kiel Arena and Busch Stadium, both professional athletics venues. The MetroLink is, in fact, a point of civic pride for the region, according to several interviewees. For example, the polling consultant used by the measure’s supporters found that survey respondents tended to exhibit greater support for *any* tax measure that mentioned the MetroLink system by name.

Moreover, a 1994 survey found extremely broad support for not only MetroLink, but also the Bi-State agency and the City. Predictably, perhaps, the survey also found that those who rode the transit system were more likely to hold it in favorable regard. The poll further found that 45% of City respondents and 40% of those in the County had made at least one trip on MetroLink — numbers that were likely higher at the time of the 1997 vote. Support expressed for bus services was somewhat less, although still formidable with a majority finding bus services “excellent” or “good.”

For these reasons, and perhaps because of the significant federal funds that had enabled creation of the system, the 1994 1/4-cent sales tax increase measure passed comfortably, with 66% of St. Louis, and 60% of St. Louis County residents voting in favor. In some respects, proponents of the 1997 measure had little reason to believe that passing an additional tax would prove problematic.

CREATING A TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE

The ballot initiative that was advanced by the coalition of transit supporters was notable for its lack of specificity. It simply asked whether voters favored a 1/4-cent increase in the sales tax “for transportation purposes.” In the early 1990s, the East-West Gateway Board of Directors agreed on a general plan that outlined which areas would get extensions first, although this plan was hardly set in stone.

By their own admission, supporters of the tax initiative did not seek to use an open, broad based approach to crafting a ballot proposal or an accompanying transportation plan; Proposition M was planned more or less behind closed

doors. Given the looming threat of an operating funds shortfall, the emphasis was on ensuring that MetroLink was able to garner the additional funds (i.e., 1/4-cent sales tax) enabled by the state earlier in the decade. Although a general plan for the location of additional lines had been circulated for years, relatively little effort was paid to delineating the specifics of how the increased revenues would be spent. This lapse would prove to be potentially a costly one to the supporters' efforts to pass the tax measure.

The failure to open up the planning process was perhaps a result of the perceived contentiousness among factions in St. Louis. "We have one of the best, new light rail systems in the country. But now we have so many factions, we can't agree on how to expand it—so it may not expand," said Les Sterman, executive director of the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council.

Had the measure passed, the tax would have begun in January 1999 and was projected to generate \$34 million per year, primarily to be put toward a MetroLink extension each year. The existing 1/4-cent tax generates about \$33.5 million in St. Louis County and more than \$8 million in St. Louis. Two-thirds of the money was planned to go to MetroLink expansion and one-third to help the Bi-State agency operate the bus and light rail service. Although Bi-State was not legally committed to spending the proceeds from the tax in a specific way, East-West Gateway Coordinating Council officials said the money would have financed MetroLink extensions in south St. Louis County and to suburban Florissant by 2010. The money might also have paid for one to three possible routes in south St. Louis and St. Louis County, north St. Louis and St. Louis County, or west St. Louis County by 2015.

USE OF RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Supporters of the tax measure used market research extensively, primarily in the form of public opinion polling. Indeed, according to interviewees, favorable polling numbers in the months prior to November election were an important factor in convincing supporters to place the proposal on the 1997 ballot. Ironically, some observers believe that errors made interpreting the market research data may have led to strategic errors on the part of the transit tax measure's supporters.

Terry Jones, a political science professor at University of Missouri - St. Louis, conducted tracking polls. In April of 1997 (approximately six months before the election), a survey was conducted that tested support for increasing the public transit sales tax from 1/4- to 1/2-cent, preferences about how to spend the additional funds, and reactions to arguments for and against increasing the tax. The survey asked, "what if there was an election this year to raise the public transit sales tax in order to speed up the development and construction

of MetroLink lines. Would you vote for or against raising the public transit sales tax from 1/4- to 1/2-cent to speed up the development and construction of MetroLink?”

Responses to this key question were overwhelmingly encouraging to supporters of a ballot measure: in both the City of St. Louis (70% yes, 26% no) and the County (68% yes, 28% no), imposing majorities favored the idea of a tax increase proposal. However, among those saying they were “very certain” about their vote, the margins were closer to 50-50. Interestingly, support for a tax increase expressed in this poll exceeded that measured in 1994 (just prior to passage of the initial Proposition M) by about ten percentage points. In its three years of existence, MetroLink has actually helped to increase support for public transit in the St. Louis area.

Analysis of the April 1997 tracking poll results provides insights into the nature of support for transit tax measures. The pollster (Terry Jones) highlighted the following patterns of support (Jones, 1997):

- The best predictor of support for a transit tax increase was experience with the MetroLink system: the more a respondent reported riding it, the more likely he or she was to indicate support for the tax. For example, a 39-point difference existed between frequent and nonriders of the MetroLink system! Education was the second most important predictor, with differences as large as 22 points between the most and least educated voters in the sample.
- Whereas patterns of support were found (such as those above), the most striking pattern was “the lack of any demographically or politically based source of opposition.” Republicans were found to be about as supportive as Democrats were, for example.

Given these encouraging results, the decision to go ahead with the sales tax increase seems to have been made on a solid basis. Indeed, a series of tracking polls conducted during the campaign for Proposition M seemed to provide more ambiguous evidence that passing the measure would be a relatively easy task. The polls, conducted several times after the initial April survey described above, indicated relatively stable and strong support for the measure, ranging from 53% to 66% in favor in the City and from 50% to 67% in the County.

However, these results may have provided supporters of the measure with a false sense of security. This is because, whereas the survey questioned respondents about their willingness to support a tax increase to pay for expansion and development of the MetroLink system, the actual ballot

proposition made no explicit mention of MetroLink. Thus, supporters may have been overconfident and perhaps too complacent about prospects for the measure at the voting booth. (In fact, opponents seized upon the wording of the ballot—and the omission of explicit reference to MetroLink—as a means of fomenting distrust about the measure among voters.)

DEVISING AND IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Supporters

According to interviewees, the basic strategy behind the supporters' campaign was to capitalize upon the existing positive affect for MetroLink identified in the public opinion polls, while avoiding the potentially conflictive mention of specific routes. This sort of strategy has been referred to as a “stealth campaign,” in that it generally seeks to avoid specific issues that might generate controversy. The idea is to motivate supporters to come and vote for the proposition, while leaving potential opponents little cause to get interested in the campaign. Light turnout was forecast for the election, because the measure was the sole item on the special election ballot.

However, the stealth approach seems to have backfired against the measure's supporters. As questions about the routing of the already-funded Cross-County expansion line began to create controversy, the campaign opted to avoid the criticism. In the meanwhile, media attention to a small, poorly funded group of outspoken opponents escalated. The lack of competing campaign issues and candidates created a vacuum in which the media—in attempting to be fair to both sides—provided opponents with a bonanza of free coverage. In the view of measure supporters, opponents of the measure seemed to be receiving as much coverage for free as the supporters were able to garner with their relatively immense budget. Although the region's major newspaper, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, endorsed the measure, Proposition M supporters were ultimately unable to “control the message” about the tax measure.

As suggested by the following figures, campaign resources were divided fairly equally between mass media and direct mail expenditures.

The supporters' committee—known as “Connecting St. Louis”—reported raising \$922,095, with \$500,000 of that total coming in the form of loans. Some of the major expenses were:

- \$229,739.36 for television and radio advertising production and television air time.
- \$199,738.20 for polling and a telephone bank.

- \$207,869.02 for direct mail expense.
- Approximately \$80,000 for campaign management expenses.
- Approximately \$25,000 for campaign contributions to local Democratic campaign committees.

The campaign had originally planned to spend \$500,000 and limit its broadcast advertising to radio. When the opposition appeared stronger than had been anticipated, the campaign decided to raise additional funds and turn to television advertising (*Post-Dispatch*, Oct. 29, 1997). The ads began just days before the election, consisting of reactions to opposition from some elected officials and neighborhood organizations in various parts of the area. The campaign treasurer stated, “We had to increase the budget because of misinformation.”

Opponents

By contrast, the opponents’ committee, “Citizens Against Proposition M,” reported raising a total of \$13,900 and spending \$14,123.02. More than half of the total raised (\$7,700) was in the form of in-kind services from an advertising company owned by an opponent. The opponents’ largest monetary donation was \$100.

Opponents seized upon the vagueness of the ballot language—which did not specify that funds would necessarily go to MetroLink expansion—to tap into the larger public distrust of government. Additionally, the opponents were able to make the argument that the transit agency (Bi-State Development) had not delivered upon its promises made in the 1994 campaign. (Supporters concede that the 1994 campaign did overpromise on what could be delivered with a 1/4-cent tax level.) Opponents were thus successful in framing the issue as “trust in the transit agency” or “trust in government,” rather than “support for MetroLink.”

One opponent felt that the supporters failed to provide answers to basic questions. “People wanted exact answers to questions like where is MetroLink going, what route will be next, how much will expansion cost and when will it arrive. I don't think people were expecting it to be at their door tomorrow, but they wanted to know when they would see it, whether it was now or 20 years from now.” Some perceived the vote as a demand for accountability, rather than as a vote against light rail. One County Council member said she commissioned a private poll among county voters before the election and found that 69% of those surveyed felt their input wasn’t sought before the

proposition was pushed. “They didn't feel involved...Slick advertising was not enough.”

An editorial written by two opponents of the measure sums up the appeal opponents successfully made to voters:

Advertisements for Proposition M claim two-thirds of the revenue would go for MetroLink expansion. But that is a meaningless campaign promise. It has no legal basis. The legislation for Proposition M, which was passed by the St. Louis Board of Aldermen and the St. Louis County Council, does not require any of the funds to be spent on MetroLink.

Nothing is definite about how these funds would be used. There are no specific plans for MetroLink expansion and no certainty on what the expansions will cost to construct and operate (*Post-Dispatch*, Nov. 2, 1997).

Opponents also used the insufficiency of funds for all proposed routes in the 1994 measure to feed the cynicism of voters. One opponent stated that the tax would give the transit agency only enough to build one of the possible expansion routes: “Everyone needs to look closely at that map and see what they're not going to get...two groups are going to be suckers” (*Post-Dispatch*, Nov. 3, 1997).

EVALUATION

Ultimately, voters in St. Louis County disapproved of Proposition M, 58% to 42%. Voters in the City of St. Louis barely passed the measure, 50.4% to 49.6%. However, these percentages mask the extent of the defeat; the measure lost by nearly 22,000 votes in the County, and passed by only 300 in the City. Both jurisdictions needed to pass for the tax increase to take effect.

In hindsight, the defeat illustrates how precarious public support for transit taxes can be. Despite encouraging polling results that suggested an easy victory for the measure, a number of factors inveighed against a positive outcome for Proposition M. The following section provides a discussion of possible reasons for the failure of the measure, in no particular order.

Placement of the Proposal on a Special Election Ballot

Special elections are normally associated with a more conservative, anti-tax electorate, but supporters of Proposition M were confident that they could marshal a sufficient number of pro-transit voters. However, they did not

anticipate the extent to which opponents would receive free publicity and, in effect, equal standing in the court of public opinion in the absence of other races and issues. Turnout for the election was just 26%, and supporters failed to attract adequate numbers of pro-transit voters.

Failure of Supporters to Identify a Specific Use of the Funds, Including a Transportation Plan

Some observers blamed the defeat on the failure of supporters to clearly define a transportation plan to provide voters with specifics about how the revenues generated by the proposed tax would be spent. Pollster Terry Jones noted that “many voters want a detailed plan about how money will be spent on which lines in what order before they will commit to a yes vote. Talk about a planning process is not sufficient.” In Jones’ view, opponents were able to use the lack of specificity in the proposal to tap into voters’ more general distrust of government. The campaign had suggested general corridors for the planned expansion, but given the rapid timeline for the election, supporters did not have time to conduct a full-scale planning process with public participation. Again, the supporters were counting on the general public goodwill toward Metrolink to carry the day. As it happened, specifics about the use of the tax funds did appear to matter.

The lack of a well-publicized plan dovetailed with the ballot proposition language, which was also vague. Pollster Jones concluded that, “If the issue is whether the voters are willing to pay higher taxes for more Metrolink lines, over 60% are favorable. If the issue is whether the *voters trust government institutions* to spend the money on MetroLink expansion and operations, less than 50% are favorable.” The failure to deliver on the promises made in the 1994 campaign may have contributed to the lack of voter trust in the claims made by proponents in the 1997 campaign. To some extent, the lack of specificity reflected a strategy that sought to mask disagreements among transit supporters about funding priorities for new MetroLink routes. As discussed below, additional routing disagreements developed nevertheless.

Controversy About Specific Routes for Extensions That Were already Funded

Approximately one month before the vote, controversy erupted with respect to the routing of an additional MetroLink line. Although this line had already received sufficient funds from other sources to begin construction and was therefore essentially irrelevant to the proposed tax increase, it was nevertheless a source of great controversy. Briefly, the conflict arose over the decision to take a route north of Forest Park from St. Louis to Clayton. Some community leaders had wanted this route to take a more southern approach, which would

have involved building a rather expensive tunnel. The City's new Mayor, Clarence Harmon, was a vocal opponent of the proposed route for the new extension although he supported the tax measure. This placed him at odds with the (elected) County executive, Buzz Westfall. Thus political leaders were squabbling over the system at a time when a uniform stand might have benefited the cause of MetroLink expansion.

The debate over the route decision became extremely contentious, and also contained some seeds of partisanship because of the demographics of the neighborhoods involved. Unfortunately, the conflict deepened and lasted until the election was about to occur. Much of the dissatisfaction over the new route was centered in western St. Louis County, a wealthier area whose approval was viewed as critical by supporters of the measure.

Some supporters of the tax measure believe that this imbroglio poisoned the well for the fortunes of the proposal. Voters may have begun to associate the disagreement about the path of the extension with the funds to be generated by the new tax. In any event, the event comprised extremely negative publicity for MetroLink at a time when it needed to maintain its traditionally very positive image. This controversy might not have sunk the measure, had the vote occurred in a more complicated general election. However, in the absence of other issues, the routing conflict easily spilled over into the Proposition M campaign.

Partisan Opposition to the Plan

Although some of the polling data obtained by the measure's supporters suggested that partisanship did not affect support for Proposition M, the campaign did ultimately invoke a degree of partisanship. Among the more vocal opponents of the plan were several Republican members of the St. Louis County Council, whose opposition may have served to mobilize "no" voters from the western suburbs. On the Democratic side, the Mayor was at least a nominal supporter of the measure, but his involvement in the routing controversy (described above) tended to effectively nullify that support.

In any event, after the election officials from both parties accused one another of allowing partisanship to affect the outcome. Democrats contended that Republicans staged an orchestrated effort to defeat the proposal, and pointed to its especially weak showing in Republican strongholds in St. Louis County. Meanwhile, Republican opponents denied that and accused Democrats of abusing their contributions from Republican-leaning companies because some campaign spending went to Democratic operatives and party ward leaders (*Post-Dispatch* Nov. 6, 1997).

Dissatisfaction with Bus Service and the Transit Agency

Because Proposition M did not specify that the tax increase would be dedicated to the expansion of MetroLink, opponents of the plan were able to appeal to the relative unpopularity of the bus system. Responses to focus groups conducted after the election confirms that the positive feelings for MetroLink are matched by equally negative feelings about the bus system. Generally speaking, voters like, and are willing to fund, rail transit much more than bus transit. The transit agency has battled annual operating losses and suffers from a poor public image (*Post-Dispatch*, Nov. 6, 1997).

The Other Proposition M Loses

Across the Mississippi in Madison County, Illinois, another Proposition M was also defeated. The Madison tax measure would have raised the sales tax by 1/4-cent, raising an estimated \$276 million by the year 2014. According to supporters, the tax increase would be used to fund MetroLink route extensions into Madison County, although no specific plan was offered to voters. In fact, officials said that receipts from the tax, had it passed, would have been held in escrow until planning began on the route.

Madison County's Proposition M suffered a fate similar to the more publicized St. Louis effort. Voters rejected the measure by a 62% - 38% margin. As in St. Louis, supporters of the measure were encouraged by pre-election polling that suggested an easy victory.

According to supporters, the Madison "M" campaign was only lightly funded (approximately \$70,000 was spent on radio ads and a direct mailing). The local Democratic Party organization did not actively support the effort in the belief that it would pass easily. At the same time, the local Republican leadership vocally opposed the measure. The supporters' strategy was to tie in the vote to the St. Louis election, which backfired when the St. Louis measure lost.

CONCLUSIONS

Because no exit polling data are available, the cause for the defeat of Proposition M may never be definitively known. However, the sum of the potential causes here seems quite plausible as an explanation. As the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (November 6, 1997) observed after the election:

Many [voters] wanted more specific routes, costs and construction timetables. Many wanted a better public process. One group wanted more money to go to bus service. Others wanted all funds to go to build MetroLink. Some thought the wording on the ballot – “for

transportation purposes”—was too vague. Some wanted assurance that MetroLink would go underground in their neighborhoods. Others wanted light rail built on railroad rights of way above ground so more money would be left for extensions in their neighborhoods. Others were upset because nothing had been built since the first sales tax for public transit was passed in 1994. Some simply may think the sales tax rates are too high.

The decisive defeat of Proposition M provides a crystalline example of the fragility of public support for transportation related tax increases. That this defeat occurred in the context of widespread public support for the MetroLink system and apparent early support for the tax increase (as suggested by public opinion polls) serves to accentuate this fact. Indeed, supporters of Proposition M were perhaps blinded with overconfidence to the extent that they failed to fully recognize the difficult task it would be to succeed, given the unfortunate circumstances in which the election occurred.

Whereas it is difficult to assign accurate weight to each of the factors and events that appeared to impact negatively on the outcome of the ballot measure, a degree of consensus about the importance of several emerges from interviewees and other resources. No one could have predicted the negative atmosphere created by the strong and public disagreement over the route of the already funded MetroLink expansion, which every interviewee cited as a critical event. However, several lessons appear to emerge from this defeat.

First, although the controversy over the MetroLink expansion route was possibly unavoidable, it is possible that it would not have been quite so influential in the context of a general (and preferably presidential) election. Similarly, the arguments put forth by opponents, both organized and otherwise, might not have been nearly so salient were other issues and elections at stake. The entire strategy of waging a so-called “stealth” campaign during a special election is questionable.

Second, it appears likely that the lack of specifics provided by the tax measure’s supporters harmed its credibility and popularity among some voters. Given that the decision to vie for the tax increase came only months before the election, this may have been more of a factor than the result of a hurried decision making process. In hindsight, the measure’s supporters would have done well to take additional time to involve and educate the public about how the tax revenues would be spent. They clearly overestimated the value of the

general popularity of MetroLink vis-à-vis deep-seated public skepticism about management by government and the transit agency.

Thus, two conclusions emerge from this defeat: (1) supporters of transit tax measures ought to weigh carefully the dangers of placing them on isolated special election ballots, particularly if they plan to run a low-key “stealth” campaign, and (2) although there may be a potential pitfall over specifying the details of a transportation improvement plan, avoiding them altogether may leave a campaign vulnerable to opponents’ likely counterstrategy. Hindsight, of course, makes a complicated and difficult process seem much clearer and simple.

APPROVAL OF A LIGHT RAIL LINE IN THE DENVER REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION DISTRICT

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In November of 1999, voters in the Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD) voted to allow the RTD to borrow \$457 million with a repayment cost of \$779 million to fund a 19.7-mile light rail line along the Southeast I-25 corridor. (Hereafter, this will be termed the “SE Corridor.”)

Voters were not authorizing any change in the tax rate in this election. For quite some time, the RTD had been receiving revenues from a .006 sales tax (the equivalent of a 3/5-cent sales tax) within the District for the transit system. Due to both population growth and increases in spending resulting from a robust economy, the RTD estimated that the current tax rate would generate sufficient revenue to fund the SE Corridor light rail line in conjunction with \$500 million of federal funding. Nevertheless, voter approval was required under the statewide Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR) through a TABOR override election. TABOR override elections are needed in Colorado to determine if voters give permission to spend, rather than being refunded, tax revenue already collected in excess of TABOR limits.

The success of the 1999 measure, with 66% of voters supporting it, came on the heels of a defeat of a passenger rail measure in 1997, which received support from only 42.2% of voters. The primary difference between the two measures was the magnitude of the light rail system. The 1999 measure included only one light rail line along a single corridor, while the 1997 measure included a comprehensive passenger rail system along at least four corridors. Another interesting feature of the 1999 ballot measure is that it was accompanied by a separate statewide highway measure. Both the decision to include only a single light rail line, and the decision to pair the measure with a separate highway measure, were made to minimize effective opposition from Bill Owens, the conservative Republican governor and other prominent elected officials, one of the two leading newspapers, and others who opposed the 1997 measure. Since these decisions were extremely effective in minimizing opposition, this case demonstrates how a transportation package can be developed in a way that minimizes opposition in an environment in which it is extremely difficult to minimize opposition.

Although this chapter focuses on the 1999 light rail ballot measure, some relevant factors from the 1997 measure will be incorporated into this

discussion. Readers interested in a detailed description of the 1997 measure should refer to Haas, Massey, et al. (2000).

BACKGROUND: THE RTD AND ITS BOARD

The RTD includes all or parts of six counties and covers a large geographical area. For example, Boulder, which is approximately 25 miles from Denver, is in the northwest part of the district, and a portion of Douglas County, including parts approximately 30 miles southwest of Denver, is also included.

The RTD Board consists of 15 elected members and is responsible only for transit. Each member represents a designated district and each district is constructed to have approximately the same population. As a result of an election in 1998, the composition of the Board was significantly different in 1999 than it was in 1997. In 1997, less than a majority of the 15 members were strong supporters of the GTR measure and one of the Board members led the opposition to the measure. After the defeat of the 1997 transit measure, an organization entitled Metro Transit, affiliated with the Chamber of Commerce, was formed to recruit and elect pro-transit people in the 1998 election. These results were successful as five of the seven people who were either opposed to GTR or were less than enthusiastic supporters of it, including the lead opponent, were replaced by pro-transit representatives in this election.

BACKGROUND: THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Denver RTD is quite diverse politically. Both Denver and Boulder tend to elect representatives from the Democratic Party while other portions of the district tend to elect representatives from the Republican Party. This political diversity also is represented at the statewide level, particularly in recent gubernatorial elections. The governor during the 1997 ballot measure was a Democrat. In 1998, Bill Owens, a conservative Republican, was elected as governor in a very close election. Transportation was an important issue in this gubernatorial election. Bill Owens' position on transportation focused on highway improvements and, along with other conservative Republicans, he publicly opposed the 1997 RTD ballot measure.

Largely because of the political diversity within the RTD, transportation tends to be a partisan political issue within the RTD, with many Republicans opposing rail transit, particularly when it involves a tax increase. In this environment in which transit is a partisan issue, and also one in which Republicans are influential in many portions of the RTD, proponents wanted to develop a package that would, at a minimum, prevent opposition from Governor Owens and other prominent elected officials from the Republican Party within the RTD. Of course, proponents hoped that they could obtain the

endorsement of Governor Owens for the 1999 measure and this hope was fulfilled. For reasons discussed in a later background section, Governor Owens did endorse the 1999 light rail ballot measure.

BACKGROUND: COMPETING NEWSPAPERS

Two newspapers, the *Denver Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News*, are strong competitors within the RTD. As might be expected, particularly in a diverse political environment, each newspaper attempts to differentiate itself from the other based in part on its editorial positions. The *Rocky Mountain News* tends to take a more conservative editorial position than the *Denver Post*. The two newspapers took different editorial positions on the 1997 measure, with the *Post* supporting the measure and the *News* opposing it.

The objective of having the *News* take either a neutral position or a supportive position on the 1999 measure was not as important as accomplishing this objective with Governor Owens. However, it was perceived that accomplishing this objective with Governor Owens would, at the same time, accomplish it with the *News*. This perception proved to be accurate, as the *News* did endorse the 1999 ballot measure.

BACKGROUND: THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM AND VOTER ATTITUDES

Prior to the 1999 election, the transit system consisted of buses, including some express buses using expressways and freeways, along with a 5.5-mile light rail system in Denver that had been operating for a few years. In addition, construction of a light rail line along the southwest corridor in Jefferson County, connecting to the southern end of the prior line, was close to completion. No new taxes were needed for the construction of this line.

The metropolitan area had a designated nonattainment status until the mid-1990s, which precluded significant highway improvements. The only highway changes involved the addition of high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes on a section of I-25 running north from Denver and on C-470, which runs in an east-west direction south of Denver.

According to all people interviewed, the public viewed traffic congestion as a high priority problem that was getting worse. In addition, the SE Corridor, which was the only district corridor identified for improvement in the 1999 transit and highway measures, was viewed as the most congested corridor in the district.

Voter research conducted after the defeat of the 1997 transit measure did not signify a general rejection of light rail. More specifically, the five most

common reasons stated by those voting against the 1997 measure are listed below, along with the percentage of voters who stated each reason. Only the fourth of these five reasons represents a general rejection of light rail.

- Plan too vague/don't know what it costs/costs keep changing (33%).
- Too expensive/too big a project/taxes too high (31%).
- Don't trust board to manage it/too much Board conflict/divisions (15%).
- Won't be used/won't reduce congestion/won't reduce pollution (11%).
- Our area doesn't get benefits/doesn't help suburbs/our area doesn't get light rail (9%).

BACKGROUND: THE SOUTHEAST BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP (SEBP)

A number of industrial parks are located along the SE Corridor and the number of employees who work on this corridor is approximately the same as the number who work in downtown Denver. One interviewee estimated that approximately 122,000 people work along the SE Corridor, compared with an estimate of 115,000 who work in downtown Denver (Neukirch, March 30, 2000). Many of the employees working along the SE Corridor are concentrated in 15 office parks within a 4.5-mile area.

With the large number of employers in the SE Corridor, it is not surprising that a business association was formed. Different specific associations and partnerships have existed in the recent past, not all of which have consisted strictly of employers. Only the two most recent associations are discussed here.

Shortly after the defeat of the 1997 transit measure, an association entitled the Southeast Corridor Mobility Coalition was formed. This coalition consisted of governmental representatives, as well as representatives from area businesses. It advocated a multimodal solution to the transportation problems on the SE Corridor and lobbied the federal government for funding of a multimodal solution.

The SEBP was formed in January of 1998. Although this organization focused on other issues, such as housing, it continued to advocate a multimodal solution to traffic congestion on the corridor. The SEBP played a major role in fundraising for both the highway and the transit ballot measures. According to a representative of this organization, it also had an important role in encouraging Governor Owens to enthusiastically support the transit measure. This representative argued to Governor Owens that a multimodal solution was

needed to obtain federal support. The fundraising ability of this organization may have given it some leverage with the Governor.

BACKGROUND: GOVERNOR OWENS AND THE HIGHWAY BALLOT MEASURE

Governor Owens is not a strong supporter of light rail and he also is publicly opposed to tax increases. While he was State Treasurer, he publicly opposed the 1997 RTD transit ballot measure. During the hotly contested 1998 gubernatorial campaign, Bill Owens pledged to oppose tax increases and also pledged to widen I-25 along the SE Corridor, along with additional highway improvements in the state through highway bonding. He did not recommend a multimodal solution involving both highway widening and light rail construction during the campaign. In addition, Governor Owens announced in his inaugural address that he would withdraw \$90 million of state funding for light rail promised by the prior governor.

Once elected, Governor Owens tried to move quickly to obtain authority for highway bonding. He thought that working through the legislature would be the fastest route and he was able to obtain legislative approval for his highway bonding proposal. The authority of the legislature to authorize this bonding was successfully challenged in the courts. The court decision was announced around May of 1999. This response from the judicial branch of government forced Governor Owens to try to obtain highway bonding approval through a statewide ballot measure and he moved quickly to get this on the ballot for November of 1999. A significant portion of the \$1.7 billion in Governor Owens' statewide measure was proposed for highway widening along the same SE Corridor where the light rail line would be constructed. The highway measure also was successful, with a supporting statewide percentage of 62%.

Two reasons were identified in interviews for the Governor's decision to support the 1999 RTD transit measure even though he opposed the 1997 measure. First, he knew that an environmental impact study of the highway widening on the SE Corridor would need to be redone if the light rail project was not approved. This environmental study would have significantly delayed the highway widening and it also would have given environmentalists another chance to block the highway construction through the environmental impact process. The governor's awareness of the importance of the light rail project to the success of the highway project is demonstrated by his application of pressure on the RTD to act quickly on the SE Corridor light rail project. He exerted this pressure by having the state legislature pass a bill enabling him to control federal transit formula funds if the RTD did not act on the SE Corridor light rail project in a specified time period. Second, he expected the RTD to

use their connections with environmental organizations to encourage environmentalists to remain neutral on the highway measure.

BACKGROUND: VOTING PROCEDURES

Voters in Arapahoe, Adams, Douglas, and Jefferson Counties were *required* to vote by mail. Only voters in Denver and Boulder Counties were allowed to vote at actual polling places on Election Day. Mail ballots were mailed to registered voters during the second week of October. Apparently, about 30% of those voting by mail return their ballots within a few days of having received them and about the same percentage tend to return them within a few days of the deadline. The remaining mail ballots are spaced roughly equally over the remaining three weeks or so.

THE TRANSIT PACKAGE AND THE PROCESS USED TO DETERMINE IT

The transit package in the 1999 ballot measure was a subset of the one in the 1997 measure. The package in 1999 involved a total of 19.7 miles of light rail. The proposed line started where the current line ends, which is about five miles south of downtown, and ran 15.2 miles in a southeast direction along I-25 through Arapahoe County and part of Douglas County. A 4.5-mile spur along I-225, running mostly east from the main line also was included in the package.

Reasons for Proposing an Incremental Approach in the 1999 RTD Measure

Although the light rail line included in the 1999 RTD ballot measure was consistent with the recommendation in the SE Corridor MIS, this package was significantly different than the package in the 1997 RTD ballot measure. In addition to the light rail line on the SE Corridor, the 1997 transit package included rail lines on both a west and east corridor, along with unspecified transit improvements along two northern corridors, one through Boulder and the other through Adams County. The estimate was about \$8 billion for the 1997 measure compared with an estimate of less than \$1 billion with the 1999 measure. The general manager of the RTD still plans to develop a system similar to that in the 1997 measure. However, a decision was made to take an incremental approach rather than a comprehensive approach, with the first new increment being the SE Corridor. Three reasons existed for this decision and each reason is described in the remainder of this subsection.

First, in a post election survey cited previously, the comprehensive nature of the 1997 transit package was a significant concern to many respondents who did not support the 1997 measure. In this study, 31% of those surveyed who

voted against the 1997 measure cited the high costs as a primary reason for their opposition. Based on this result, the Board realized that being able to present a transportation package with no tax rate increase would eliminate a primary reason for voter rejection. A tax increase could be avoided only with a single-corridor package.

Second, an incremental single-corridor package was required to obtain support from the Governor and other conservative Republicans who normally would not support an expensive light rail package. Since the Governor had publicly pledged in the 1998 gubernatorial election to avoid any new taxes, he was willing to support the Board's measure only if it did not involve new taxes. Having a transit package that did not require new taxes obviously was possible only with an incremental package. Having the support of Governor Owens was valuable for a few reasons. First, his support, which was mentioned in advertising, was said to be important in a pre-election survey by many voters who opposed the 1997 measure. Second, multiple interviewees indicated that the Governor was helpful in persuading conservative Republicans, who were opposed to the 1997 measure, to support the 1999 measure. Given that two of the main claims advanced by proponents, namely less highway congestion and less air pollution, were not convincingly supported by the MIS, minimizing opposition was important.

Although it probably was a secondary factor considered by the RTD in their decision to have a single-corridor package, this approach was needed to obtain the editorial support of the *Rocky Mountain News*. The *Denver Post* had supported the 1997 comprehensive measure in editorials. However, the *Rocky Mountain News* opposed the 1997 measure in their editorials, due largely to the high costs which required a significant tax increase for a lengthy period of time. Proponents essentially knew that this newspaper would support a transit package that focused only on the congested SE Corridor and did not involve a tax increase. Proponents used this support in one of their two television ads, as well as in their mailers and literature handouts. A lead political consultant indicated that they would not have identified the support of the *Denver Post* in these ads if the *Rocky Mountain News* had opposed the 1999 measure.

THE COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN USED BY PROPONENTS

The Communications Budget

The total budget proposed by the political consultants in 1999, consisting of slightly less than \$1 million, was very similar to the one proposed in 1997. This goal was met in 1999 while only about 50% of the goal was met in 1997. Somewhat surprisingly, the fundraising efforts were more successful in 1999 even though the single-corridor package seemingly reduced the pool of

potential contributors. In addition, the 1999 fundraising efforts commenced in August, which allowed only about three months for these efforts. The fundraising efforts were organized and lead primarily by business organizations, namely the SEBP, the SE Metro Chamber of Commerce, the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, and the Downtown Denver Partnership. The fundraising efforts were more successful in 1999 than in 1997 for three reasons.

- People who were less enthusiastic about transit improvements than highway improvements contributed to the transit campaign, as well as to the highway campaign, realizing that an additional environmental impact study of the highway widening on the SE Corridor could be avoided only if voters approved the transit measure. The fact that both campaigns shared their list of potential contributors indicates that fundraising efforts were perceived to be synergistic rather than competitive.
- Lists of contributors from 1997 were used by fundraisers in 1999. This made fundraising efforts more efficient and focused. Efficiency was needed given the limited amount of time involved for fundraising.
- Opponents were less successful in discouraging financial support for the 1999 ballot measure than for the 1997 measure. In 1997, the lead opponent, who also was a member of the RTD Board, was successful in his efforts to have the Board pass a resolution that prevented the district from entering into any financial relationship with any organization that contributed more than \$100 to the 1997 measure. Even though this resolution was declared unconstitutional shortly before the 1997 election, it had a chilling effect on fundraising. This chilling effect was compounded by significant newspaper coverage of this issue, including publication of names of some contributors with potential vested interests.

Advertising

Television was the primary medium used for advertising. Radio, direct mail, and hangers also were used. Each of these four types is discussed below.

Approximately \$540,000 was spent on television advertising. The consultants thought it would be most effective to use an emotional appeal in their advertising and concluded that television would be more appropriate in conveying emotions than other media would be.

Copies of each of the two television ads used were provided by the political consultants. The two ads had some common elements along with some differences.

- Both stressed that no new taxes would be needed.
- Both mentioned and showed highway congestion problems and linked these problems to a poor quality of life. For example, one ad said, “Congestion takes time away from our businesses and our families.”
- Both ads used positive visual symbols to implicitly link the transit measure with quality of life. For example, one ad showed a boy riding a bike at the beginning of the ad and said, “People live here for a better life.” The other ad showed beautiful flowers in a mountain valley and said, “This is Denver, but what makes it great is what we do to keep it great.”
- Neither ad stated that the proposed light rail line would significantly lessen congestion. However, both implied this. For example one ad first presented the above quote about congestion and then immediately stated, “Referendum 4A – new light rail along I-25 with no new taxes.”
- Both ads subtly addressed the issue that the 1999 package was only a single-corridor package that would not provide benefits to people who used other corridors. One ad said that the SE Corridor rail line was “The next step toward better transit service throughout metro Denver.” The second ad said, “Our traffic problems will only be solved if we work together.”
- One of the ads raised the problem of air pollution and implied that the transit measure would result in cleaner air.
- One of the ads identified the endorsement by both of the major newspapers.

The television advertising ran multiple times daily for close to four weeks, starting around October 13 when the mail ballots were sent, up to Election Day. Heavy advertising, generating approximately 100 gross rating points (GRPs) per day, was used for the first week or so, followed by a reduction to about 65 GRPs for the next two weeks, followed by a return to 100 GRPs for the last four or five days prior to the election. This schedule was used because of the prevalence of mail voting. To make the concept of GRPs more tangible, between 30 and 50 ads often were run on a daily basis, using each of the local NBC, ABC, CBS and FOX network affiliates. The heaviest focus was on the morning, evening, and late night news programs, along with reruns on the FOX network at times that news programs were on the other networks.

A second component of advertising involved a distribution piece similar in size to a door hanger. According to the written field plan, the goal was to distribute

100,000 copies of this distribution piece. Many of these were distributed at major places of employment, both downtown and along the SE Corridor, and at major transit locations. Cooperation was needed from employers in using this method of distribution and their cooperation is further evidence of the strong support received from the business community. Some were also distributed in neighborhoods, although the neighborhood effort was not targeted. If volunteers were available in a neighborhood, the hangers would be distributed. The volunteers involved in the distribution tended to be people from environmental organizations.

The distribution piece was in color and had information on both sides of the piece. The information on the front stressed a) no new taxes, b) the loss of federal funding of over \$500 million if the measure was defeated (Note that it did not say that the money was guaranteed if the measure passed.), c) the endorsements of the two major newspapers, and d) that something needed to be done about growth and traffic.

The primary message on the back of the piece was that traffic problems would get better if the measure passed. More specifically, it said that congestion would get better because 30,000 riders, or 20% of rush hour commuters, would be riding transit, and because light rail commuters would save 20 minutes. It also said that light rail would reduce emissions and smog but did not provide any statistics for this claim. The back also listed some supporters, with the first supporter being Governor Owens. This prominence of Governor Owens in the list of supporters demonstrates that proponents viewed his support as being important.

Direct mail was used as a third component of advertising. The direct mail campaign had limited reach and frequency. This campaign was not part of the original plan, but it was added based on results of survey research conducted during the campaign. This research discovered that support was soft among Republican and Independent women in the suburbs and that they were looking for more information than that provided in the television ads. Based on this research, one mailer was sent to women in Jefferson, Arapahoe, and Douglas Counties. The mailer was sent around the third week of October. The content of the direct mail was similar to that of the distribution piece described previously.

Approximately \$30,000 was budgeted for radio advertising. Most of these ads were run during drive time and on some morning and evening talk shows. The main themes were similar to those in the other advertising.

Publicity Efforts

In interviews after the defeat of the 1997 transit measure, representatives from both the *Denver Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News* thought proponents did a poor job with both the news and editorial departments of the newspapers. Although proponents did not state that they were running a stealth campaign, this appeared to be the case, at least with publicity. The political consultants used with the 1999 campaign realized the importance of trying to a) obtain favorable publicity, and b) more effectively counter negative publicity. Based upon both an analysis of the articles written and information from a newspaper reporter, the proponents accomplished both of these objectives.

The four basic reasons identified below explain the proponents' comparative success with publicity in 1999.

- They identified information objectives to be communicated through the news media and editorials that were not being communicated through advertising.
- They anticipated arguments that opponents would make, and that news reporters might address, and had counterarguments prepared in advance.
- They made a concerted effort to keep the RTD Board out of the news. This was easier to do in 1999 than in 1997 due to Board members' greater willingness to cooperate in 1999.
- The coalition with the Governor created the potential for more newsworthy events, partly because the Governor's support of transit was surprising. The Governor's support was mentioned frequently in the media, including some articles based on media events planned by the Governor's office.

Each of the first three of the four reasons identified above is discussed in more detail below. The fourth reason above needs no additional discussion beyond mentioning that it provides an additional reason for the conclusion that the Governor's support was important to the 1999 transit measure.

Proponents hoped to communicate at least three information objectives through publicity that were not being communicated through television advertising. They received some mention in both editorials and news articles of each of these three objectives. First, they wanted to communicate the Governor's support for the transit measure. His support was mentioned repeatedly in news articles in both major newspapers. Second, they wanted to give voters, who were more interested in the highway improvements, a reason to also vote for the transit measure. This was done by saying that the highway measure would be delayed for up to five years, and would cost at least \$40-\$60

million more if the transit measure was defeated. This information was stated by highway proponents, such as the head of the Colorado Department of Transportation, which was more credible than having transit advocates make this point. Third, they wanted to identify the support of conservative Republican legislators within the RTD but outside the SE Corridor. A news conference was held by five conservative Republican legislators shortly before mail ballots were mailed and both major newspapers ran articles about this news conference. One of these representatives also was frequently used by proponents as a spokesperson in other news articles.

Proponents realized that the news media would try to be balanced and write about potential weaknesses of the transit measure. Accordingly, proponents systematically identified weaknesses and developed contingency responses. A lengthy lead article on a Sunday when mail balloting was beginning demonstrates this contingency planning (*Denver Post*, October 17, pp. 1A, 22A). This balanced article focused on the geographic inequity of the transit measure, which was a weakness anticipated by proponents. The article mentioned that voters rejected the 1997 comprehensive measure because it was too costly. It then mentioned that costs could be reduced through an incremental approach with success happening only if each region supported the other regions. These responses had been prepared by proponents during their contingency planning.

In 1997, a large number of articles were written in both major newspapers about the RTD Board and its divisions. Given the divisions that existed, it would have been difficult for proponents to keep the Board out of the news. Based on this experience in 1997, the political consultants wanted to keep the Board out of the news during the 1999 campaign and they were largely successful with this objective once they were hired.

Voter Research Conducted

The political consultants budgeted about \$80,000 for voter research, with about half involving two surveys and the other half involving two series of focus groups. The initial survey seems to have been used primarily in the development of the advertising themes and messages, and the focus groups were used largely to test reactions to four rough-cut ads for television. The second survey was done for tracking to help determine if any modifications were required in the communications campaign. The direct mail campaign, discussed previously, was instituted based on the results of this tracking survey. In general, with the exception of spending more money on voter research than in most other cases studied, the research conducted in support of the 1999 measure is similar to research conducted in other cases.

THE CAMPAIGN USED BY OPPONENTS

As discussed previously, the proponents in 1999 did a number of things with the transportation package, coalition building, and their communications campaign to make it more difficult for opponents to develop an effective plan than in 1997. At the same time, the opposition and their leadership was not as effective in 1999 as in 1997, for reasons discussed immediately below.

Nature of the Opposition

The person usually identified as the leader of the opposition in 1997, namely Jon Caldara, also was in the opposition in 1999. He was quoted quite frequently in the newspapers and his comments always indicated strong opposition. However, some people interviewed concluded that Caldara was not as active and committed in his opposition in 1999 as he was in 1997. For example, Caldara did not make the effort to contact a news reporter who was interviewed nearly as often in 1999 as in 1997. People interviewed who thought that Caldara was not as active in organizing and leading the opposition in 1999, attributed this to his hesitance in leading the opposition on an issue that the Governor, who normally is an ally of Caldara's, supported.

Other than Caldara, effective leadership of the opposition could have come from prominent elected officials. In 1997, a number of elected Republicans, including Bill Owens, campaigned against the transit measure. Although some elected officials at both the state and local level did speak out against the 1999 transit measure, none seemed to play a role in attempting to organize the opposition. The active support of the Governor for the transit measure probably had a lot to do with the hesitancy of any prominent elected officials to lead the opposition since opposition would most likely have come from elected conservative Republicans. In addition, prominent elected Republicans probably would have been more inclined to take a leadership role in energetically opposing the 1999 transit measure if it had involved a tax increase.

Fundraising Efforts

Based on the case research conducted to date, opponents appear to have more difficulty raising funds than proponents have, in even the best of circumstances. In this situation, due partly to the RTD crafting a transit package that did not involve a tax increase, and partly to the linking of the transit measure with the highway measure, two of the main sources of funding for opponents were neutralized, namely anti-tax groups and highway construction groups. In addition, the fundraising efforts of opponents probably were hindered by the lack of active opposition from prominent conservative

Republicans. Opponents, in fact, did not raise sufficient money to do any media advertising in 1999 while they did raise sufficient funds to do limited television advertising in 1997. Thus, their ability to get their message out depended on their plan for obtaining publicity.

Publicity

Unlike 1997, when the *Rocky Mountain News* took an editorial position that strongly opposed the transit measure, both of the major newspapers took editorial positions in support of the 1999 measure. However, neither newspaper probably would have taken an editorial position in opposition to the 1999 measure even if more prominent and effective opposition leadership had existed, including opposition from the Governor.

Without editorial support and with no money for media advertising, the opposition had to rely primarily on news coverage in the newspapers to get their message across. They were able to get all of the main components of their message communicated, such as the geographic inequity of the measure, the uncertainty of federal funding, the limited impact of light rail on congestion and pollution, and the ineffectiveness and high cost of light rail. They also argued that the measure was a tax increase in disguise since its passage prevented the distribution of tax refunds and this argument appeared in some newspaper articles. However, they had difficulty obtaining intense and repetitive coverage of these issues, partly because they did not have any prominent leadership that could stage newsworthy media events and partly because they did not have a convenient platform, such as a divided RTD Board, for obtaining publicity favorable to their position.

EVALUATION

Two important and complex issues involving the transit package are raised in the Denver case. These two issues are 1) the manner in which highway improvements are packaged with transit improvements, and 2) The use of a geographically imbalanced incremental package. Each of these two issues is discussed below, followed by an evaluation of the communications campaign used by proponents.

Method of Combining Highway and Transit Improvements

Beale, Bishop, and Marley (1996), Middleton (1998), and Haas, Massey, et al. (2000), have suggested that the probability of success increases when highway improvements are combined with transit improvements, particularly when highway improvements have not occurred in the recent past. The Denver case combined highway and transit improvements, but did so in an atypical manner. Unlike both the Sonoma County and Santa Clara County cases, examined in

Haas et al. (2000), which combined highway and transit improvements into a single measure, Denver had separate highway and transit measures.²

The use of separate measures involves at least two significant risks. One risk is that distrust and competition can exist between the separate groups and people who initiate each package. The second risk is that voters who are significantly more inclined to support highway improvements than transit improvements or vice-versa might be inclined to vote in favor of one measure but vote to reject a separate measure. For reasons discussed below, neither of these risks occurred to a significant extent in Denver.

The potential for conflict certainly did exist in Denver. Neither Governor Owens, nor the Colorado Department of Transportation, both of whom initiated the highway measure, are strong supporters of transit. Neither the RTD nor environmentalists, who enthusiastically supported the transit measure, are strong supporters of highway improvements. In spite of the significant potential for conflict, virtually none surfaced in Denver. The factors below seem to have encouraged cooperation and/or discouraged conflict.

- No tax increase was involved with either measure. Tax increases might have encouraged some voters to consider the comparative value of the highway and transit measures. This voter tendency could have encouraged proponents of the highway measure to argue against the transit measure and also encouraged proponents of the transit measure to argue against the highway measure. Since voter approval was required even though no tax increase was involved, the lack of conflict between proponents of the two measures in this case might be atypical.
- Leaders in the business community seemed genuinely committed to a solution that involved both highway and transit improvements and they worked to raise funds for both campaigns. Thus, competition did not exist over the potentially divisive issue of fundraising. Although it was not necessary, the leaders of the business community also could have been effective mediators of any conflicts between highway and transit proponents as they had leverage with both groups.
- Voter heterogeneity within the RTD encouraged cooperation between conservative Republicans who supported the highway improvements and more liberal Democrats who supported the transit improvements. Denver and Boulder County tend to be more liberal while the remaining counties tend to be more conservative. Thus, the highway proponents wanted, at a

² Since the RTD has responsibility only for transit, it could not have included highway improvements in their measure even if it wanted to do so.

minimum, to avoid active opposition from prominent Democrats and environmentalists and transit proponents wanted, at a minimum, to avoid active opposition from prominent Republicans.

- The political consultants hired by proponents of the transit measure had worked previously with conservative Republicans, both within Colorado and at the national level. For example, one of them had worked with both Bob Dole and Lee Atwater. This experience gave them credibility in working with Governor Owens and other conservative Republicans.
- Although two separate campaigns and organizations were involved, representatives of the two campaigns met frequently and were willing to compromise, largely because of the above factors. For example, the Governor was opposed to an advertisement developed by the consultants for the transit measure that was very popular in the focus groups. This advertisement was not used because of the Governor's opposition.

As mentioned previously, a second risk of using separate highway and transit measures is that it allows voters to split their vote. This risk was anticipated and countered in Denver by identifying the interdependence between the two measures. For example, the Governor agreed to have the head of the CDOT argue that rejection of the transit measure would both increase the costs and delay completion of the highway improvements on the SE Corridor.

In summary, the Denver case demonstrates the conditions contributing to success when separate highway and transit measures are placed on the same ballot.

The Use of Geographically Imbalanced Incremental Transit Package

Beale, Bishop, and Marley (1996), and Middleton (1998) identified geographical equity as a critical success factor in obtaining voter approval of transportation funding initiatives. Most of the major cases included both in Haas, et al. (2000), and in this project have made an attempt to provide at least a semblance of geographical equity, even though this attempt increases the costs of the transportation package presented. One of the interesting features of the 1999 Denver case is the significant amount of geographical inequity. Many voters would not have experienced any daily benefit from a new light rail line on the SE Corridor. The success of this single-corridor package by a very large ratio of 2:1, including a high supporting percentage of 65% in Boulder County, which received no benefits in spite of high growth and congestion, demonstrates that geographical equity is not a necessary condition for success. Of course, passage of the 1999 RTD measure certainly was facilitated by the absence of any tax increase since voters living in districts receiving no transit

improvements are less likely to approve a transit package that provides them little direct benefit when it raises their taxes, than when it does not raise their taxes. Accordingly, it is difficult to predict the probability of voter approval of geographically imbalanced transit packages in other communities when a tax increase is needed to fund the package.

Once a community uses a geographically imbalanced incremental approach, it must continue to use this approach to fund additional light rail lines in a series of packages over time. For example, the RTD is considering a future light rail measure involving a western corridor and/or a northern corridor. Accordingly, an interesting longer-term issue raised with a geographically imbalanced incremental approach is whether voter approval becomes more problematic with later increments. If residents already have a light rail line in their corridor, they may be less inclined to vote for tax increases to fund lines in other corridors, particularly if they do not work in a corridor targeted for a light rail route in a later round.

Evaluation of the Communications Campaign Used

To this point, the evaluation of the 1999 RTD measure has focused on characteristics of the transit package. It also is relevant to evaluate the communications campaign used by proponents. Overall, this campaign was well conceived and comprehensive, even though the consultants were selected at the end of July, which meant they had a little over two months prior to the beginning of mail balloting to develop and implement a plan, along with conducting research. Although some aspects of the communications campaign, such as the research conducted, are similar to what has been done in most other cases, a few of the characteristics of the 1999 Denver plan have not existed frequently. These infrequent characteristics are identified below.

- An *integrated* communications plan was used with a range of information objectives identified and different communication media used to communicate different objectives.
 - (1) Television advertising was used to convey some basic themes, such as the severity of the traffic and growth problems, and appeal to emotions using symbolism.
 - (2) Targeted direct mail at undecided voters and an information piece provided more detailed information, including statistics and endorsements, than provided in the

television ads.

(3) Additional information objectives, discussed previously in the section dealing with publicity, were selected for communication through the news articles and editorial coverage.

- Proponents were proactive and aggressive in dealing with the news media, particularly newspapers. Conventional thinking suggests that extensive and balanced news coverage will allow opponents, who typically can do little or no advertising, to get their message across. However, proponents in the 1999 campaign learned from the 1997 campaign that news coverage would tend to be extensive in Denver even with a stealth campaign. If coverage is likely to be extensive regardless of whether a proactive approach is used, more favorable coverage is likely to exist with a proactive and aggressive approach. For example, proponents were able to leverage the Governor's prominence and support to stage some news events involving the Governor.
- As part of the planning process, proponents developed a written document that listed arguments likely to be used by opponents and the news media along with responses to these arguments.

Although the communications campaign used by proponents was effective, proponents also took a significant risk with their advertising campaign. As mentioned previously in the section on advertising, proponents implied in their television advertising that the light rail line would have a significant impact on highway congestion. This implied claim was risky because it essentially was inconsistent with the assessment in the SE Corridor MIS. The MIS said, "Generally, implementation of the major investment will result in either no benefit or only a minor benefit to congestion in the general purpose highway lanes" (Carter and Burgess, 1997, p. 4-32). As cited previously, the MIS projected that the highway commute from the end of the light rail line to downtown would be reduced by only two minutes with the light rail line. Since it would have been difficult for proponents to question projections and assessments in the MIS that they commissioned, they were vulnerable with this implied claim in their advertising. They took this risk because their research indicated that many voters were much more likely to support the measure if they thought that the light rail line would reduce highway congestion on the SE Corridor.

CONCLUSION

Important lessons can be learned from a comparison of the differences between a measure that loses by a large margin and a measure in the same community that wins by a large margin. The differences between the RTD's successful campaign in 1999 and the unsuccessful one in 1997 are summarized below.

Table 3-1. Differences Between the 1999 and 1997 Elections

1999 Election	1997 Election
Single SE Corridor package	Five or six corridor packages
\$779 million of local funds needed	\$8-16 billion of local funds needed
No increase in sales tax rate, but voters would not receive a tax refund	Increase in sales tax rate from .006 to .01
Separate measure for highways on ballot	No highway improvements included on the ballot
Active support from Bill Owens and other conservative Republicans	Active opposition from Bill Owens and other conservative Republicans
RTD Board was united with only one member opposed to the transit package	RTD Board was divided; a significant minority opposed the package and the lead opponent was an RTD Board member
Both newspapers supported the measure in a series of editorials	One newspaper supported, but the second one opposed the measure
Opponents had no money for advertising	Opponents had approximately \$45,000 to spend on advertising
Proponents raised and spent approximately \$1 million	Proponents raised and spent approximately \$550,000
Proponents were proactive in dealing with the media	Proponents were not proactive in dealing with the media
Emphasis in proponent advertising on significant federal funding	No emphasis in proponent advertising on significant federal funding

One of the differences identified in Table 3-1 needs to be clarified. First, Bill Owens was Treasurer of Colorado when he opposed the 1997 measure. Roy Romer, a Democrat, was Governor during the 1997 campaign and he supported this measure. In other words, both the 1997 and the 1999 measures had the support of the standing Governor. However, it probably was more useful to receive the support of a conservative Republican Governor, as in 1999, than to receive the support of a Democratic Governor, as in 1997.

Some of the above differences are dependent on the very first difference listed. If a single-corridor package had not been presented in 1999, a tax increase would have been needed. Both Governor Owens and the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* probably would not have actively supported the measure if it had involved a tax increase. In addition, opponents probably would have been more successful in their fundraising efforts, and proponents may have been less successful, without the active support from the Governor and other conservative Republicans.

Unfortunately, one of the most important characteristics of the 1999 measure, namely the ability to fund a large light rail line without a tax increase, will be difficult for other communities to replicate. In addition, as discussed previously other communities should be cautious about presenting an incremental and geographically imbalanced light rail package to voters even though this approach succeeded with the RTD's 1999 measure.

Other communities also can learn some important lessons from the RTD's 1999 measure and campaign. First, the case demonstrates a means of combining highway improvements with light rail construction that can be effective both with voters and in building a very strong and diverse coalition. Second, a number of features of the proponents' integrated communications campaign can be used in other communities.

SAN ANTONIO: DEFEAT OF FIRST ATTEMPT TO FUND A COMPREHENSIVE LIGHT RAIL SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In an election on May 6, 2000, VIA, which is the San Antonio Metropolitan Transit Authority, proposed a ballot involving a permanent increase in the sales tax of 1/4-cent to fund a 54-mile light rail system. In a very low turnout election, with less than 10% of registered voters in San Antonio and Bexar County turning out to vote, only 30% of the 76,057 voters supported the light rail measure.

A number of factors typically combine to explain the defeat of a measure that loses by such a large margin. Such is the case with the defeat of the light rail measure in San Antonio and Bexar County. Some changes in a) the ballot measure, b) the communications campaign, and c) coalition building efforts would have reduced the margin of defeat.

In general, this case demonstrates the difficulty of generating voter enthusiasm for a *comprehensive* light rail system, funded by a new tax with no expiration date, when traffic congestion is not perceived as being a critical problem and when opponents energetically argue that light rail will be very costly and have minimal impact on highway congestion.

BACKGROUND: GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICS

According to the United States Census Bureau, the population in Bexar County was 1,372,867 in 1999, an increase of 15.8% from 1990. Hispanics comprise approximately 56% of the County's population. Approximately 79% of the County's population live in San Antonio. Assuming that the rate of population increase in Bexar County is equal to the 35% rate for the entire state, the population of Bexar County in 2025 will be approximately 1,900,000.³

Although mayoral elections in San Antonio technically are nonpartisan, prior mayors, such as Henry Cisneros, have been associated with a political party.

³ The significant projected population increase in the County from 2000 to 2025 was used by proponents to support the need for the proposed light rail system. However, proponents were not consistent in their projections. One of VIA's publications distributed to the public said that the County's population would increase by over 1 million people between 2000 and 2025. This figure was retracted when challenged by opponents. VIA then projected a 50% increase in the population from 2000 to 2025. Based upon the Census Bureau's projection of a 35% increase for the State, even this 50% projection seems inflated, particularly since the rate of growth in the County from 1990 to 1999 was slightly less than the growth rate in the State during the same time frame.

Mayoral elections are held every two years and term limits restrict a mayor to two consecutive terms, or four years. The mayor, Howard Peak, was close to the end of his second term during the 2000 election.

Mayor Peak, with the support of the city council, had four tax measures on the same ballot as VIA's measure. Each measure was positioned as a component of an economic development plan. The Mayor's package was unusual in that a sales tax increase of 1/8-cent was designated for the combination of the measures rather than for each measure individually. If at least one of these measures passed but at least one also failed, the tax increase would remain at 1/8-cent. However, the time period for the tax would be shorter than the ten-year sunset date for the combination of the four measures.

According to people interviewed, Mayor Peak was not happy with VIA's decision to place the light rail measure on the same ballot as his four measures. He perceived that the transit measure was less popular than his measures. This perception proved to be correct. Although only one of the Mayor's four measures passed, by a margin of 56% to 44%, each of the three losing measures received a higher percentage of support than the 30% support for VIA's transit measure. Two of his measures were supported by 44% of voters while the remaining measure was supported by 36% of voters.

VIA was not happy with the Mayor's decision to request voter approval of a sales tax increase for uses other than transit. Texas did not allow any community to increase the sales tax by more than one cent. VIA initially requested voter approval of a 1/2-cent sales tax increase to fund a bus transit system and voters approved this increase in 1977. VIA perceived that they should be given a chance to obtain voter approval for at least part of the remaining 1/2-cent for advanced transit improvements before other uses were proposed for this remaining amount. This perception was based largely on the fact that Houston, Dallas, and Austin each had the entire one-cent sales tax dedicated solely to transit.

VIA would have delayed their ballot measure if the Mayor had not presented his ballot measures to voters in May of 2000. VIA had not completed a major investment study required for federal funding nor had they done much public outreach to generate enthusiasm for a comprehensive light rail system prior to this election. However, since VIA thought voters would be less likely to support a tax increase for transit at a later date if even one of the Mayor's measures passed, it decided to present its measure during the election that the Mayor presented his measures.

In summary, political factors discouraged cooperation between Mayor Peak, along with members of the City Council, and VIA. The failure of the Mayor

and VIA to even coordinate a voter turnout effort demonstrates the lack of cooperation between them. Given that low voter turnout was projected, both the Mayor and VIA would have benefited from a coordinated voter turnout effort.

BACKGROUND: THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD IT

The highway and road system in Bexar County seems quite extensive. Two highway loops exist which encompass San Antonio and approximately 12 major spokes connect with these loops and with inner parts of San Antonio, including the downtown area. Some areas of congestion currently exist, mostly around the northern parts of both loops, particularly at interchanges with some of the spoke highways, as well as along some of the northern spokes. No HOV lanes currently exist in Bexar County. The Texas Department of Transportation is proceeding with the design of one HOV lane between an eastern point on the inner loop and downtown San Antonio.

According to the results in three surveys commissioned by VIA, residents in Bexar County did not view highway congestion and transportation as being a critical problem. Two of these surveys were conducted in the last quarter of 1999 and the second survey was conducted in January of 2000. The relevant survey findings are identified below.

- One question asked respondents to select the first and second most important issues facing people in Bexar County from a randomized list of seven factors: a) state and local taxes; b) transportation; c) education; d) health care; e) crime and drugs; f) water; and g) growth. Transportation received significantly fewer mentions (9%) than all the listed issues except growth. Of the five issues above transportation, water received the fewest mentions (23%).
- When asked whether their current commute trip was “pleasant,” “acceptable, but could be improved,” or “frustrating, stressful, and annoying,” 17% said it was frustrating, 54% said it was acceptable and 24% said it was pleasant
- Consistent with the above finding, 81% of respondents indicated that their current commute time was either “very reasonable” (30%) or “somewhat reasonable” (51%).

Objective data on commute times seems consistent with the above survey results on highway congestion perceptions. Approximately 90% of area drivers have a commute time of less than 30 minutes (*San Antonio Express News*,

April 16, 2000). This commute time seems reasonably short for a community with over one million residents.

Given the above results indicating that transportation and highway congestion was not perceived as being a high priority problem, it is not surprising that respondents in the January, 2000 survey did not demonstrate strong support for a permanent 1/4-cent sales tax increase to fund a comprehensive light rail system. When asked whether they would vote for or against authorizing a 1/4-cent increase in the sales tax for a light rail system, 49% indicated they would support the measure, 41% opposed it and 10% were unsure of whether they would support it. Respondents also were presented with two 1/8-cent sales tax measures, one involving a human development fund for services ranging from early childhood development to adult job training and the second involving the repair and improvement of local streets and roads. When asked to select which one of these three measures they would vote against if they had to vote against just one of them, 49% of the sample selected the light rail measure compared to 22% for the human development fund and 20% for the road improvement measure.

THE TRANSIT PACKAGE AND THE PROCESS USED TO DETERMINE IT

Description of the 2000 Transit Package

The package consisted of a 53.5-mile light rail system. This system included three lines with central transfer points from each of the lines to the other two lines. Approximately 70% of the system would share streets with automobile traffic with the remainder operating on exclusive rights-of-way. Both the proposed routes and stations were identified in materials produced by VIA, although passage of the measure would not have committed VIA to these routes.⁴ Based upon the VIA maps, the routes appeared to provide better availability to the northern and southern portions of the county and city than to the eastern and western portions. All three lines appeared to have more miles running in a northern-southern direction than in an eastern-western direction. In addition, northern connections existed with both of the highway loops and a southern connection existed with the inner highway loop. However, no eastern or western connections existed with either of the two highway loops. Unlike some other cases studied, which included the authorization of some sort of

⁴ The language in the ballot measure, which apparently was mandated by the state legislature, referred only to a 1/4-cent increase in the sales tax to fund an “advanced transportation” system. The ballot measure made no specific mention of light rail, let alone the magnitude of the system and its routes.

oversight process with citizen input, no oversight process was identified in the ballot language with the San Antonio measure.

The capital costs of the 53.5-mile light rail system were estimated to be \$1.428 billion in FY 2000 dollars. VIA decided to use a pay-as-you go system rather than using debt financing. It thought this would appeal to voters and even identified this financing method in one of their television ads. At the same time, this method of financing lengthened the construction process. Slightly less than half of the 53.5-mile light rail system was scheduled for completion by 2013, with the remainder scheduled for completion by 2025.

Although most aspects of the plan identified above were specified, one potentially important aspect was not specified. VIA had not done sufficient detailed planning to know whether automobile carrying capacity would be reduced on the roadways with a light rail line. VIA also could not identify the period of time that normal traffic would be disrupted on these roadways during construction.

Process Used to Determine the Transit Package

To start with a broad description of the process, VIA commissioned a citizen task force to propose some public transportation recommendations needed by 2025. One of the recommendations of this task force involved a “fixed guideway” system, with light rail being one example of such a system. It proposed a 1/4-cent sales tax increase to fund this system. Since the remaining recommendations of the task force could be implemented without a sales tax increase, VIA focused on developing the specifics of a light rail system to be funded by the proposed sales tax increase. Although the task force recommended an incremental approach with a 28-mile “starter” fixed guideway system, VIA decided to proceed with a more comprehensive system that was almost twice the size of the system recommended by the task force. This process is described in more detail in the remainder of this section.

The citizen task force, labeled the Transit 2025 Vision Task Force, consisted of 21 citizens. The group’s tasks were to examine the projected county environment in 2025 and recommend the directions, initiatives and investments required to produce the public transportation capabilities needed. The task force began its work in early 1998 and produced a report at the end of July of the same year.

The importance of task force independence from VIA was stated in the group’s final report. VIA’s role was to provide administrative support and data when requested and review proposed budgets. Although the Chair of the task force was selected by VIA, the remaining members were selected by the Chair.

These members were strictly unpaid volunteers. A contractor with transportation planning expertise and experience was selected by the task force.

The task force held 11 meetings with the public to obtain their input. The first round of meetings was held toward the beginning of the process. These meetings were rather unstructured and unfocused in the sense that the task force did not present transportation solutions being considered. Recommendations being considered by the task force were presented and public reaction to these options was elicited during the second round of meetings held toward the end of the process.

The final report of the Transit 2025 Vision Task Force included the group's recommendations. Since VIA's transit package presented to voters differed from the task force's recommendations, it is important to identify the primary recommendations of the task force.

- VIA should exploit “an opportunity to promote a better image, become more of a visible, active partner in the community planning structure, and create a broader awareness of how transportation can often enhance the outcome of both public and private initiative” (p.1-6). This recommendation was based on an assessment that, except for times when VIA receives critical scrutiny, it tends to be invisible in the community.
- VIA should “modernize and expand the capabilities of its current fleet of buses, growing as much as 10-15% in number and diversifying much more in bus sizes” (p. 1-7).
- “Investments in fixed guideway systems should be pursued to establish a rapid, high-capacity movement capability between major activity centers and/or population concentrations within VIA's service area” (p. 1-7).

The task force recommended using an incremental approach with this fixed guideway system. “A ‘starter system’ of sufficient magnitude to demonstrate benefits as well as costs should be established prior to committing to further expansion, but should be designed as part of a broader fixed guideway network that could, over time, meet concentrated needs throughout the service area” (p. 1-8). They suggested that the starter system be approximately 28 miles.

Once the Transit 2025 Vision Task Force completed its report, VIA needed to develop an implementation plan for the fixed guideway recommendation along with determining how to modify the plan. The primary modification was to start with a 53.5-mile system rather than the 28-mile starter system recommended by the task force. When asked about the reasoning for this

modification, VIA's Director of Planning attributed the difference in the two recommendations to lower estimates of construction costs used by VIA than by the task force. Apparently, VIA's decision on the number of miles involved in the system was based primarily on what they thought they could afford with a 1/4-cent sales tax increase.

Voter reaction, political input, or even business community input, apparently was not systematically included in VIA's decision-making process. For example, survey research was not used to help develop the details of VIA's transportation package. As another example, the lead political consultant indicated that retail institutions located on a street targeted for a light rail line were not sufficiently involved in the decision making and outreach process. Even VIA representatives indicated that insufficient time and effort was devoted to systematic public outreach and coalition building. In addition, elected officials in other communities studied have played an important role in developing a transit and funding package likely to be acceptable to voters. This, also, did not occur in San Antonio.

A former mayor was selected to lead the campaign about three months before the election. His role consisted primarily of fundraising, hiring a political consultant, and coordinating the communications campaign. He indicated in an interview that he made some suggestions to VIA to modify their package to make it more politically acceptable, such as including a sunset date, establishing a citizen accountability group, and using the incremental approach recommended by the vision task force. VIA did accept the citizen accountability group concept toward the end of April. However, this was done at a time and in a manner that may have done more harm than good. It was done only after a good deal of criticism and publicity. Thus, VIA's belated response appeared to be politically motivated.

COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN USED BY PROPONENTS

Timing of Start of Campaign

The political consultants were not hired until the end of February, which was only a little over two months prior to Election Day. Since they had no prior experience with transit ballot measures, they had an insufficient amount of time to conduct research and then use the results of this research to develop a communications approach, while also preparing to effectively respond to opposition.

The Campaign Budget

The fundraising efforts were led by a former mayor and the ballot measure also was endorsed by most of the Chambers of Commerce in Bexar County. These

factors suggest that fundraising was likely to be reasonably successful. However, the efforts, which raised approximately \$300,000, were not successful by virtually any reasonable standard. For example, proponents of a measure passed in November 1999 to increase hotel and car rental taxes to pay for a new arena raised over \$1 million.

The lack of fundraising success suggests that most local Chambers of Commerce, along with the business community, generally were less than enthusiastic supporters of the measure. This conclusion is supported by assessments of people interviewed. Apparently, many organizations in the business community did not perceive developing a comprehensive light rail system as being a high priority item requiring immediate attention.

Advertising

Approximately \$100,000 was spent on advertising. Most of this was spent on television with the remainder being spent on radio advertising. No direct mail advertising was used. The consultant wanted to use direct mail advertising to provide more detailed and descriptive information to complement the strictly theme-based television advertising. However, the budget was not large enough to use both direct mail and television advertising.

Two different television ads were used, one in English and the other in Spanish.

The ad in English had three themes – access, value, and choice. Access meant that it provided access to work, schools, shopping, and entertainment. Value meant that it was pay-as-you go with no bond debt and was less expensive than freeway construction. Choice meant that one would not need to sit in traffic, which would result in cleaner air. With the exception of a very short visual of highway congestion, the visuals were of light rail cars moving quickly. The political consultant was somewhat critical of this ad in his interview. Television ads in other communities, such as Denver and Phoenix, seemed to be more effective in their ability to emotionally link light rail to the problem of highway congestion.

The Spanish language ad involved Henry Cisneros endorsing the measure. He is a former mayor of San Antonio who is very popular with many Hispanics in Bexar County. However, since he also had rather high negative ratings with Anglo survey respondents, this ad was placed only on Spanish-speaking television stations. With the exception of a very short visual of light rail cars moving quickly, the visual component consisted of showing Mr. Cisneros sitting at a desk. Mr. Cisneros stated that the light rail would travel from downtown to the west side of the city, with no mention of the remaining routes

and access points. The themes of choice and access also were used in this ad, although, unlike the English-speaking ad, these themes were not described. This ad also identified two Hispanic congressmen who supported the measure.

The radio advertising was very similar to the television advertising. Again, two different ads were used, one in English and the other in Spanish. The television scripts provided the foundation for the radio ads although additions were included since the radio ads were 60 seconds in length compared to a time of 30 seconds with the television ads.

Although it technically was not advertising, VIA developed a four-page information piece, consisting of a lot of text along with maps of each of the tree light rail lines. This information piece was an insert in the *San Antonio Express News* on two different dates prior to the election and it also was distributed at many public outreach meetings organized by VIA. According to this piece, highway congestion would get much worse by 2025, and that more highways are at best, part of the solution that may backfire by encouraging more users. It also stressed choice and stated that light rail would lessen air pollution and highway congestion, citing some supportive statistics on the high percentage of light rail riders in other communities who previously were drivers. Although no individuals who endorsed the measure were mentioned, this piece did identify business, labor, and environmental organizations that supported the measure. No mention was made of the costs of the proposed light rail system, nor was mention made of the possibility of federal funding.

Publicity Efforts

Given that proponents knew they had insufficient funding to communicate most aspects of their message through advertising, they might have been expected to use an aggressive publicity generation campaign. However, this aggressive campaign was not undertaken. Proponents acknowledged that they held very few media events. They did issue some press releases and a media kit. However, two representatives from the *Express-News* indicated that proponents did not make concerted efforts to contact them and encourage the newspaper to provide frequent news coverage.

Proponents did appear to have a few information objectives to communicate through the news media. First, since insufficient funding existed to provide details of the plan through direct mail advertising, proponents wanted to provide the details through the news media. Maps identifying the light rail routes and the general time frames for the four phases of construction did appear repeatedly in the *Express News*. Second, they attempted to attack the credibility of a lead opponent and his organization, the Texas Public Policy Foundation, by questioning the validity of their role in the campaign as a

nonprofit organization. Third, they encouraged the media to disclose the results of an aforementioned survey, which VIA thought demonstrated a positive voter reaction. However, this decision may have been counterproductive as a lead opponent was quoted as correctly saying that the results were not as positive as those typically found in other communities.

Proponents did receive editorial support from the *Express News*, although only a few supportive editorials were written. One columnist also wrote a few supportive columns. At the same time, two *Express News* columnists expressed strong criticism of VIA and the measure in a series of columns.

Voter Research Conducted

Both VIA and the political consultants used by proponents conducted a significant amount of survey research. VIA had three surveys conducted within a year of the election. The first one was conducted in July and August of 1999, the second one in November of 1999, and the last one in January of 2000. They also commissioned two focus groups in September and October of 1999. The research conducted by VIA focused on the degree of satisfaction with the transportation system, attitudes towards different modes of transportation, and reactions to a large number of positive arguments about light rail and a few negative arguments. The results with the January 2000 study were discussed in the previous background section on the transportation system and voter attitudes towards it. The results of the two 1999 surveys will be discussed in the outcomes evaluation section.

Three surveys were commissioned by the campaign committee and political consultants during March and April of 2000. These were largely tracking studies that measured reaction to both the ballot measure, and to a large number of supporting arguments and a few opposing ones. The results of the second of these three studies, along with proponents' reaction to this study, is worthy of mention. In this second tracking survey, conducted during the last week of March, only 37% of respondents who had seen, heard, or read something about the measure supported it. This study also concluded that low turnout would reduce the chances of success. Particularly since proponents either knew, or should have known, they probably did not have the funds to use an intensive advertising campaign to significantly increase the supporting percentage, they might have considered an aggressive approach with the media, along with an aggressive get-out-the-vote effort. These actions were not taken. In fact, according to one of the leading proponents, these research results tended to demoralize the proponents.

COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN USED BY OPPONENTS

Identity of Opposition

Although different organizations were involved in the opposition, the Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF) seemed to lead the opposition. The president of this organization was the opponent most frequently quoted in the *Express News*. This person also appeared at numerous outreach meetings organized by VIA, and he frequently contacted the *Express News* in attempts to obtain news coverage of various issues.

The TPPF is a nonprofit research institution with a free market and limited government philosophy. The research usually, if not always, advocates positions on public policy issues including transportation. It has published a number of articles that are highly critical of proposed and current light rail systems in Texas.

In addition to the TPPF, a local chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), a local taxpayer association, and the North San Antonio Chamber of Commerce actively opposed the measure.

Opposition Arguments

As is typically the case, opponents argued that light rail is a costly system that will have little if any impact on highway congestion because very few drivers will switch to light rail. They also argued that the costs would be significantly higher than VIA's estimates. These arguments were presented using numbers and statistics with light rail systems throughout the country and the sources of the data usually were identified, often through footnotes.

In addition to the basic arguments identified above, opponents argued that construction of light rail on city streets would seriously endanger small businesses located on these streets by disrupting access for a lengthy period of time and they also stressed that the tax was permanent with no sunset date. They also argued that the plan was vague, subject to change, and presented before sufficient studies and thinking had taken place.

To counter charges that they were strictly rejectionists, the opponents did offer some alternative solutions to light rail. One solution was highway expansion. In addition, since they seemed to realize that multimodal solutions might be popular with the public, they also recommended use of a busway/HOV system.

Along with criticizing light rail and offering general alternative solutions, opponents attacked the credibility and management abilities of VIA. The TPPF had accused VIA of financial mismanagement in 1997 when VIA increased bus fares. These criticisms received a significant amount of media attention

and also may have been a partial basis for the recommendation of the Transit 2025 Vision Task Force that VIA needed to try to improve their public image. These criticisms were resurrected during the 2000 campaign and two additional criticisms, discussed below, were added.

A significant criticism of VIA involved the use of public funds for political purposes. In conjunction with the Texas Justice Foundation, LULAC sued VIA for the misuse of public funds and this lawsuit received significant coverage in the news media during the campaign. The lawsuit was based both on an aforementioned survey financed by VIA in January, and on information appearing in movie theatres generated and financed by VIA. LULAC claimed that the survey provided a basis for the proponents' campaign and should have been financed from the campaign budget. LULAC claimed that the information provided by VIA was advertising that should also have been financed from the campaign budget.

The second major additional criticism suggested that VIA presented biased and incorrect information. Using VIA documents, they demonstrated that VIA lowered the capital costs of constructing a light rail system over time. Opponents made no attempt to explain the basis for the cost reductions, even though legitimate reasons can exist for these reductions. They also argued that VIA overestimated population growth to make a stronger case for light rail. In an interview, a representative from the *Express News* provided two different versions of one of VIA's information pieces with two different population growth estimates. This discrepancy demonstrates that VIA did initially overestimate population growth.

Three general characteristics of the arguments used by opponents should be identified. First, they conducted a time consuming and detailed analysis of VIA documents to try to discover discrepancies. Second, opponents in San Antonio adjusted their tactics in response to proponents' criticisms of opponents in prior recent campaigns in other communities. For example, proponents in other communities have criticized opponents as not offering a viable alternative to the transit package in the ballot measure and this criticism has been reasonable in other communities. Opponents in San Antonio did propose alternative solutions, although they were not very specific. Third, since the lawsuit against VIA for using public funds for political purposes seemed to be a successful tactic, particularly in generating unfavorable publicity, this tactic probably will be used by opponents in future campaigns unless transit agencies are very conservative in their use of public funds.

Means of Communication Used

Since opponents raised approximately \$50,000, they were able to do some advertising, which consisted of five billboards. However, they relied largely on free media, particularly talk show radio and the *Express News*, to communicate their arguments. As discussed in the next section, they were successful in communicating their message through these media.

Both the talk show radio stations and a couple of newspaper columnists probably would have opposed the measure even if no organized opposition existed. However, the opposition was effective in providing these sources with both their arguments and the information supporting these arguments. One of the columnists wrote approximately eight columns, appearing on the third page of the newspaper, which were highly critical of VIA and the transit measure. One of these columns focused on the ineffectiveness of light rail and the other ones questioned the credibility of VIA. The lawsuit and the use of public funds for the survey and the information pieces in the movie theatres were mentioned in at least three columns. A second columnist wrote about three or four columns. These focused on the vagueness of the plan and also were critical of VIA's management abilities.

NEWS COVERAGE

The coverage of VIA and the ballot measure in newspaper editorials and columns has been discussed previously. However, the coverage in the news section of the *Express News* has not been discussed previously.

The coverage was quite extensive. At least twenty articles were devoted to the measure and transit, with the majority of these appearing in April. Although these articles focused on news dimensions of the issue and did not advocate a position, a number of the articles focused on issues that probably hurt the measure. The lawsuit against VIA was the most common topic, with six articles devoted to it. The opposition of the North San Antonio Chamber of Commerce and suburban mayors, combined with no more than lukewarm support of the San Antonio City Council and Mayor, was the focus of three or four articles. Another article focused on VIA revising its estimate of population growth, another addressed the uncertainty of VIA's cost estimates, and still another one focused on the lack of specificity of the plan.

Only four or five articles focused on issues that might have helped VIA's measure. One of them questioned whether the TPPF's role in the campaign was consistent with its mission as a nonprofit research institution. Four other articles discussed light rail systems in San Diego, Denver, Phoenix, and Dallas. Each of these articles tended to emphasize the popularity of these systems.

EVALUATION

When a ballot measure is defeated by a large margin, no single explanation usually can be advanced for the defeat. Such is the case with VIA's measure. The main reasons for the measure's defeat are summarized below.

Much of the Public was not Dissatisfied with Traffic Congestion

In a community suspicious of tax increases, obtaining support for a tax increase, particularly one without an expiration date is difficult unless voters attach high priority to the problem that the tax will hopefully lessen. As discussed previously in a background section toward the beginning of this chapter, highway congestion was not perceived as a significant problem in San Antonio and Bexar County in 2000.

Limited Political and Voter Input in the Development of the Transportation Package

Even when the public does view traffic congestion as a significant problem, many other communities have been unsuccessful in their first attempt to seek voter approval of a tax increase to fund construction of a light rail system. Given this difficulty, it is important to integrate public attitudes and political expertise and involvement into the planning process used to develop the transportation package. No elected officials were selected to serve on the Transit 2025 Vision Task Force and VIA made little attempt to obtain input from elected officials in refining the framework developed by the task force. The task force held about five or six public meeting to obtain feedback to their proposals. By itself, this process is unlikely to predict voter reaction to critical specific issues involved in developing a transportation and funding package to be placed on a ballot measure. As mentioned previously, VIA commissioned some systematic voter research in the latter part of 1999. However, this research did not focus on important and specific issues involved in developing the transportation package. For example, this research did not compare respondent reaction to a starter system with a specific sunset date to the comprehensive system without such a date.

An Apparent Inability to Use the Experience of Other Communities in Developing a Transportation Package

A systematic comparison of characteristics of transportation packages to the percentage of votes supporting a package across communities is useful in developing a package that voters are likely to approve. For example, almost all of the successful cases studied in our research involved a combination of light rail with bus and/or highway capacity improvements and also involved a sunset date. Some unsuccessful ballot measures also have involved a sunset

date and a multimodal transportation package. Thus, the use of a multimodal package and a reasonable sunset date is not a *sufficient* combination for success. However, this combination may be a *necessary* combination for success. VIA's measure did not fulfill either of these two characteristics.

Lack of a Strong and Enthusiastic Coalition

All successful cases have been enthusiastically supported by important local elected officials, often from both major political parties, and also by important segments of the business community. Such a coalition is useful in fundraising, establishing credibility, and neutralizing opposition. VIA did have the support of two prior mayors, a couple of city council members, and some of the local Chambers of Commerce. However, Mayor Peak and most of the city council members remained neutral. In addition, based on the limited success with fundraising, the business community did not view passage of VIA's ballot measure as a high priority.

The public's attitude towards the transportation system and traffic congestion made it difficult for VIA to obtain the enthusiastic support of elected officials and the business community. Elected officials tend to focus on issues perceived as being high priority problems by a significant portion of the public. The research results previously cited indicated that traffic congestion was not perceived by the majority of the public as a high priority problem. Although no surveys were conducted within the business community, their attitudes toward traffic congestion probably were consistent with those of respondents surveyed.

A significant amount of time often is needed to build a broad and enthusiastic coalition, particularly with the business community, which is far from a homogeneous group. According to VIA representatives interviewed, they did not devote sufficient time to community outreach. In hindsight, they acknowledged that they should not have presented their ballot measure in an election less than two years after the Transit 2025 Vision Task Force completed their report. However, Mayor Peak's decision to present his sales tax increase package to the voters in May of 2000 did pressure VIA to act quickly.

Insufficient Time to Develop an Effective Communications Campaign

Particularly since VIA had no prior experience with an advanced transit ballot measure and since neither the political consultants hired nor the campaign chairpeople had any experience with transit, it was important for campaign planning to start well in advance of the actual election. Unfortunately, campaign planning did not begin until February of 2000, which was about three months before the election.

The lack of sufficient planning time manifested itself in a number of ways. First, the television advertising appeared to be less effective than the advertising used in other recent successful campaigns, such as in Phoenix and Denver. Neither the English- nor Spanish-language versions focused on the problems that light rail would solve, particularly with any visuals, and neither ad did much to attract attention. Second, proponents did not appear to understand the need to have an energetic and proactive media approach. This approach was needed because they did not raise sufficient funds to utilize an intensive advertising campaign. Third, even though the opposition from the TPPF should have been expected, since it had been critical of VIA in the past and also had opposed prior light rail measures in Texas, proponents did not seem sufficiently prepared to effectively counter many of the TPPF's criticisms.

Nature and Effectiveness of Opposition

In some other campaigns, opposition has been led and organized by citizen groups. This was not the situation in San Antonio. The TPPF had the time and expertise to provide effective opposition.

As an example of the time commitment, VIA held well over 100 public meetings during the campaign and they estimated that the President of the TPPF attended approximately 75% of these meetings. The President of the TPPF also kept VIA quite busy by bombarding it with what VIA representatives referred to as "daily public information access requests."

The TPPF also had people with knowledge of light rail systems in Texas and throughout the country write position papers based on analysis and research. For example, the TPPF had one or more people carefully analyze a lengthy System 2025 Development Plan prepared by consultants for discrepancies and they were able to find some discrepancies.

CONCLUSION

Since less than 10% of those registered actually voted in the special election, caution should be used in drawing conclusions from the very large margin of defeat of VIA's measure. In fact, the results of one of the surveys commissioned by the campaign committee suggest that the election results may have underestimated public support for light rail. This survey concluded that registered voters likely to support VIA's measure were *less* likely to actually vote in a special election than those likely to oppose the measure. At the same time, although the margin of defeat probably would have been reduced in a general election with higher voter turnout, it is unlikely that VIA's measure would have passed even in such an election.

Most of the lessons learned from the defeat of VIA's measure actually are lessons that could have been learned from prior cases. Other communities, which have made no prior attempt to obtain voter approval for a tax increase to fund light rail, need to appreciate the difficulty in generating voter support for such a ballot measure on their first attempt. Systematically investigating the experiences of other communities with these ballot measures can significantly increase the chances of success in a first attempt. VIA representatives acknowledged that they could have done more of this investigation.

Some new lessons can be learned from this case. First, it demonstrates that opponents are adjusting their tactics over time. This seems to be the first instance in which a lawsuit has been used to discourage a transit agency from engaging in a public information campaign. Given the success of this tactic in generating negative publicity in San Antonio, it probably will be employed in other communities in the future unless transit agencies are very careful about using these campaigns. In addition, the opposition in San Antonio seemed to realize the importance of suggesting alternatives to the ballot measure. Second, this case demonstrates the importance of timing. VIA went forward with a ballot measure before the public perceived traffic congestion as a high priority problem.

APPROVAL OF A COMPREHENSIVE TRANSIT PACKAGE BY THE CITY OF PHOENIX

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In March of 2000, voters in the city of Phoenix voted by a margin of 65% to 35% to increase the sales tax by .004 for a period of 20 years, with the revenue dedicated solely to transit improvements. The package included major expansion of local bus, express bus, and dial-a-ride service, along with construction of approximately 24 miles of light rail. The total cost of the transit package was estimated to be approximately \$5 billion.

Similar to most other cases studied, in which voters have approved funding for major increases in transit spending, Phoenix did not succeed on their first attempt. The city did not succeed until their fourth attempt, having first failed by a large margin in 1989, then by a narrower loss in 1994, followed by a third loss of only 122 votes in 1997. Even though the 1997 measure lost by a very small margin, Phoenix made some important changes in both the 2000 transportation package and the communications campaign used to obtain voter approval of this package.

Unlike the 1997 ballot measure, the 2000 measure *explicitly* included light rail in the package. At the same time, to neutralize opposition, which was expected to focus on light rail, significantly less than 50% of the funding provided was devoted to light rail, with the remainder allocated to other transit improvements. An incremental, rather than a comprehensive, light rail system was required once the decision was made to have less than 50% of the funds devoted to light rail. Thus, this case demonstrates that a community with no existing light rail experience, may be more likely to support a new tax to fund light rail when it a) is only part of the transportation package, and b) is an incremental, rather than a comprehensive, system.

Unlike the 1997 communications campaign, the 2000 campaign was very aggressive and well funded. Its most notable features were a) using a variety of media to communicate a large number of communication objectives, b) aggressively criticizing the opposition, largely through attacking the credibility of the individuals leading the opposition, and c) utilizing a proactive approach with the newspaper and talk show radio stations to try to influence the issues discussed in these sources rather than allowing the opposition to influence the issues covered by these sources.

BACKGROUND: GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Phoenix is in Maricopa County, a very large county with an area of 10,000 square miles. The population of both Phoenix and the remainder of the County has been growing at a rapid rate and this growth rate is projected to continue. For example, the population in Phoenix increased by 21.3% from 1990 to 1998 and the growth rate in the rest of the County is even higher than in Phoenix.

Phoenix is the largest city in the County, with a population of over 1.2 million people. Phoenix's share of the County's population currently is approximately 45% and this share is decreasing. Mesa, Tempe, Scottsdale, and Glendale are among the larger remaining cities in the County with Tempe, Scottsdale, and Glendale all being directly adjacent to Phoenix.

Skip Rimsza, the current mayor of Phoenix, is serving his second term in office, having been reelected in 1998. He is a Republican, as is the current Governor, Jane Hull, who replaced Fife Symington when he resigned in 1997. Mayor Rimsza played important, but different, roles in the 1997 and 2000 transit measures. These roles will be discussed later in the chapter. Fife Symington also played a critical role in the defeat of the 1997 measure, as he orchestrated some last minute opposition to the measure that is discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Given the small margin of defeat of the 1997 measure, it probably would have passed if Fife Symington had not orchestrated this opposition.

BACKGROUND: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM AND PRIOR TRANSPORTATION VOTES

Prior to the 2000 election, Phoenix's transit system was inferior to systems in similarly sized cities. Of cities in the United States, Phoenix had the seventh largest population, while it had fewer buses than 34 other cities. Phoenix had no Sunday bus service and bus service ended at 8:00 P.M. on the remaining six days of the week. It also had no dedicated funding source for transit and no light rail lines had been authorized, let alone started.

In a 1985 countywide election, approximately 70% of voters approved a highway construction and expansion measure involving a .005 sales tax, lasting for 20 years. The planned highway improvements were close to completion, but were ongoing during the 2000 transit campaign. This 1985 measure also dedicated \$5 million a year for a regional public transportation authority (RPTA). The RPTA was charged with developing a long-range transit plan for Maricopa County.

A plan was developed by the RPTA in conjunction with consulting firms and with very little public input. The most expensive element in the plan was a

103-mile light rail system. To fund this plan, a .005 sales tax, with no sunset date, was presented to county voters for approval in 1989. This measure was rejected by a margin of 40% to 60%.

A combination of a) a revenue shortfall in an economic downturn, b) increased land acquisition costs due to real estate speculation on highway routes announced for construction, and c) increased highway construction costs in the early 1990s. As a result of these factors, it was estimated that original highway plans could not be completed with the sales tax approved in 1985. Rather than scaling back and/or slowing the rate of highway construction, a decision was made to ask county voters to approve an additional .005 increase in the sales tax. It also was determined, apparently without any research, that voters would be more inclined to approve a balanced transportation package, involving transit as well as highway improvements. Accordingly, half of the tax increase was devoted to highways and half to transit. This county-level measure was defeated, with 46% of votes in favor of the measure.

In both the 1989 and 1994 county-level elections, Tempe was the only city in which a majority of voters supported the tax increases. Accordingly, decision makers in Tempe abandoned the county-level approach and presented a city-level transit funding measure to voters involving a .005 sales tax with no sunset date. This measure, which included funding for light rail, was approved by voters in 1996.

Encouraged by Tempe's success, Phoenix presented a transit ballot measure to city voters in 1997. This measure involved a .005 sales tax increase with no sunset date. The money was to be used largely for improvements in both local and express bus services, along with improvements in dial-a-ride service. Light rail was handled in an unusual manner in this package. Light rail construction would not begin prior to 2007. After this year, an unspecified amount of the revenue could have been spent on light rail construction if both a Citizens' Transit Committee and the City Council approved the authorization of revenue for this construction. Based upon both survey results, with 70% of respondents supporting the measure, and the results of early mail-in voting, with 60% approval, the consultants hired by the proponents decided to use a stealth campaign. However, votes cast on Election Day ran 60% against the measure and it was defeated by a total of 122 votes out of 111,000 votes cast. Two factors happened late in the campaign which may have caused later voters to be significantly less supportive than early voters. First, opponents spent at least \$30,000 on radio advertising during the last two weeks of the election. Second, about a week before the election, the Republican Governor, Fife Symington, directed both the Director of the Arizona Department of Transportation and the Chief of the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality to hold a well-

publicized press conference at which they both encouraged a no vote. Symington resigned from office later that same day after being convicted on seven charges of bank fraud. Symington's opposition was somewhat surprising, as the Mayor of Phoenix, Skip Rimsza, also is a member of the Republican Party. Additional aspects of the 1997 transit package and campaign will be integrated into a discussion of the transit package and communications campaign used in 2000.

THE TRANSIT PACKAGE AND THE PROCESS USED TO DETERMINE IT

General Description of the 2000 Transit Package, Including Differences Between it and the 1997 Package

Proponents thought that two characteristics of the 1997 transit package needed to be more clearly specified to lessen voter distrust and confusion. First, unlike 1997, the amount of money earmarked for light rail was specified in the 2000 measure. Second, since it was difficult for voters to understand how a specific budget with designated amounts to different components could exist without a sunset date, such a date was included with the 2000 package.

Including both a sunset date and revenue earmarked for light rail in the 2000 package, along with reducing the sales tax increase from .005 to .004, required a scaling back of the bus components from the level involved in the 1997 package.

Specific Description of the 2000 Transit Package

The transit package included four basic elements.

- **Expansion of basic or local bus service.** Expansion would take place largely through the purchase of 150 additional vehicles, all operating with natural gas, with 100 vehicles being purchased during the first five years. New routes were to be added, along with earlier start times in the morning, later ending times in the evening, Sunday service, and reduced intervals between buses on routes. A total of \$2.515 billion, or 52% of the program total was presented for this component.
- **Construction of approximately 24 miles of light rail lines.** This was described as a surface level system that would be constructed on both freeways and city streets. Approximately 17 miles were scheduled to be completed by 2010 along a designated route. The route for the remaining seven miles was not specified. A total of \$1.654 billion, or 34% of the program total, was presented for this component.

- **Expansion of dial-a-ride service.** This expansion also was to be implemented largely through a fleet increase from 60 to 100 vehicles. Additional hours were promised and \$336 million, or 6% of the program total, was the cost presented for this component.
- **Expansion of express bus service.** This expansion also relied on a fleet increase, although the number of additional vehicles purchased was not identified in either a press kit or in a description of the plan mailed to all residents. The description mailed to residents included a map and mentioned hours of operation and frequency of service. Five different routes were proposed, each of which either would run directly to downtown or connect with a downtown express route. Since the routes on the map were virtually identical to the map for the proposed light rail system, the express service apparently would have been phased down once the light rail system was in place. The figure presented for this component was \$160 million, or 4% of the program total.

Approximately 3% was allocated to “support services.” Two other small components, each involving only 1% of the program total, were identified in the description sent to residents. One involved a demonstration limited stop service along two streets, both in the northern part of the city. The other involved a demonstration neighborhood mini-bus service that would connect people to local bus routes. The two locations identified for this service were both in the southeast portion of the city.

Description of People and Institutions Responsible for Developing the Plan

According to a mailer sent to residents by the city, the plan was developed by a “26-member citizens’ transit committee with the support of the Mayor and City Council.” In reality, the Mayor did significantly more than “support” this committee. He selected the members. This committee, which normally was termed the Citizens Steering Committee, was chaired by a councilwoman with a strong interest in transit. The business community had seven representatives on this committee, one of them the CEO of the Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce. Approximately nine members of the committee were identified as either citizens or officers of neighborhood associations and they seem to have been selected to provide both geographic and ethnic heterogeneity. According to opponents interviewed, people who were opposed to light rail specifically requested to be on the committee but were not selected. This claim was disputed by a proponent who said that one or two people on the committee were opposed to light rail. Regardless of who is correct in this dispute, Mayor

Rimsza was very enthusiastic about light rail at this point in time and his enthusiasm was shared by the Phoenix Public Transit Department (PPTD), the Chamber, and the city manager's office. He did not try to achieve any meaningful balance within the committee in terms of attitudes towards light rail.

To summarize the above, the people and institutions most responsible for the 2000 transit measure were 1) Mayor Rimsza, 2) an associate city manager heavily involved in transportation planning, 3) representatives from the business community through the Chamber of Commerce, 4) the city council, and 5) the PPTD. The package involved political considerations meant to both build a broad coalition and have a package acceptable to voters, and also involved input from transit planners. The process used to develop the transit package by these different people and institutions is described in the following paragraphs.

Description of the Planning and Decision Making Process

One of the starting points involved establishing a budget parameter for the package and a compromise was made here. The Chamber and the PPTD preferred a .005 sales tax rate increase, as in the 1997 election. Given the very small margin of defeat in 1997, combined with what was perceived as a poor communications campaign and the last minute opposition orchestrated by a Governor who no longer was in office, they believed that the sales tax rate did not need to be reduced as long as a sunset date was introduced. Mayor Rimsza had wanted an increase of .0025 in 1997 and this also was his starting position with the 2000 package. Due to a significant increase in the Mayor's enthusiasm for light rail, he realized that his preferred tax level of .0025 was not sufficient to fund both an adequate light rail system and the bus improvements that were needed.⁵ Fortunately, a .004 sales tax that was used to finance the baseball stadium was due to expire at the same time that a transit sales tax would start. Thus, the mayor apparently agreed to a .004 sales tax because it did not involve a net increase in the sales tax rate.

Once Mayor Rimsza became enthusiastic about light rail, a consensus existed to fund both significant improvements in local bus service and construction of light rail lines in the transit package. The size of the local bus fleet was inadequate by any standard. In addition, given the comparative costs of increasing the fleet of buses vs. light rail construction, it was easier to provide

⁵ To further describe Mayor Rimsza's changing view towards light rail, he apparently did not want to have light rail included in the 1997 package while he wanted light rail to be approximately 75% of the package in 2000.

geographical equity with the bus component than with the light rail component. A map sent to residents with the proposed improvements in local bus service did, in fact, show improvements throughout the entire city. People on the steering committee became even more enthusiastic about light rail after traveling to Portland and other cities with modern light rail systems. In addition, light rail received the highest importance ratings of 11 transit options presented in residential surveys conducted for the Citizens Steering Committee.

Another strategic decision involved the percentages to spend on the two major components of the package, which were light rail and basic bus service. According to the Chair of the Citizens Steering Committee, general agreement existed within the committee that the percentage should be significantly higher for local bus service than for light rail. A consensus existed that the bus system was weak and needed significant capacity expansion with expanded hours, expanded routes, increased frequency, and Sunday service. Allocating significantly more funding to local bus service than to light rail also was effective in neutralizing opposition. Although the light rail component was not well defined in the 1997 election, opponents focused their criticism on this element. This was their focus because they were united in their opposition to light rail but were not united in their opposition to expansion of local bus service. In addition, published research, by such people as Richmond (1998, 1999) and Pickrell (1990) has focused on rail systems and provided statistics that can be used by opponents in arguing that rail is inefficient and ineffective. Opponents argued that the light rail improvements and the local bus improvements should have been included in a separate ballot measure. This position demonstrates that opponents realized the bundling of light rail with local bus improvements, with considerably more funding allocated to the latter component, did make it more difficult for them to implement an opposition strategy.

Once the decisions were made to reduce the sales tax increase from .005 to .004 with a 20-year sunset date and also have approximately 33% of the funds allocated to light rail, it was impossible to include a comprehensive light rail system in the plan. This challenge was resolved in an interesting way. Three phases were used with only the first two phases being defined. The first phase, which was scheduled for completion in 2006, consisted of one line approximately 12 miles in length. Little disagreement existed regarding the route for this line. It ran in a north-south direction for about five miles, primarily along a street with a high concentration of employment, both downtown and uptown. In the middle of downtown, the line then turned east and ran by both the baseball stadium and the basketball arena. It also went by

the airport and connected with Tempe's light rail system. The second phase, which was scheduled for completion in 2010, involved approximately a five mile northern extension of the first phase that ran primarily along a major freeway. The third phase was not defined, largely because it would have been very difficult to reach agreement on priorities for this phase. It involved an additional seven to ten miles of light rail, scheduled for completion in 2016, with the specific route or routes depending on ridership on express bus routes. The express bus route or routes with the highest ridership will be the route or routes for the third phase of light rail construction. The ballot measure stated that a "Citizens Transit Commission" would be established to review all expenditures.

After funding for expansion of local bus service and light rail construction, the third ranked component in terms of spending was dial-a-ride service. It was perceived that this element would appeal to seniors who are a large percentage of voters in Phoenix. According to two interviewees, approximately 60% of voters in the 2000 election were seniors.

As mentioned previously, surveys were conducted for the Citizens Steering Committee while the plan was being developed. These surveys received prominent mention in the written description of the plan sent to residents. However, at least with the decision concerning the comparative priority of dial-a-ride service to mini-bus service, the survey results were ignored. Mini-bus service was significantly more important than dial-a-ride service to survey respondents. However, mini-bus service received less money in the transit plan than dial-a-ride service.

In summary, political considerations appeared to have a significant impact on the major aspects of the transit package included in the 2000 ballot measure. These major decisions involved the total magnitude of the package and the approximate percentages that would be allocated to the major components of the package. These political considerations included voter acceptability, diffusing opponents' likely arguments, and building a broad coalition.

THE COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN USED BY PROPONENTS

The communications campaign used by proponents relied primarily on advertising since sufficient funds were raised to conduct an advertising campaign. Accordingly, much of this section discusses the advertising campaign used by proponents. At the same time, the campaign had some important objectives that were accomplished through the newspaper and talk radio stations.

The Communications Budget

The political consultants hired by Mayor Rimsza approximately one full year prior to the 2000 election, proposed a budget of approximately \$1 million.⁶ The Mayor, who led the fundraising efforts, exceeded this goal by approximately \$300,000. This \$1.3 million budget in 2000 compared with approximately \$700,000 in 1997.

In this case, as in some other cases in which a second election is held shortly after a failed attempt, more funds were raised in a follow-up election. Donators do not seem to be discouraged by a lack of recent success, at least if success appears reasonably likely in a follow-up election.

Advertising Objectives

A large number of themes and information objectives, listed below, were communicated through advertising. Many of these themes, such as highway congestion relief, have been used in other cases. A few of the themes, such as the state of the transit system at the time of the election, have not been used in a large number of other cases.

- Traffic congestion is bad and will get a lot worse if transit is not improved because of significant population growth.
- Air pollution is worse in Phoenix than in most places and it will get a lot worse if transit is not improved because of significant population growth.
- Phoenix has a very bad basic transit system.
- \$600 million of matching federal funding will be lost if the measure does not pass.
- The transit package is balanced and comprehensive, with increased local bus service, doubling of dial-a-ride service, express bus service, and light rail.
- Light rail is quiet, pollution free, fast, has reduced congestion in other cities similar to Phoenix, and it can carry a large number of passengers with lower per-passenger operating costs than a bus-only system.

⁶These consultants actually were hired by Mayor Rimsza to work on three different local funding ballot measures. The March 2000 transit measure was the second measure, with the first measure occurring in the fall of 1999. Thus, although they were hired one year prior to the transit election, they began planning for the transit measure approximately three or four months before the election.

- Improvements will be made throughout the entire city.
- The plan is specific.
- It is a people's plan and also has a citizens' oversight committee.
- The plan will increase the number of choices people could use for transportation.

The number of advertising objectives identified above is larger than the number often used in other cases. It is risky to have so many message points as the main message points can get lost. However, this risk was minimal in this situation for a couple of reasons. First, the main message themes, such as highway congestion relief, were communicated at a much higher frequency level than other themes. More specifically, the major message themes were communicated through television ads which ran a large number of times on a daily basis for approximately three weeks, while a number of the other themes were communicated through direct mail with each household receiving no more than three direct mail pieces. Of course this heavy use of television, along with some direct mail and radio advertising, would have been impossible if fundraising efforts had not been so successful. Second, voters already were familiar with a number of the message points, having been exposed to them previously in 1994 and/or 1997.

Television Advertising

Television was the primary advertising medium used with approximately \$700,000 being spent on this medium. The television advertising was conducted for three weeks, at levels of 500 GRPs per day during the first week, followed by levels of 700 GRPs per day during the second week and 1000 GRPs per day during the third week.

Three different television advertisements were rotated in Phoenix. Each of these ads shared some common elements, along with having some differences.

- Each of the three ads began with a visual of highway congestion along with a close-up of a frustrated driver stuck in traffic. Each of the three ads stated that the ballot measure would provide traffic relief and two of the three ads had a visual, linked with passage of the ballot measure, of a freeway with no congestion.
- Expansion of basic bus service was stated in each of the three ads, along with some description of the means of expansion in two of the ads. Both of these ads mentioned more routes, and Sunday service. One also mentioned greater frequency and extended hours in the morning and evening.

- Light rail was included in each of the three ads. Express bus service and dial-a-ride service also were included in each of the three ads.
- Although none of the ads specifically stated that air pollution would be reduced through passage of the ballot measure, one of the ads linked the measure with clean air (“time to give Phoenix a clean and efficient valley wide transit system”), while a second ad featured a close up of an automobile exhaust pipe stuck on the highway.

Advertising Mailers

Three mailers were sent. One of these was sent and paid for by the city and it technically was not classified as advertising. The other two were advertising mailers that were included in the proponents’ budget.

The mailer from the city was sent to all registered voters in the city toward the beginning of the campaign. This mailer had two important objectives. One objective involved communicating that the measure involved a specific plan. This objective was perceived by proponents as being critical because the 1997 plan was criticized by opponents and by two talk radio stations as being either a vague plan or one with which proponents did not want to disclose the details. The mailer identified each of the basic components of the plan, along with a detailed and quantitative description of the nature of the improvements and the amount of money involved with each component. Complicated maps identifying the location of services also were included. The second theme stressed that the plan was developed by a citizens committee with significant public input, both through a survey and public meetings.

Two advertising mailers were sent to most registered voters. In contrast to the television ads, these mailers gave greater emphasis to air pollution than to traffic congestion, although they were careful to avoid explicitly claiming that air pollution would be reduced with the transit improvements.

One of the mailers reinforced the mailer sent by the city. It identified the basic components of the plan, along with providing some details and maps. It also stressed that it was a “people’s plan” and had a “citizens oversight committee.” The benefits of light rail identified previously in the list of objectives also were mentioned in this mailer. It also included quotes and endorsements, including one from the Mayor and three from the *Arizona Republic*. Different versions of this mailer were sent to voters in different geographic districts. Each mailer included an endorsement from the district councilperson and also had some benefits identified for the district in question.

The second advertising mailer gave two new reasons for supporting the ballot measure. First, it indicated that a projected population increase of more than 600 thousand people over 20 years would cause congestion and air pollution to get worse if “we continue to do nothing to improve what is considered to be the worst public transit system in the United States.” Second, it indicated that \$600 million in federal matching funds would be lost if the measure failed.

Radio Advertising

Approximately \$100,000 was spent on radio advertising and two different radio ads were used. One focused on highway congestion, using the audio from one of the television ads. The second radio ad was a message from Mayor Rimsza.

Proponents leaked information that a third radio ad had been produced. This ad attacked highway construction organizations that had provided funding for the opposition in 1997. This threatened ad tried to discourage these organizations from supporting the opposition.

Publicity and Public Relations Objectives

Proponents began with two major guidelines in their publicity campaign. First, they wanted to attack the opposition. In addition to attacking the substance of the arguments used by opponents, they planned to make personal attacks to lessen the opponents’ credibility. Second, they wanted to neutralize talk show radio stations, which they thought had done substantial damage in 1997 with continual criticism of that ballot measure.

Publicity: Attacking the Opposition

The ability of the proponents to try to lessen the credibility of the opponents was aided by their ability to accurately predict the identities of the lead opponents before the campaign actually began. The proponents correctly assumed that the lead opponents in the 2000 campaign would be the same people who led the opposition in 1997.

As a result of being able to predict the identity of the opponents, proponents were able to distribute a release at the opening of their campaign in early January to the press who were invited to the event. These charges were published in an article on the first page of the *Arizona Republic*, which is the main newspaper in Phoenix and Maricopa County.

One of the supporting arguments in the voting pamphlet, written by a representative of the official organization supporting the measure, also demonstrates the personal attacks on opposition. This argument was entitled “Who is De-Rail the Tax?” and it identified four opponents by name followed

by negative statements about each person. Two of the four negative statements are quoted below, omitting the person's identify.

It's _____, whose Cadillac sports the vanity license plate "FREON" because she believes Freon doesn't hurt the environment. Next to the license is a bumper sticker "Stop Global Whining."

It's _____, an ADOT employee, who works for government and collects his government check as he rails against government. He says he's an "economist" from the Laissez-Faire Institute. The institute is his home.

Proponents also used a press event held by opponents to attack them and this also was mentioned in an article in the *Arizona Republic*. In discussing the demonstration, the article mentioned that a supporter carried a sign calling the opponents "CAVE" people with the acronym meaning "Citizens Against Virtually Everything" (*Arizona Republic*, March 10, 2000, p. B1).

Proponents assumed opponents would use many of the same arguments in the 2000 campaign as they used in 1997. Accordingly, they were well prepared for these arguments. A report commissioned by the Chamber of Commerce demonstrates both this anticipation of arguments and preparation of responses.

Proponents in Phoenix, as elsewhere, have tried to persuade voters that the transportation problems need some solution now and that opponents either have no solution or they have an inferior solution. The use of the previously mentioned CAVE sign was meant to convey this message. Some of the other solutions identified by opponents on a website also were criticized and may have been rather susceptible to criticism. For example, opponents suggested that SkyTran was a better solution because it was a high technology private sector solution involving no new taxes. As the *Arizona Republic* discussed in an article that focused exclusively on SkyTran, this transit system was an untested concept that existed only on a web page (*Arizona Republic*, March 7, 2000, p. B1).

Publicity: Neutralizing the Talk Show Radio Stations

Two popular talk show radio stations, and one talk show personality in particular, frequently were critical of the 1997 ballot measure. Proponents made a concerted effort to neutralize this source, realizing it was one of the few possible sources that the financially strapped opponents could use to convey their message. Proponents, including Mayor Rimsza and their media consultant, met with the talk show personality. Apparently, the personality

agreed to remain neutral if proponents agreed to three one-hour debates aired on his talk show. Although the media consultant did not discuss the tactics used to encourage a second talk show radio station to take a neutral position on the 2000 ballot measure, her efforts apparently were successful with this second station.

Publicity: Editorial Support by the *Arizona Republic*

According to the person who wrote virtually all of the editorials supporting both the 1997 and 2000 measures, no persuasion was needed by proponents to obtain the editorial support of the newspaper. He also indicated that opponents were powerless to change this editorial position.

Six editorials appeared in the *Republic* between the middle of February and the election. The arguments presented in these editorials covered all of the major points proponents were making in their advertising and one of the editorials attacked the credibility of the opposition.

Voter Research Conducted

As discussed previously in the section on the development of the transportation package, the steering committee had two surveys conducted while it was developing the transportation package. Both surveys, one telephone and one mail, asked residents to rate the importance of various components being considered for inclusion in the package.

Although the political consultants did no focus group research, some survey research was conducted to help formulate the advertising. According to a lead political consultant, these results confirmed their decision to focus on air pollution as well as on traffic congestion relief. Voters surveyed expressed high concern over air pollution and they tended to accept the argument that transit would reduce air pollution, even with no statistics being presented to support this claim.

THE CAMPAIGN USED BY OPPONENTS

The composition of the opposition, their arguments, their fundraising efforts, and the means used to communicate their arguments are discussed below.

Nature of the Opposition

One of the lead opponents described the opposition as a “grass roots” group. This appears to be an accurate description. Only three elected officials, all state legislators, presented signed ballot arguments against the measure in the voting pamphlet. Since Republicans are more likely than Democrats to oppose new taxes and increased government spending, it is difficult to obtain the support and involvement of prominent politicians when the mayor is a Republican who

strongly supports a measure. This was the challenge faced by the opposition in 2000 with Mayor Rimsza. One of the lead opponents confirmed this difficulty. He stated that some elected officials expressed private opposition to the ballot measure but were unwilling to risk alienating one of their leaders by actively opposing the measure.

The opposition also was largely unsuccessful in obtaining the support of many organizations. This is demonstrated by the identity of people who presented opposing arguments in the voting pamphlet. Excluding the three ballot arguments signed by state elected officials mentioned in the preceding paragraph, 14 opposing arguments existed. Only one of these arguments was signed by a person representing an ongoing organization, with this organization being the “Taxpayer Protection Alliance.”

Opposition Arguments

Both the names usually used by opponents, “De-Rail the Tax,” and one of their labels for the measure, “Trolley Folly,” suggest that they focused more on the light rail component of the package than on the bus component. This was, in fact, the case. According to one of the lead opponents, they focused more on light rail because all of their members were opposed to light rail but some were in favor of improving the bus system. The basic arguments used against light rail were the common ones of it costing more than buses, being slower than express buses, having minimal impact on congestion and air pollution, and disrupting business and traffic during a lengthy construction period.

Realizing that they were somewhat vulnerable in attacking the light rail component when it was supposed to be a relatively small percentage of the total package, they argued that significantly more money would actually be spent on light rail than the 34% stated in the mailer sent by the city. More specifically, they argued that the Citizens Transit Commission had the authority to change the package and also noted that the ballot measure language did not identify the percentages to be spent on light rail vs. the other components.

Although opponents focused more on the light rail component than on the bus component of the package, some criticisms were made of the bus expansion component. They indicated that this money would have little impact on air pollution and congestion, and provided statistics to support this argument, including statistics demonstrating that significant reductions in air pollution had already occurred. They also argued that higher priority uses existed, such as spending more for libraries, and the police and fire departments. In addition, opponents argued that the \$600 million of matching federal funds identified by proponents was far from a certainty.

Since proponents relied more heavily on personally attacking opponents in the 2000 campaign than in the 1997 campaign, opponents probably were surprised by these attacks. If proponents were attempting to sidetrack opponents through their personal attacks, they may have partly succeeded in accomplishing this objective. According to a news reporter from the *Arizona Republic*, opponents focused their criticism of the news coverage toward the end of the campaign on the failure to adequately cover these personal attacks.

Opponents thought their case would be strengthened by proposing some alternatives to the transit package. In addition to the previously mentioned SkyTran, they proposed privatizing the bus system, giving vouchers to the transit dependent, telecommuting and flexible work schedules, and state-of-the-art traffic-activated traffic lights.

One solution suggested by opponents in other communities in which a transit-only package exists, is conspicuous in its absence. This solution is highway capacity increase. It was difficult for opponents in Phoenix to use this argument because major highway improvements had taken place during the 1990s and were still taking place at the time of the 2000 election.

Fundraising

Opponents only raised about \$10,000 in the 2000 campaign, compared to more than \$30,000 in 1997. As mentioned in the section discussing the communications campaign used by proponents, proponents used the threat of radio advertising to discourage a significant funding source for the opposition in 1997 from contributing to their efforts in 2000. This source, which had contributed over \$30,000 to the opposition for a radio advertising campaign in 1997, did not contribute any funds to the opposition in 2000.

Means of Communication Used

Unlike 1997, when the opposition did some radio advertising in the last few weeks prior to the election, the opposition did not do any advertising during the 2000 campaign. They also knew, as in 1997, that the *Arizona Republic* would strongly and repeatedly endorse the ballot measure in their editorials. Accordingly, opponents hoped to communicate their message largely through the news media, particularly the *Arizona Republic*, and through talk radio stations, which had been a very good source for them in 1997.

As discussed previously, the talk show radio stations did not oppose the 2000 measure even though they had opposed the 1997 measure. At the same time, one of the radio stations sponsored three one-hour debates and the ballot measure was frequently discussed in call-ins.

According to the opposition, the *Republic* did not cover the 2000 campaign as extensively as it covered the 1997 campaign. This view was confirmed by the reporter who was responsible for covering both campaigns. She did not want to rehash the same issues she wrote about during the 1997 campaign. Although the amount of coverage in the newspaper in 2000 was not as extensive as in 1997, the coverage was far from light. Coverage started in early January and involved only five articles prior to the end of February. However, 12 articles appeared from the end of February until the election, with about half of them front-page articles. Opponents were quoted in most of these articles and most of their communications objectives were repeatedly mentioned, particularly objectives pertaining to light rail. Frequent mention also was made of the opponents' solutions. At the same time, two or three correct mentions were made that some opponents supported expansion of the bus system, including a direct quote from one of the leaders of De-Rail the Tax.

EVALUATION

One characteristic of the ballot measure in the Phoenix case is unique among the cases studied to date. Phoenix is the only case that used a city-only ballot measure.

The use of a city-level approach seems plausible only when support is likely to be significantly higher in one or two communities within an MPO than within other communities within the same MPO. Based on the results for the Maricopa County transit elections in 1989 and 1994, Tempe's success in 1996, and the defeat of 2000 ballot transit measure in Scottsdale while Phoenix passed their measure in the same year by a large margin, support for transit is significantly stronger in Phoenix and Tempe than in the remaining communities within Maricopa County. In addition, the use of a city-only approach may simplify the task of providing geographical equity. It may be easier to achieve this equity in a smaller geographical area than in a larger area, particularly when the need for transit is not equal throughout the larger geographical area. For example, the need and demand for bus transit is greater in Phoenix than in largely suburban residential communities, such as Scottsdale.

Although the use of a city-only approach increases the likelihood of success in one or two communities within an MPO, such as in Phoenix and Tempe, the same approach probably reduces the likelihood of success in other communities with less support for transit within the same MPO, such as in Scottsdale. Thus, the use of a city-level approach could lessen the probability that a system-wide transit system will be adopted. Since most freeway traffic in Maricopa County, particularly during commute hours, is suburb-to-city, a rail

system existing only in Tempe and Phoenix will have less impact on congestion than a system-wide rail system would have.

In summary, the use of a city-only approach seems to involve a tradeoff. Such an approach increases the chances of success within some communities while, at the same time, probably lessening the chances of success in other communities within the MPO.

The Phoenix case provides some understanding relevant to an issue discussed in a number of other cases. This issue is whether highway funding should be paired with transit funding, either in a single measure or in separate but concurrent measures.

The success of the 2000 transit-only measure in Phoenix, combined with voter rejection in Phoenix of a combined highway and transit county measure in 1994, suggests that transit-only measures can be more successful than combined highway and transit measures in at least one set of conditions. The conditions existing in Phoenix were a) a significant amount of highway construction had taken place shortly before the 2000 transit-only measure was presented to voters, and b) the transit-only package included a significant percentage of funding allocated to improving an inadequate basic bus service.

CONCLUSION

Differences between the successful 2000 ballot measure and the unsuccessful 1999 one have been discussed throughout this chapter. The differences are summarized in Table 5-1.

Table 5-1. Differences Between 2000 and 1997 Ballot Measures

2000 Ballot Measure	1997 Ballot Measure
.004 increase in sales tax	.005 increase in sales tax
20-year sunset date	No sunset date
100 buses added in first five years	400 buses added in first five years
An explicit light rail component	No explicit light rail component
Specifics of plan communicated	Specifics of plan not communicated as part of stealth campaign
Proponents had \$1.3 million budget	Proponents had \$700,000 budget
The Mayor led the fundraising efforts and selected the political consultants	The business community led the fundraising efforts and also selected the political consultants
Proponents used extensive television advertising	Proponents did not use extensive television advertising
Proponents attacked opponents	Proponents did not attack opponents
Opponents had no money available for advertising	Opponents spent at least \$30,000 on advertising
Talk show radio stations not opposed	Talk show radio stations opposed
No opposition from prominent politicians or appointed officials	Opposition from the state Director of the Department of Transportation and the Chief of the state Department of Environmental Quality

A brief explanation of one entry in Table 5-1 is needed. Although the 2000 measure added 300 fewer buses than the 1997 measure, this difference was not mentioned by either proponents or by opponents.

Now that the differences between the successful 2000 ballot measure and campaign and the unsuccessful one in 1997 have been identified, they are briefly evaluated.

- Phoenix both added a sunset date and reduced the magnitude of the sales tax increase with their successful ballot measure. Even with these modifications, the sunset date of 20 years is a lengthy one and the .004 increase in the sales tax rate is rather large in comparison with other cases studied. In addition, as mentioned previously, the rate was lowered primarily at Mayor Rimsza's insistence based upon future political aspirations rather than lowered to gain more voter acceptance for the ballot measure. Voters' positive reaction to this long sunset date and significant tax increase, in a fiscally conservative community is somewhat inconsistent with conventional wisdom that measures are unlikely to pass with a sales tax increase greater than 1/4-cent, particularly if the sunset date is longer than ten years.
- Having some unspecified components of a plan and/or not presenting the specific components to the voting public, fearing that voters will reject the plan if they disagree with some of its specific aspects, is risky.

As discussed previously, the amount of funding devoted to light rail was not specified in the 1997 package and this lack of specification was used by opponents and talk show radio stations to generate voter suspicion and distrust. These suspicions were reinforced by the political consultant's decision in 1997 to run a stealth campaign which did not disclose the details of the parts of the plan that were specified and by the lack of a sunset date. These problems were largely corrected with the 2000 measure and the campaign in support of the measure.

To qualify this discussion of specificity, voter distrust may not be triggered with some unspecified components as long as the basic aspects are specified. For example, the failure to specify the seven to ten miles of light rail routing in the third phase of construction apparently was not viewed negatively by voters in the 2000 campaign. The combination of specifying the total funding allocated to light rail and also specifying the routing of the first 17 miles of light rail construction appears to have alleviated potential voter distrust regarding the lack of specificity of the routing during the third phase of light rail construction.

- A high frequency television advertising campaign, focusing on the congestion problems can be effective, even without strong statistical support, demonstrating that the transit improvements will significantly lessen congestion. To qualify this discussion of television advertising frequency, higher frequency levels probably are needed when voting is done over an extended period of time through mail balloting. Such was the case in Phoenix.

- Proponents were much more aggressive in attacking opponents in 2000 than in 1997, as well as being more aggressive than in any other community studied to date. However, it is difficult to ascertain the impact, if any, of these attacks, given the large number of other differences identified in Table 5-1. In addition, these attacks could have backfired if some prominent and respected people had been involved in the opposition. The attacks, particularly the use of the CAVE acronym (Citizens Against Virtually Everything), also would have been less effective if the opponents had presented alternatives that the public perceived positively, rather than presenting alternatives such as SkyTran and telecommuting.

The successful passage of the 2000 ballot measure by a 2:1 margin, only slightly more than two years after a rather similar measure was defeated by a small margin, suggests that voting patterns with transit measures can be unstable. The Phoenix case also demonstrates that a transit-only measure with a significant increase in the sales tax and a lengthy sunset date can be passed by a large margin when a) light rail is only one component in the package and this component initially involves an incremental, rather than a comprehensive light rail system to be funded, and b) proponents use an aggressive communications campaign supported by very successful fundraising.

IS HALF A LOAF BETTER THAN NONE? COLUMBUS SPLITS TRANSIT TAX VOTES

In November of 1999, the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) had two issues on the ballot in Franklin County. One, Issue 20, represented a permanent renewal of COTA's existing 1/4-cent sales tax funding; the other, Issue 21, would have provided an additional 1/4-cent tax for a ten-year period in order to provide for significant transit enhancements, including new commuter trains. Voters in Franklin County, which includes the city of Columbus, opted to approve the first measure by a significant margin, yet rejected the second measure by an almost equally large margin. Thus, voters apparently sent a mixed message, and this case therefore represents a somewhat complicated lesson for transportation advocates. The case seems to illustrate the difficulty of getting voters to approve a transit-only package with a substantial rail component in an area with less than crisis-level congestion and a controversial bus system.

BACKGROUND: TRANSPORTATION AND TRAFFIC

Columbus, the state capital of Ohio, is a city of over 500,000 and greater Columbus, including surrounding Franklin County has a population of just over one million. A number of Fortune 500 companies are located in Columbus, which has become a financial and service sector center of the Midwest. Additionally, the city is home to many state government agencies as well as Ohio State University, which has over 30,000 students. Population forecasts suggest that the area will face an increase in population of 400,000, including 225,000 new jobs by the year 2020. With the growth of population and commerce have come increases in traffic and congestion. Although Franklin County's population increased by only 6% in the past nine years, the number of cars on the road increased by 29% during the same period. Commute times are expected to double by the year 2020 (*Columbus Dispatch*, May 16, 1999).

However, traffic congestion in the Columbus area does not yet appear to be at a crisis point in the eye of the public. The worst traffic appears to be located in specific areas, and some parts of the city are relatively unaffected by congestion. A survey taken shortly before the campaign for Issues 20 and 21 began found that 24% of Columbus citizens were "concerned about traffic congestion." Although that is a substantial increase since 1994, when only 4% were so concerned, it suggests that many residents of the area do not yet see congestion relief as an urgent and immediate priority for public policy. Unlike many communities with traffic and congestion problems, air quality did not

appear to be a pressing issue in Columbus. One transit supporter said, “Columbus is one of the last major cities to experience real congestion; we have had a great ride for about 40 years” (*Dispatch*, Oct. 24, 1999). Traffic is clearly a problem in Columbus that many citizens are concerned about, but is perhaps not yet at the point at which the public is prepared to pay much for transit improvements.

The Columbus area receives transit services from COTA in the form of a bus system, which COTA has operated since 1974. Currently, COTA has 66 bus routes with 334 buses that provide 18 million rides a year. Project Mainstream, a van service for the disabled, carries 121,000 people annually. The bus system, although extensive, has been the focus of some dissatisfaction in Columbus. The dependability of the system at nonpeak hours has been questioned, while some critics focused on the inefficiency of the system: so-called “empty buses” became a focal point of the campaign for Issues 20 and 21. The existing bus system was financed in large part by a nonpermanent 1/4-cent sales tax levy whose renewal and transition to permanency was at issue with Issue 20 (*Dispatch*, Jan. 10, 1999).

However, the area did not have any rail transit of any kind. Supporters of Issues 20 and 21 argued that the area was losing out on federal assistance for transit because of its failure to embrace rail transit. For example, the Ohio cities of Cleveland and Cincinnati had recently been awarded \$220 and \$127 million respectively for rail related activities, whereas Columbus received only \$66 million for capital improvements to its bus system (*Dispatch*, Jan. 10, 1999).

BACKGROUND: POLITICAL HISTORY

In Columbus, decision making about transit is largely the responsibility of COTA. A Board of Directors governs COTA, but COTA President and CEO Ronald Barnes is the most influential individual. Barnes was formerly the chief manager with the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority. A high profile, active chief administrator, Barnes was the key architect and proponent of Issues 20 and 21, although he was by no means the sole force behind the measures. Other key decision makers who figure in local transportation policy include Columbus Mayor Greg Lashutka, the Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce – which frequently speaks for the local business community, and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, a voluntary association of governments serving the area.

The 1999 election was not the first time that the area had considered substantial improvements in its mass transit system. As the executive director of the planning commission noted, local efforts to introduce passenger rail

have been characterized by “misadventure and disappointment” (*Dispatch*, January 10, 1999). Over the prior 15 years, no fewer than nine long-range plans that included a rail transit component (including subways, light rail and commuter rail) had been proposed, but none had actually made a ballot. Each was rejected on the basis of excessive cost.

Most recently, in 1995 COTA had proposed an 11.2-mile light rail line that would have connected downtown Columbus to suburban Crosswoods center. Due to the cost (\$276 million) and opposition from the local newspaper, the COTA board withheld the measure from the ballot. Instead, a less costly measure that included only enhanced bus service was placed on the 1995 ballot, which was soundly defeated. Transit advocates felt that the rail measure might have fared better, and with metropolitan congestion a much more tangible reality, transit supporters were optimistic about the prospects for increased support for a rail measure in 1999.

Additionally, the *Columbus Dispatch* had figured prominently in past decisions about transportation improvements. The former publisher of the local daily newspaper, John Wolfe, had reportedly helped to eliminate light rail from the 1995 measure, which may have helped to hasten its lopsided defeat. Its coverage of the campaign for Issues 20 and 21 figured to have a significant impact on the outcomes.

DEVELOPING A TRANSPORTATION COALITION

Community leaders are generally supportive of COTA. Once COTA announced the details of the transit plan (see below), the mayor of Columbus, both of the candidates who were running to replace him, nearly every suburban mayor, the Columbus and Westerville Chambers of Commerce, the Franklin County AFL-CIO, environmental groups (including the Sierra Club), and many other community organizations endorsed it. A political action committee, the Transit Tomorrow Coalition was formed early in 1999 (the year of the election), giving the transportation initiatives’ supporters a timely focal point for their efforts. Support for the measures was bipartisan, but this election was the first in which congestion was a major issue. This meant that the depth of support for congestion relief was a major unknown.

The business community was generally supportive of the idea of enhanced mass transit because of the perception that the existing transportation system was inadequate for business. The continuing mobility of the workforce, therefore, was a motivating factor for the support of the business community. Nevertheless, some within the business community were less than enthusiastic about COTA; and the perception existed that the authority lacked public support due to its mismanagement of the bus service (interview with a

Chamber of Commerce representative). Moreover, Columbus is a generally conservative community that has traditionally resisted public indebtedness. Although Issues 20 and 21 did not represent debt, they represented a long-term financial obligation with which some within the business community may have felt unease.

Organized opposition was scant in terms of organizational resources, yet highly effective. First, Richard Sheir, a citizen-activist, was opposed to the plans. He based opposition primarily on dissatisfaction with the existing bus service offered by COTA. Second, the Buckeye Institute, a research organization based in Dayton that typically opposes public expenditures for passenger rail systems, was poised to oppose the measures. Although neither opposition force could marshal much in the way of financial or other organizational resources, both were to be highly effective in publicizing their opposition to the plans.

CREATING A TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE

Plans for the 1999 measures began in 1996, when COTA officials began to discuss how they were going to deal with the impending expiration of a 10-year, 1/4-cent sales tax levy that provided much of their operating funds, in light of the fact that the 1995 increase had failed at the polls. To help build stronger grass roots support for its next attempt, the COTA Board of Directors created a committee of members of the community who would help construct a more successful measure. Additionally, the Board attempted to consult with community stakeholders and leaders, trying to both seek a consensus and to rectify its less than positive community image. In 1998, the agency began an outreach program, which sought feedback on its emerging regional transportation plan known as “Vision 2020,” which is described below in greater detail. However, the plan that emerged was essentially designed by COTA.

The COTA board itself was solidly behind Barnes, although several members left shortly before the election (*Dispatch*, March 7, 1999).

Vision 2020 consisted of the enhancement of the existing bus service, creation of a commuter rail system, plus a downtown light rail line (*Dispatch*, Oct. 12, 1999). The plan also called for various improvements that would help increase the “intelligence” of the entire transit system. At a projected cost of \$421.7 million, the enhanced bus service would include:

- 24-hour bus service on major routes;
- 15 transit centers with small-bus circulators in suburbs and urban neighborhoods;

- Expanded downtown circulator bus service;
- Construction of a downtown multimodal transportation terminal; and
- An increase of the bus fleet from 265 to 508 coaches, including more small buses.

At an estimated cost of \$498.8 million, the commuter rail would include:

- Construction of eight commuter rail lines on existing freight lines between downtown Columbus and its suburbs;
- 83.6 miles of right-of-way would be obtained from freight railroads;
- Purchase of 29 diesel-powered rail cars; and
- Trains that would run on average every 30 minutes from 5:00 A.M. to Midnight, Monday through Saturday, plus more limited Sunday service.

The downtown “circulation” system would consist of:

- A 1.2-mile street-level rail line opening in 2005 connecting two neighborhoods that circumscribe the north and south of downtown Columbus, and
- Two circulator bus loops running north and south along Broad Street, a major downtown artery.

The plan represented a sweeping upgrade of the Franklin County transit system. The creation of eight commuter rail lines, and a light rail in central Columbus represented benefits potentially attractive to a geographically diverse portion of the area.

All told, the projects outlined in the Vision 2020 plan required approximately \$1 billion in new revenues. Initially, transit supporters planned a permanent, 1/2-cent sales tax increase that would have provided the bulk of the required revenues (although even with that amount, some additional bond funding would have been necessary) (*Dispatch*, May, 20, 1999). However, opposition surfaced with respect to the permanency of this approach. More specifically, elements of the business community lobbied for a temporary measure, on the grounds that it would enhance the accountability of COTA. A number of alternatives were then floated as possible compromises, and eventually the idea of two tax measures, one permanent and one temporary surfaced. However, even if both measures were to pass, the temporary measure would need to be renewed by voters in 10 years for the project to be adequately funded. Supporters of the measures expressed hope that the taxes would help attract federal funds that would help make up some or all of the shortfall.

In retrospect, the bifurcation of the tax measure – although it helped increase the purchase on the local business community – may have helped to doom the overall success of the transportation measures. Pre-election survey data suggested support for rail transportation. But rail transportation was only a possibility if both measures were to pass, because the operation of the existing bus transit system rested in part on passage of at least one tax increase.

Ballot language for the two measures was nearly identical. Issue 20 (the permanent 1/4-cent increase) read: “Shall the continuation of an existing sales and use tax be levied for all transit purposes of the Central Ohio Transit Authority at a rate not exceeding one-fourth of one percent for a continuing period of time?” Issue 21 (the temporary 1/4-cent increase) was nearly identical, ending with the “for a period of ten years.” (State law presently prohibits direct linkages between tax increases and specific expenditures.) Thus neither measure was legally specific with respect to its purpose, thereby potentially confusing voters and opening a line of criticism from opponents about the vagueness of the plan. Had both measures passed, they would have raised approximately \$1.5 billion over a 20-year period (*Dispatch*, Oct. 24, 1999).

USE OF RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Extensive survey research was employed to test the waters for the passage of Issues 20 and 21. Tracking surveys were conducted in April, July, and September in 1999. Results from the initial April survey, although indicating widespread support for the issues (which at that time weren't well known) suggested that transportation was not an issue of preeminent importance among most respondents. When asked what was “the most important problem facing Franklin County,” respondents were as likely to mention crime (21%) or education (21%) as transportation-related issues (20%). Compared with previous data, the survey found that transportation had actually receded somewhat as a salient issue; a 1998 survey found that 28% of respondents found it to be the most important problem.

Nevertheless, as early as April, support for the language that would later appear in both Issues 20 and 12 seemed fairly strong. With respect to Issue 20, 69.5% of respondents said they would “probably” or “definitely” vote yes for such measures. For Issue 21, a total of 62% were in favor. Thus, support for the second, temporary measure was apparently less than that for its companion from the onset. Interestingly, the percentage of respondents who said they would vote for the two measures *combined* into a single, permanent 1/2-cent increase was 57% (37% definitely, 30% probably).

By July, however, before any considerable amount of publicity about the measures had emerged, support for the measures had changed noticeably. Whereas support for Issue 20 remained more or less constant (at 66%), support for the 1/4-cent increase (Issue 21) had already dipped to 55%, a loss of seven percentage points.

The July survey instrument also contained interesting items that may shed light on the outcome of Issues 20 and 21. When asked, “If COTA receives additional funding, do you believe it is more important for COTA to spend those additional funds on improving the county’s bus system OR on developing a passenger rail system in the county,” respondents were fairly closely divided. Forty percent chose improving the bus system, and 48% opted for developing a rail system. This suggests that the priorities underlying support for the two measures were significantly divided. Nevertheless, although more respondents wanted to develop a rail system (if additional funds were available), support was greater for the measure that was dedicated to the (existing) bus system. The discrepancy is explained in part by the fact that all respondents – including those who expressed opposition to the tax measures – were asked about their priorities for additional funds.

Respondents were also asked whether various arguments would affect their support for the ballot measures. The argument that had – by far – the biggest positive impact was: “In order to move people more efficiently, COTA plans on using a portion of the funds from these issues to purchase smaller buses to service areas with fewer average riders and put larger buses into areas where the bus system has a heavier load. This will eliminate the problem of running buses with few or no passengers.” Ninety-three percent of respondents indicated that this argument would make them “much more” or “somewhat more” likely to support the measures. This fact illustrates the salience of the management of the bus system – and dissatisfaction with it – to voter attitudes about transportation in Franklin County, which seemed to have some impact for the outcome of these measures.

By late September, support for both issues had eroded considerably. Support for Issue 20 was at 53%, while Issue 21 was receiving only 38%. Although the campaign for the Measures had barely begun, they were already in serious jeopardy of failing. To understand this development, and to interpret the ultimate failure of Issue 21 (and passage of Issue 20), it is necessary to more closely examine the events that unfolded during the campaign (see following section).

DEVISING AND IMPLEMENTING A CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

A Columbus based consulting and public relations firm, coordinated the campaign for the issues. The firm subsequently hired a campaign manager, field coordinator, and a fundraiser. The business community, rallied in part by the Chamber of Commerce, also took a reasonably active part in the campaign for Issues 20 and 21. The Chamber's Board of Directors passed formal resolutions in favor of both measures. Most, if not all of the bigger local financial concerns donated to the campaign, including the Columbus Dispatch, Nationwide Bank, BancOne, and The Limited. Ultimately, however, the Chamber raised less than \$500,000. There is no simple explanation for the relative shortfall of donations from the local business community; it may have been the result of distrust of COTA management, the lack of a history of successful transit projects, the perception that congestion was not at a crisis level, or some combination of these or other factors. The campaign wound up with a war chest of less than \$550,000, an amount less than that typically associated with such campaigns and an insufficient one in the view of some campaign consultants. Most of the money was dedicated to television advertising, which ran the last two weeks of the campaign.

As is the case with many political campaigns, the supporters' strategy was to focus on convincing marginal or "swing" voters to support the measures, while maintaining the support of those predisposed to do so. Survey research had suggested that the "base" support for the measure was coming from women, Democrats, *infrequent* COTA users, and residents of downtown Columbus and its northern suburbs. Swing voters were believed to consist of female homemakers, African Americans, independents, and residents of the southwestern, blue-collar areas of Columbus. Interestingly, *frequent* COTA users were not considered to be part of the base support demographic; rather they were found to be at best part of the "swing" contingent. This fact alone should have perhaps raised concerns about the underlying vitality of support for the measures. Despite the fact that the campaign never became particularly partisan in flavor, the key opposition demographic consisted primarily of Republicans; the campaign strategy was essentially to ignore the more entrenched opposition.

The overall campaign strategy was to focus on mass media, particularly television spots. Second, the campaign would seek to sell the two measures as a package, and not emphasize the differences between the two on the theory that to do so would only complicate the issue and confuse voters. One fact that had emerged from the precampaign polling was that rail was a popular issue among voters in the County. For example, when asked in April of 1999, "Which one of the following do you believe will do the MOST to relieve traffic

congestion in the county?” a plurality (44%) of respondents had opted for “building a passenger rail system in the county.” Although management of the bus system was clearly also a concern among voters, adding new rail service seemed to be a more positive message to emphasize than addressing bus management issues. In any event, the campaign’s relative lack of emphasis on grass roots and direct mail campaigning were, in retrospect, questionable.

The message from the television campaign was to emphasize the congestion-reducing effects that a rail commuting system could confer on the community. It would focus on the “three Cs:” *Connecting* people to higher-paying jobs; providing *Congestion* relief, and helping riders *Conveniently* reach important destinations. The bus system was mentioned in some spots, but received much less overall emphasis. However, the television campaign was apparently overshadowed by other developments in the campaign.

First, despite the lack of organized opposition, contestants in other races largely overlooked the issue of transportation raised by Issues 20 and 21. Most important, the two candidates for Mayor of Columbus avoided the issue, although both were on record in support of both measures. This left the issue without a major elected official or candidate to act as spokesperson for the measures. Second, the *Columbus Dispatch* focused heavily on the issue. It was through this avenue that the essentially unfunded and unorganized opposition to the measures was apparently extremely effective.

Perhaps the most effective opponent was Richard Sheir, a self-styled “rabble-rouser” who was also associated with a successful effort to deny public funding to a downtown sports arena. Sheir is a management analyst for the Ohio Department of Human Services with a master's degree in public policy and labor economics from the University of California-Berkeley. His opposition to both Issues 20 and 21 was based almost exclusively on his charge that COTA was an inefficient manager of the bus system. Beginning in approximately September, Sheir began publicizing the fact that some if not many, COTA buses frequently ran with few and sometimes no passengers.

A *Dispatch* columnist picked up on Sheir’s opposition, running a column that supported Sheir’s view of COTA and the bus system:

Richard Sheir—a rabble-rouser who has saved taxpayers untold millions of dollars fighting arenas, convention centers and other titan-favored toys—says 17 COTA routes average fewer than seven people—total—per run. Thirty other routes average fewer than 10, he said. On some trips, a lone rider, rattling around a huge, diesel-gulping bus built for 40 or more gets what amounts to a

\$69 subsidy from taxpayers, Sheir said. “They’re like very, very expensive taxi rides.” And Sheir, a Democrat and regular COTA rider, likes public transportation. He just thinks it’d be crazy to fork over billions of additional dollars in light of COTA’s record. “They want to take an already-inefficient system and double capacity,” he said. “Any troubled business cuts out the inefficiency first before talking about expanding” (*Dispatch*, Oct. 11, 1999).

Shortly after the above article appeared, Sheir debated his views with a representative of the supporters of Issues 20 and 21. (The two were actually interviewed separately, but their views were pieced together to give the appearance of an actual debate.) In the article, Sheir expanded upon his view of COTA as a mismanaged public entity. He disputed the notion that Columbus was really experiencing enough congestion to warrant creation of a rail commuting system, criticized plans to link employers with bus service as “corporate welfare,” and continued to press his criticism of “empty buses” run by COTA. Sheir was effective in portraying himself as a mainstream critic who represented dissatisfied COTA customers, and not a “lone voice” (*Dispatch*, Oct. 24, 1999).

A few days later, COTA general manager Ronald Barnes – the *de facto* leader of the pro-transit campaign – engaged in a public debate at a luncheon at the Columbus Metropolitan Club. Barnes responded –somewhat testily, according to news reports – to Sheir’s charges about the so-called “empty buses.”

“It’s very easy to go out and cut down on every route that is not productive in someone’s mind,” Barnes said. “But we as a public agency should be looking at guaranteeing mobility for every person who needs it.” The comment generated applause from the audience. “In a government city, you are not going to get much applause by saying that there are limits to government,” Sheir responded. “Guaranteed taxi services should be one of those limits” (*Dispatch*, Oct. 28, 1999).

Whether either individual “won” the debate is less important than the fact that the event apparently continued to elevate Sheir as an opponent with a credible point of view. The “empty buses” argument seemed to resonate with an electorate that surveys (taken before the debate) had shown to have concerns with the COTA bus service. Additionally, the focus on Sheir and his arguments

effectively moved the campaign from a discussion of the merits of Vision 2020 to a debate over the management of the bus system by COTA.

More or less concomitantly, a second phalanx of opposition arose from a conservative think tank known as the “Buckeye Institute for Public Policy Solutions.” In October, the Institute released a report with the claim that it would be cheaper to lease projected rail passengers new sport utility vehicles than to build light rail or commuter rail in Ohio’s major cities. A second Buckeye Institute theme disputed the major COTA claim of cutting congestion, concluding that traffic congestion would be reduced by less than one-percent by building the proposed passenger rail in Ohio’s largest cities. The report supported the idea of building additional roads as the most efficient and effective response to congestion problems in the Columbus area (*Dispatch*, October 19, 1999).

Transit supporters countered the report with the results from one commissioned by the Columbus Chamber of Commerce. That report found that Franklin County would receive \$3.30 in benefits for every \$1.00 paid toward the \$1.5 billion COTA expansion and generally contradicted the conclusions from the Buckeye Institute. Following the release of the Buckeye Institute report, a *Dispatch* columnist lampooned its findings: “The institute says that because so many people drive cars, the answer to road congestion is to keep driving cars and building more roads.” The Institute soon offered a rejoinder in the *Dispatch*’s letters to the editor section. However, once again, the question was not “who won?” but rather to what extent did the debate shift the focus of the campaign from the supporters’ positive message to a sound bite about buying sports utility vehicles in lieu of transit.

Ultimately, the *Dispatch* editorial section did endorse both Issues 20 and 21, with the following language:

For metropolitan Columbus to remain a place where people enjoy living, working, and raising a family, the city must have a convenient, well-used and efficient mass-transit system. Voting yes on both Issues 20 and 21 puts a plan for such a system into action. Issue 20 would turn the Central Ohio Transit Authority's existing 1/4-cent sales-tax levy, which expires on Jan. 31, into an equal-sized levy that would not expire, thus ensuring the continuous source of revenues necessary to attract federal funding. Issue 21 would establish, for 10 years only, an additional 1/4-cent sales-tax levy for COTA, allowing a much-needed

expansion of the system (*Dispatch*, Oct. 31, 1999).

Whereas this was indeed an endorsement, it was probably too little and too late to offset all of the negative publicity that the opponents of the measures had successfully engendered.

Of course, the supporters' campaign extended beyond the war of words in the *Dispatch*. The campaign sought to create a grass roots presence, with the creation of a speaker's bureau, securing endorsements from community leaders, and outreach messages targeted for constituent groups such as African Americans, seniors, and the disabled. However, in retrospect, some observers interviewed for this report were skeptical about the campaign's effectiveness in implementing this aspect of the campaign.

EVALUATION

On the general election held November 2, 1999, in Franklin County, Issue 20 – a permanent 1/4-cent sales tax increase – passed with 57% of the vote (124,343 yes to 91,733 no). Issue 20 – a ten-year 1/4-cent sales tax increase – failed with just 44.7% of the vote (96,614 yes to 119,350 no). Interpretation of such a mixed result is precarious, and inasmuch as no exit polling was done, the true reasons behind this outcome cannot be definitively known. The mixed result was, in a fashion, a major victory for COTA because it meant that for the first time the agency would receive guaranteed funding without the need to ask for renewal. On the other hand, of course, the defeat of Issue 21 signified the decimation of COTA's plans for the comprehensive transit system outlined in Vision 2020 – at least for the time being.

Perhaps the most obvious interpretation of the outcome would be to credit the opposition and its remarkable domination of the campaign agenda during the key weeks of October. However, that interpretation is problematic for several reasons. First, the surveys conducted by the supporters showed that support for both measures had decreased significantly as early as September, far earlier than the publicity surrounding the opposition. The September poll results showed Issue 20 passing (barely) and Issue 21 losing. The actual result was quite similar to the results of this poll. Such a pattern of early support followed by deterioration is not unusual in this type of election.

Second, the fact that Issue 20 – which was essentially dedicated to the bus system – passed, suggests that the opposition's message about "empty buses" was perhaps not as trenchant as it appeared to be. Issue 21 did fail, of course, but again the polls suggested it would fail before the Buckeye Institute attacks on rail systems. Nevertheless, the fact that the \$550,000 pro-transit campaign was unable to realize any gains in public support in the face of an underfunded

opposition that included few, if any, prominent officials or widely respected organizations, was a major disappointment to transit supporters in the area.

In all likelihood, a number of factors were at play to create the outcome of November 2, including the following:

- Paired initiative on the ballot;
- Inexplicit ballot language;
- Lack of a lead campaign spokesperson;
- Failure of campaign to link plan to benefits for voters;
- Failure to convince suburban voters about the benefits of transit;
- Lack of congestion crisis;
- Inadequate campaign funding;
- Inadequate grassroots organization;
- Over-reliance on mass media; and
- Excessive attention paid to opposition arguments.

Paired initiative on the ballot

Considerable hand wringing occurred among transit supporters before and after the November election concerning the wisdom and impact of going with two separate ballot measures. The existence of two measures meant that limited campaign resources had to be stretched even further – despite the avowed strategy of treating the two as a package. Although it is uncertain whether one ballot would have passed, it is fairly clear that voters were quite confused by the two measures. Only half of the voting respondents to a post election survey reported knowing the difference between the two issues, as did only 31% of all respondents.

Individuals interviewed for this report were evenly divided with respect to their opinion on how a single initiative would have fared. As one consultant stated, “placing one initiative on the ballot for a permanent tax would have been a huge gamble, and probably would not have paid off.” Splitting the measures enabled supporters to treat one as a “renewal” and the other as an “increase.” Clearly, the renewal was more popular with voters, although it is possible that the increase (Issue 21) helped to detract attention from the permanency of the renewal (Issue 20).

Ultimately, given the political realities of the Columbus area, the question of the wisdom may be a moot point. The fact is that the business community,

whose buy-in to the plan was critical, would not have supported a single, permanent measure, and thus supporters had to work with the hand with which they were dealt.

Inexplicit ballot language

An associated problem with Issues 20 and 21 was their vague language, which mentions only the tax increases and not – even impressionistically – their purposes. Voters who were not familiar with the details behind the issues – and post election survey data suggests many voters were not – were confronted only with a pair of what appeared to be tax increases. However, the supporters’ hands were tied in this respect by state law. Supporters have since raised the idea of amending the law such that the purposes of a tax increase can be included in the ballot language.

Lack of a lead campaign spokesperson

Although the outgoing Mayor and both of the candidates running to succeed him all endorsed the measures, none took great initiative to sponsor them. Given the traditionally fiscal conservative mindset of the Columbus electorate, their reticence is understandable, but the burden of spearheading the campaign fell largely instead to the managing director of COTA, Ronald Barnes. Besides being limited as an appointed official in terms of campaign activities, Barnes would have the appearance of feathering his own nest by being too closely associated with the campaign. In any event, his debate with opponent Richard Sheir apparently did little to help the measures succeed.

Failure of campaign to link plan to benefits for individual voters.

The message of the campaign – the “three Cs” of Connecting, Congestion relief, and Convenience, was perhaps too broad. It failed to demonstrate to individual voters the specific benefits they could expect to realize were the measures to pass. This problem is related to the reliance on televised media (see next item).

Over-reliance on mass media

The campaign devoted most of its limited resources to television spots that aired the final two weeks before the election. Although these spots may have had some positive impact, televised media are inherently poor at linking specific benefits to specific portions of the electorate. Additionally, brief television spots are a poor forum for explaining the complexities of a two-issue campaign. An enhanced direct mail approach might have helped voters

understand what was at stake with the two issues, as well as letting them see how they personally might have benefited from a positive outcome.

Lack of a traffic congestion crisis

Compared to many other major metropolitan areas, Columbus does not yet seem to be facing a crisis with respect to traffic, congestion, and associated problems like air pollution. Even some of the measures' supporters would concede this, and polling data tend to support the finding that many voters do not yet regard transportation as a front-burner issue. This fact put additional burden on the already overextended campaign to help sell the message that something needed to be done, and quickly, to address the problem. It may be that a necessary condition for a successful transit tax measure is a clear consensus that *something* must be done about a pressing traffic problem. Columbus does not yet fill that bill.

Inadequate campaign funding

Consultants for the Columbus campaign indicated that their odds of success would have been much greater with a \$1 million campaign fund. With more resources, the campaign might have been able to afford more voter education about the two issues, and a much more extensive direct mail campaign.

Inadequate grass roots organization

The campaign occurred in a six to eight week time frame, insufficient to build an effective grass roots presence. As a result, logical constituencies such as frequent COTA users were apparently not mobilized.

Excessive attention paid to opposition arguments

The supporters' campaign opted to respond in great detail to the opposition's somewhat outrageous claims about public transportation. The director of COTA even engaged one outspoken opponent in a public debate that was covered by the local media. In the context of the campaign, it is possible that this seemed necessary because the newspaper was publishing the opponents' arguments. But it may have been counterproductive in that it served to further publicize these arguments, and perhaps legitimized them for an even wider audience.

CHARLOTTE: A RESOUNDING VICTORY FOR TRANSIT IN THE “NEW SOUTH”

On November 3, 1998, voters in the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, approved a 1/2-cent sales tax increase to fund an improved public transportation system, including rapid transit. The tax increase, which was projected to raise \$1 billion over a 25-year period, received 58% of the vote countywide. The victory was a stunning political success in an area with a scant history of support for or experience with transit. Revenues from the tax will be used to create a new light rail system, improve and expand bus service, as well as fund commuter rail from outlying areas.

The success of the measure provides an example of how sufficient support can be marshaled for transportation improvements even in areas that are traditionally wary of tax increases, as well as transit. To achieve this in Charlotte, supporters of the tax initiative created a credible, detailed plan, used extensive public education to publicize it, and ultimately built a broad coalition that supported it at the polls. They were also effective in neutralizing the opposition to the measure by addressing opponent’s arguments directly and with immediacy.

BACKGROUND: TRANSPORTATION AND TRAFFIC

Charlotte (and surrounding Mecklenburg County) is one of the Southeast’s fastest growing metropolitan areas. More than 500,000 people reside within the city’s borders, and approximately 1.3 million live within the metropolitan area; six million residents are within a 100-mile radius. Moreover, the County’s population is expected to continue climbing by as many as 345,000 residents over the next 25 years, a 57% increase; employment is projected to grow by approximately 250,000 jobs during the same period (2025 Transit/Land-use Plan). The metropolitan region’s population is forecast to double over the next 30 years (Observer, Nov. 1, 1998).

Charlotte is home to 292 of the top Fortune 500 companies and more than 340 foreign firms. The banking and financial industries are particularly important and the city is known as the nation’s second largest banking center (next to New York City), with more than \$362 billion in banking assets. The city now ranks as the nation’s fifth largest urban region, as Charlotte and its environs have attracted more and more workers and their families to the “New South.”

With the expanding population and explosive economic development of the past decades, Charlotte is experiencing concomitant increases in traffic, congestion, and related problems. According to a 1997 study by the Texas

Transportation Institute, Charlotte ranked fourth in its rate of congestion growth among the largest 50 metropolitan areas in the United States. Mobility within the region’s five major transportation corridors is rated from “fair” to “poor,” while vehicle miles traveled (VMT) are projected to increase even faster than the population. At the same time, the area has developed in a dispersed manner, such that relatively few commercial and residential developments are situated within major transportation corridors. Additionally, air quality in Charlotte has deteriorated to the point that the region is considered a “maintenance area.” In 1997, for example, the Charlotte area was out of compliance with federal ozone regulations eleven times (*Observer*, Nov. 1, 1998).

Traffic and congestion have become significant concerns to the residents and economic leaders of Charlotte. Residents are increasingly wary of long commute times, and the business community has expressed concerns about the continuing competitiveness of the region should congestion continue to worsen. However, Charlotte is a community that has traditionally eschewed both transit and tax increases. A bastion of moderate conservatism with comparably low tax rates, prior to the 1998 election, Charlotte boasted only a very basic bus and paratransit system.

However, an influx of new residents from the North and East has potentially increased the proportion of residents who have some familiarity with transit. That the business community was demonstrating concern about the region’s transportation problem was also a potential ground for optimism. Nevertheless, to even consider a significant sales tax increase for a major transit project represented a major departure from local custom.

BACKGROUND: POLITICAL HISTORY

The City of Charlotte is governed by a council-manager system. There are 11 members of the City Council; seven are elected by district, the remaining four are elected on an at-large basis. Although the Mayor is elected directly by the voters, most of the day-to-day administration of the city is left to the city manager. However, as the only citywide elected executive official, the mayor can be an important source of policy direction and political leadership, if not an always legally empowered one. Mecklenburg County is governed by a nine-member County Commission; six commissioners represent county districts, and the remainder are elected at large.

The current mayor, who was also in office at the time of the transportation tax campaign, is Pat McCrory, considered by most observers to be a moderate to conservative Republican. Politically, the Charlotte area is generally regarded as conservative and Republican, although partly because the significant African-

American population tends to vote Democratic, some Democrats have been elected as Mayor.

In a city like Charlotte, which is dominated economically by a single industry, it is not unusual to find extraordinary political influence wielded by that industry. Thus in Charlotte, it is the banking and finance industry that is an extremely important member of the influential elite when it comes to civic affairs. Particularly, the First Union Bank and the Bank of America are regarded as critical voices in the local business community.

Prior to the 1998 election, transit in Charlotte was the responsibility of the City of Charlotte. The system consisted of only about 180 buses that rode primarily in and out of downtown Charlotte. According to interviewees, the bus system was not highly regarded by many citizens and was often viewed as a transportation option of last resort for the poor.

CREATING A TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE

The decision to place a public transportation sales tax increase on the November 1998 ballot had its origins in discussions generated early in the decade when the City’s Planning Commission convened a group of civic leaders. Known as the “Committee of 100,” the group proposed that the area needed to begin planning a comprehensive transportation plan to respond to its worsening traffic problems. At that time, the idea of a one-cent sales tax increase was initiated. However, these proposals died without any definitive action being taken on their behalf.

Late in 1997, the idea that a public response to traffic and congestion problems was necessary was resurrected when the region’s state government delegation, working in concert with local leaders, sought and received state permission to ask voters for a 1/2-cent sales tax increase for public transportation. Although some general concepts about the corridors that would receive improvements had already been discussed, there was recognition that a more detailed plan would be necessary to win voter support.

To this end, the City’s planning, transportation, and corporate communications departments collaborated to produce a combined transit and land-use plan titled the “2025 Transit/Land-Use Plan.” Although the plan was not formally linked to the transportation tax initiative, it was the cornerstone of the approach communicated to the public. It established a strong conceptual link between proposed transportation improvements and future land-use policies that would strengthen them. In the minds of its creators, public approval for the tax would mean more than support for transit – it would mean support for “smart growth.”

The plan provides for a development pattern that is “transit-friendly,” by concentrating new development along five major corridors that connect the city’s major economic centers. This land use strategy plays a critical role in helping to make transit a more realistic alternative for the sprawling Charlotte area. Among the land-use patterns espoused by the plan are:

- denser, more pedestrian friendly developments,
- a mix of single and multifamily residences, and
- areas with a mix of residential, shopping and employers in close proximity.

These land-use approaches are markedly different than most of the existing developments in the Charlotte area. Linkage of land-use to the plan implied that a vote for the tax increase meant support for a different approach to land use, although the two were not linked by law. With respect to transit, the plan specifies the development of a transit system consisting of the following options:

- Commuter (“heavy”) rail, to run on commuter lines on existing tracks
- Light rail, to be run on new lines created along major corridors.
- Bus Rapid Transit, to run on newly created busways
- Improvement of existing bus service.

The plan is noteworthy for its specificity. The 2025 report provides a detailed breakdown of the improvements envisioned for each of the five transportation corridors, including the mix of commuter and light rail and bus rapid transit planned for each, and a timetable for implementing the improvements over the coming 25 years. The document also covers planned improvements for area roads, but these receive considerably less emphasis than the rail and other transit strategies. (HOV lanes are rejected as alternative because they “have little or no potential to stimulate or support land use intensification.”)

Despite the comprehensiveness of the plan, its developers avoided overpromising its benefits. They specifically did not contend that adoption of the plan would reduce existing congestion. Rather, the plan was touted as a means of addressing future, inevitable growth and development more rationally.

The plan also called for the creation of a “Metropolitan Transit Commission” (MTC) that would be established to manage the sales tax revenue and oversee the transit operations. The MTC would consist of eight members, one from

each municipality in the County and one at-large member. The MTC would have the following responsibilities:

- Develop and periodically update a long-range transit plan for the County.
- Prepare biennial transit operating programs and five-year capital programs for all County transit services.
- Conduct a public involvement program to help guide the transit planning processes.

In order to build public awareness and support for the transportation tax measure, city officials developed a concentrated effort to publicize and solicit feedback about the plan. Among the key components of this communication effort were the following:

- Community meetings. Multiple public meetings at each of the five transportation corridors identified in the land-use plan were conducted.
- Citywide meetings. Three higher profile, citywide meetings were conducted. These meetings, which were publicized with paid newspaper ads, included a panel of outside consultants who discussed the pros and cons of the plan.
- Citizen’s Committee. A committee of 21 influential citizens was created to help promote public discussion of the plan.

Enacting a tax increase for transportation improvements is a complicated process in the Charlotte area, requiring permission from the state legislature, the Mecklenburg County Commission, and the City Council. Mayor McCrory and the local legislative delegation were instrumental in obtaining this permission. The North Carolina State Legislature enabled the ballot initiative with support from the Charlotte-area delegation in the fall of 1997. In August of 1998, the Charlotte City Council and Mecklenburg County Commission also approved of putting the measure on the ballot. This left approximately 10 weeks for the campaign to win majority approval from the Charlotte community.

The measure called for an open ended 1/2-cent sales tax increase, projected to raise approximately \$50 million annually and over \$1 billion dollars during the 25 years projected to complete the transportation plan described earlier. The actual amount raised by the tax will depend on sales tax revenues; one observer believes the actual amount could be as much as \$2 billion (*Charlotte Observer*, September 6, 1998). Although the measure did not specify how the funds raised by the tax would be spent, the 2025 plan contemplated a system that

could include: a single light rail line from suburban Pineville to “uptown” Charlotte; a busway from the city of Davidson on the shoulder over a major commuting artery, Interstate 77; a heavy rail line on existing track; and several other busways. Nevertheless, passage of the tax increase did not necessarily commit funds to these specific projects, a fact that opponents of the measure seized upon.

Coincidentally, voters were also given an opportunity to vote for a bond package that would provide \$98.3 million to widen and improve existing roads and expand sidewalks within the Charlotte city limits. This provided the tax measure’s supporters with the appearance, if not the reality of a balanced approach to the community’s transportation challenges.

Creation of a pro-transit coalition

The Mayor and the Charlotte business community provided the leadership for the initiative campaign. The Chamber of Commerce viewed the transit improvements to be created by the tax to be “part of the [city’s] business infrastructure” and was therefore an enthusiastic supporter of the campaign (interview with Bob Morgan, Chamber CC). The group selected a well-known former Republican mayor, Jerry Blackmon, to chair the campaign although this was a largely symbolic position. Blackmon’s participation helped to signal that the tax increase had the blessing of the more conservative business establishment in Charlotte, an important consideration in the conservative-leaning community. The mayor’s commitment to the campaign was also critical. Besides helping to convince the state legislature that the tax should be allowed on the ballot, he marshaled political support around the community and appeared in television ads. However, on a more day-to-day basis, a few key business leaders, including executives from major Charlotte financial institutions, directed the campaign.

Under the auspices of the Committee for Our Transportation Future, approximately \$250,000 was raised. Of that sum, \$150,000 came from three key corporate entities: First Union Bank, the Bank of America, and Duke Energy. The remainder came in much smaller amounts from a wide spectrum of local industries, businesses, and construction firms (*Charlotte Observer*, October 28, 1998). Although \$250,000 is not a large sum by national standards, the campaign was very brief – about ten weeks – and the measure’s opponents did not have a funded campaign. Additionally, the public education program conducted cooperatively by various city agencies helped to raise positive public consciousness about the measure. Although city employees could not actually campaign for the measure, the series of public meetings and informational sessions probably helped to achieve the same purpose.

Organized opposition to the plan was scant. Although two Charlotte City Council members were outspoken opponents, they did not raise money to fund an opposition campaign. Perhaps the most effective step taken by the opposition was to gather opposition-related talking points from Wendell Cox, a nationally active opponent of many transit developments, particularly those with a rail component, and related tax measures whose “Public Purpose” provides a host of generally anti-transit materials. The pro-transit coalition responded by retaining the services of UC-Berkeley professor and transit consultant Robert Cervero, who addressed Cox’s many specific arguments against public transit with great diligence. The automobile club, AAA Carolinas, issued a statement in opposition to the plan, stating that the open-ended tax and proposed plans were a “poor way to address the (transportation) problem” (*Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 30, 1998).

In many communities, pro-transit coalitions begin with the more liberal and/or Democratic elements of the community and seek to expand to include the more conservative constituency. In Charlotte, by contrast, supporters had a solid base in the business community but needed to reach out to other community groups to create a more viable coalition. The measure’s supporters, therefore, took steps to target public hearings in areas with relatively heavy concentrations of Democrats and/or African Americans. Additionally, they successfully enlisted the support of local environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club, which was reportedly supportive during the campaign (interview with Jerry Blackmon).

The result was a truly bipartisan coalition in support of the measure and an almost complete absence of organized opposition. The ineffectiveness of the opposition is perhaps underscored by the defeat of both outspoken opponents in the concurrent city council election.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Moreover, newspaper coverage of the issue was quite extensive. The *Charlotte Observer*, the major daily in the area, endorsed the measure without reservation. Perhaps more important, the newspaper ran a series of in-depth analytic pieces about the need for solutions to the area’s transportation-related woes. The pieces included features – including both pros and cons – about the transit systems in other large Sun Belt communities, such as Houston, San Diego, Atlanta, and St. Louis. Several of these cities have fairly extensive rail transit systems. Although the pieces stopped short of endorsing any particular type of system, they perhaps had the net effect of making mass transit seem like a viable alternative for a modern Sun Belt metropolis. Given the lack of a

history of a comprehensive transit system, that was a significant step for the Charlotte area.

The *Charlotte Observer* endorsed the measure wholeheartedly, stating: “No large city can function without good mass transit, and Charlotte’s growth requires it here. That can’t be done without funding. We recommend a yes vote on the transit tax.” The editorial, like the campaign generally, did not overpromise on the benefits to be realized from passage of the tax: “Will building a transit system reduce traffic congestion? No. Transit will, instead offer the option of a reliable, efficient trip, versus the unpredictability and annoyance of traffic congestion” (*Charlotte Observer*, October 21, 1998).

The newspaper also printed guest editorials in support of, and opposition to, the tax measure. Jerry Blackmon, the former mayor and a Republican, from the supporters, wrote the centerpiece editorial. He emphasized that raising the sales tax was the fiscally responsible way of providing for transit – and that 30% of sales tax was paid by people who resided outside of the area. He also mentioned that the tax would help to attract state and federal matching funds and that the system would help bring the county into compliance with federal air pollution regulations. In a fiscally conservative area like Charlotte, his approach has apparent advantages (*Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 1, 1998).

For the opposition, City Council member Mike Jackson wrote the most visible editorial. Jackson quoted the *Observer*’s own editorial which had conceded that the new transit system funded by the tax would not improve traffic conditions in the area. Beyond that, he claimed that (unspecified) supporters of the tax were lying by making various promises about the effectiveness of transit. Jackson provided various examples of communities that had experienced less than favorable outcomes with transit (Most of these arguments were apparently based on those supplied by “The Public Purpose.”). The strategic problem with Jackson’s argument – and perhaps that of the opposition generally – is that it did not for the most part address the specifics of the Charlotte proposal, as did the supporter’s. Instead, it relies on somewhat sketchy critiques of other cities’ transit systems. For example, Jackson goes so far as to say that “Los Angeles is an argument for continued aggressive road improvements” (*Observer*, October 29). Even if true, this line of argument may have proven difficult for the average reader to relate to the specifics of the Charlotte tax proposal. Beyond providing opponents with editorial space, the newspaper apparently did little to promote public awareness of the opposition.

Local television was apparently not a significant factor in the campaign, although in October a local network affiliate did air a special titled “Crossroads of Change,” which explored the issues involved in the transportation tax

measure. The show was one of a series about changes faced by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. Given the market share of public television generally and news programs specifically, it is doubtful whether this program influenced many voters.

DEVISING AND IMPLEMENTING COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Use of research techniques

Market research was used extensively to help plan the transportation tax measure and inform the subsequent campaign. First, in the month of March preceding the election, the City of Charlotte commissioned MarketWise, Inc., a survey research firm, to conduct a survey of Mecklenburg County residents. The telephone survey of 400 residents established the following findings:

- Most (76%) respondents identified the term “mass transit” with the City’s bus system.
- A majority (53%) had a negative view of the bus system.
- Traffic was viewed as a problem for Charlotte, with nearly half agreeing that the traffic situation was a “very serious problem” and an additional 30% finding it “somewhat serious.”
- More than half (55%) liked the idea of a light rail system.
- Nevertheless, most respondents were described as “car oriented.” For example, half thought that widening the roads would be an “excellent” alternative to mass transit, and almost half (47%) were in favor of HOV lanes.
- Although most respondents were not aware the tax increase measure was being proposed for the ballot at the time, 60% did indicate that they supported the idea of a 1/2-cent sales tax increase for funding an expanded mass transit system.

These results convinced transit supporters that a sales tax initiative was a viable prospect, but it also demonstrated the need for public education about the potential benefits of transit. The data helped city officials create the public education program described earlier. A poll conducted by the *Observer* similarly indicated broad support for a transit-dedicated tax increase. However, a poll conducted by the consultant hired by the pro-tax campaign found the public split nearly 50-50 only seven weeks before the vote.

The Campaign Message

As required by law, the campaign for the sales tax initiative was conducted separately from the city’s public education program concerning the broader “2025” land-use plan. The campaign was organized under the title of “Committee for the Transportation Future.” It is difficult to ascertain how effective the public education effort was alone in helping to increase public awareness and acceptance of mass transit. However, interviewees from the campaign suggest that their campaign kept the potentially divisive land use proposal at a safe distance in designing and implementing their campaign strategy. This approach is understandable, given that the land use plan calls for higher density development than that traditionally allowed in the Charlotte area. Had the campaign embraced this concept, it would have exposed the measure to opposition from neighborhoods fearful of higher density developments.

The central message, therefore, was somewhat different than that implied by the “2025” plan. First, it focused on coupling the transit tax measure with the roads bond package: “Vote yes for transit and roads” was one of the phrases frequently invoked by the campaign. Second, the campaign was intentionally vague about what “transit” comprised. In light of the survey results that suggested many residents were unfamiliar with exactly what is meant by “transit,” it made sense to let individuals interpret the concept in their own way. This approach also avoided the potentially divisive effect of committing to specific routes and locales. Third, as exemplified by the pro-tax editorial mentioned earlier, the campaign focused on the fiscal soundness of investing in transit by linking the success of the measure to increased state and federal funding and the role of nonresidents in paying the sales tax.

An additional appeal was directed toward the area’s civic pride: “For Charlotte to be a world class city, it needs a world class transit system.” This message capitalized on the fact that many residents of Charlotte are recent implants from larger East Coast cities. Another message exploited the survey results that indicated significant citizen concern over a clean environment: “Congestion and air quality problems are not going to go away.”

What these campaign messages, for the most part, did *not* do is overpromise on the ability of transit to instantly solve the area’s traffic congestion woes. None of them, it would seem, provided the measure’s opponents with an easy factual or logical weakness to exploit. To the contrary, these messages tended to put the onus on the opposition to articulate a reasonable alternative to the supporter’s plan. Most important, they implied that doing nothing was not a reasonable alternative.

Use of campaign media

The campaign had very little lead-time to plan a grass roots campaign, so most of the activities were mass distributed. The media campaign for the tax measure was based primarily on direct mail rather than broadcast media. With a total budget of only approximately \$250,000, television was considered too expensive to be the centerpiece of the campaign. The supporters’ campaign assembled a list of 90,000 voters who were considered most likely to vote in the election. They contacted each with either direct mail, a phone call, or both. Additionally, a group of speakers was assembled that enabled targeting individual speakers to specific audiences.

Some television spots were purchased. Most notably, one featured Mayor McCrory standing on a busy overpass during rush hour. The idea was to implant a positive message – about the need to address the traffic problem – in a negative context that reminded potential voters about the seriousness of the problem.

EVALUATION

On November 3, 1998 Charlotte and Mecklenburg County voters passed the 1/2-cent sales tax increase by a margin of 58% to 42%, thereby authorizing the largest public-works project ever approved by County voters. The *Charlotte Observer* interpreted the vote as “as a strong message to the rest of the nation – and especially the rest of the state – that there is a serious concern about transportation, congestion, and the environment” (*Charlotte Observer*, November 4, 1998).

How did a Southern, traditionally fiscally-conservative city, with minimal experience with mass transit –so readily approve of a \$1 billion (over 25 years) tax increase? There are several keys to understanding the success of the Charlotte measure. They include:

- The initiative originated within a critical part of the business establishment.
- The traffic congestion problem, and related difficulties, was severe enough to create a sense of urgency among the business community and acceptance among the general public.
- Both the city’s planning department and the local newspaper helped to educate the public about the nature of the transportation challenges faced by the community, further laying the groundwork for public acceptance.
- Supporters were careful to prepare measured responses to opponent’s attacks, without elevating them to the level of equal footing with their own

position.

Each of these four keys is discussed in more detail in the following subsections.

Origin within the City’s Business Establishment

The key to the measure’s success appears to be linked to the fact that the initiative and ongoing support for the measure came first from the area’s influential business community. As mentioned earlier, in many communities such an initiative originates among other elements of the community. Charlotte is a community with an extremely influential core of financial institutions whose executives perceived transportation as a key to the region’s continued financial success. Once this group embraced the concept of mass transit as a partial solution to the area’s long-term viability, the approach was evidently legitimized for a large portion of the electorate. This point was further driven home by selection of a former Republican mayor to act as the campaign’s spokesperson. The opposition, moreover, was essentially marginalized to a few council members who had few potential sources of financial support.

Public Perception of a Serious Problem

Why did the Charlotte financial community come to support the concept of mass transit? The answer lies in a second critical aspect of the Charlotte experience: the existence of a significant and worsening traffic congestion problem. Polling conducted by several sources (the City, the *Charlotte Observer*, and the supporter’s campaign) indicated that a significant majority of the population perceived traffic and congestion to be serious problems in the area. Pollution and the inability to meet federal air quality standards appeared to strengthen this perception. Perhaps of equal significance, interviews with local business executives indicate that many businesses were concerned that, as congestion continued to worsen, their workforce would have increasing difficulty accessing downtown Charlotte.

Support from a Key Political Figure

In addition to playing a critical role in lobbying the state legislature to authorize the appearance of the tax measure on the ballot, Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory provided the campaign with a visible, credible campaign leader. As a Republican, McCrory’s support did much to legitimize the campaign in the eyes of more conservative voters. The Mayor’s role was quite visible, as he appeared in television ads in support of the measure.

Public Education Efforts

The initiative’s path was eased considerably by efforts to educate and prepare the public for the concept of mass transit. Although an increasing portion of Charlotte’s population has experience with mass transit in other cities, the fact remains that most residents of Charlotte have little exposure to an effective transit system. The city’s planning and corporate communications departments led an ambitious effort to educate the community. Concomitantly, perhaps, the *Charlotte Observer* published a series of articles that – although they fell short of recommending it – perhaps helped to create a sense that mass transit was a reasonable endeavor for a modern American metropolis. Education efforts continued with the actual campaign, including speakers who were chosen on the basis of their appeal to specific elements of the population.

Anticipating and Responding to Opponent’s Arguments

For the reasons stated above, opposition to the measure was relatively disorganized. However, inasmuch as two members of the Charlotte City Council were vocally opposed, it was important for the measure’s supporters to anticipate and address potential attempts to sway voter perceptions and attitudes. In this respect, the City Planning Department was judicious in taking steps to hire a consultant who could diffuse many of the opponents’ arguments. This was apparently successful, and was done so in a way that did not require the supporters of the transit measure to elevate their opponents’ positions with direct debate.

This case illustrates that Sunbelt cities without significant experience with mass transit can successfully persuade voters to help marshal local funding via tax increases. However, if a primary key to the success of this effort was initiation by and the willful leadership of the business community, similar metropolitan areas lacking such a condition may find it more challenging to create the necessary broad-based, bipartisan support that occurred in Charlotte.

A SUCCESSFUL SUPERMAJORITY IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

In November of 2000, supporters of Measure A, a tax initiative that would fund the extension of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system into Santa Clara County, California, (along with other transit improvements) successfully convinced a required supermajority of voters to take up their cause. The local newspaper called the outcome, “a little short of a political miracle” (*San Jose Mercury News*, Nov. 8, 2000). The victory occurred despite a host of political foibles and miscues that threatened to keep the measure off the ballot, much less from garnering the necessary two-thirds supermajority vote. In fact, the stunning success of Measure A demonstrated that at least some of the conventional wisdom about the passage of such tax initiatives can be thrown out the window when other conditions are met. In Santa Clara County, the operant factor appeared to be a widely shared sense of urgency about confronting the area’s traffic and congestion woes with public action. The extent to which the lessons learned in this cradle of the Silicon Valley may be readily applied to other communities, however, is less certain.

BACKGROUND: TRANSPORTATION AND TRAFFIC

Santa Clara County, which largely subsumes the Silicon Valley, lies approximately 45 miles southwest of San Francisco. Until recent years, Santa Clara County and its largest city of San Jose, stood in the shadow of San Francisco. However, with the advent of the boom in high technology over the past decades, the Silicon Valley emerged as the focus for a great deal of economic growth. Increasingly, that economic growth has translated into more and more traffic and congestion. Terrible traffic in the Silicon Valley is essentially a by-product of an extremely high number of jobs, coupled with inadequate housing that forces many workers to drive increasingly farther distances to and from their places of employment, as well as a pattern of land use that has not linked transportation improvements with jobs and homes.

Never good even before the halcyon days of the most recent technology boom, traffic in and around Santa Clara County went from bad to truly horrible. Recent figures from the California State Transportation Agency, Caltrans, have indicated that seven of the 10 most congested highways in the San Francisco Bay Area feed into the County. According to Caltrans, stop-and-go traffic costs the Bay Area as a whole nearly \$1.5 million a day in lost wages and wasted fuel (*San Jose Mercury News*, September 21, 2000). Traffic congestion in the region has risen an astounding 87% since 1995. In just one year, from 1998 to

1999, delays jumped 15%. For years, public opinion polls have typically found traffic and congestion to be the number one policy concern of area residents.

Although the traffic situation was apparently reaching new extremes in 2000, the area had not failed to act in the past when it came to providing transit alternatives to the automobile. Santa Clara County voters have a record of approving sales taxes dedicated to transit and other transportation improvements. Most recently, in 1996 the electorate had approved by a slim margin a 1/2-cent sales tax increase that funded expansion of the county's fledgling light rail system, along with other transportation improvements. That increase (1996 Measure A) was passed in tandem with a companion measure (1996 Measure B) that specified how the revenues collected by the tax would be spent, a bit of legislative legerdemain that enabled the tax increase to be approved by a simple majority. Without such a companion measure arrangement, tax increases for specific purposes (such as transportation projects) must, by state law, be passed by a two-thirds supermajority.

Although the County had a working light rail system, and had already approved (via the 1996 Measure A) expansion of that system, that fledgling system alone could not address a major component of the area's traffic woes: the constant stream of workers from outside the County, particularly from the East Bay area of the region down Interstate 880 and Interstate 680. The Bay Area transit alternative for such intraregional commuting is BART. But BART extends only to the East Bay City of Fremont and to Daly City on the northwest side of Santa Clara County. Decades ago, when the BART system was first proposed and built, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors declined to commit the County into the system. Moreover, the Board opted *not* to place the proposal on the ballot to let voters decide. Beyond a series of County bus systems, the only other transit option in and out of Santa Clara County was CalTrain, a relatively slow commuter rail train that runs from downtown San Francisco to downtown San Jose with no service at all to the East Bay portion of the region.

As San Jose and the Silicon Valley became increasingly critical to the region's economic engine, public demand grew for an extension of BART into Santa Clara County. Although alternative transit arrangements were occasionally discussed by the various county transportation agencies, such as an enhanced commuter rail system, it was always clear that BART was the transit mode of choice in the Bay Area. Yet Santa Clara County voters never had a chance to vote on the prospect of joining the area-wide BART system. With intraregional traffic reaching crisis levels, the time appeared ripe to community leaders to give voters that opportunity.

BACKGROUND: POLITICAL HISTORY

Regional transportation policy is quite complicated. Each county has a transportation agency that is primarily responsible for building and maintaining roads, providing mass transit, etc. Additionally, BART is managed by a special district with elected board members. Regional transportation decisions may also fall under the purview of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the area's metropolitan planning organization (MPO). The Santa Clara County transportation agency is known as the VTA (Valley Transportation Authority). The VTA operates the local bus and light rail systems, in addition to highway construction and maintenance responsibilities on behalf of some localities. It is the executive agency charged with implementing and managing most transportation policies. Its Board of Directors consists of twelve members and five alternates appointed as follows:

- Five city council members and one alternate from the City of San Jose;
- Five city council members from other, much smaller municipalities in the County; and
- Two members and one alternate from the County Board of Supervisors.

The decision of whether or not to build a BART extension, at least theoretically, involves many of these decision makers and others. At least some if not most, of the funding would have to come from Santa Clara County, although some federal subsidy was a possibility for the future. Ultimately, the BART Board of Directors would have to approve any extension and might possibly require additional "buy-in" funds from Santa Clara County. The MTC would also need to approve of the expansion in the context of regional transportation policy.

As a practical matter, two ways of securing local funding for the BART expansion were possible under State and County law. First, the County (via its Board of Supervisors) could approve of a sales tax increase. For this to occur, four of the five County Supervisors would have to approve of the proposal, which would then go to voters, a majority of which would need to approve it for the tax to succeed. Alternately, the VTA Board of Directors could also vote to place a sales tax increase on the ballot – but such a measure would require a two-thirds margin by voters because it would be a transportation-specific issue. (Were the Board of Supervisors to approve of a tax measure, it could be framed as a general revenue issue, and thus require only the normal majority vote.)

California counties generally lack a strong central decision making authority, leaving major policy issues open to a variety of political pressures. In Santa

Clara County, the Mayor of San Jose, by virtue of his or her authority over the largest municipality, is potentially a major influence on policymaking. The County Board of Supervisors, of course, is also important. Because of its primacy in the local economy, the high-tech industry has, over the past two decades, developed into a significant lobbying force with respect to a variety of local and regional policy issues. Specifically, the Silicon Valley Manufacturers Group (SVMG) – which represents 190 of the area’s largest high-tech firms – has taken a substantial interest and leadership role in the field of transportation policy. When transportation-related Measures A & B were successfully passed in 1996, it was the SVMG that spearheaded both the fundraising and the campaign. The influence of the SVMG, which includes such high-tech industry heavyweights as Intel, Applied Materials, and Hewlett-Packard, is pervasive enough such that it would be unlikely for a tax measure increase to succeed without its support.

Compared to national and state norms, voters in Santa Clara County tend to be quite liberal and generally supportive of reasoned public responses to policy challenges. The area’s congressional and state legislative delegations are exclusively Democratic. Although all local elections are officially nonpartisan, most local elected officials are also known to identify with the Democratic Party. Thus, the area is probably more potentially receptive than many to the idea of enhancing local transportation facilities via tax increases.

More specifically, the public in Santa Clara County has always been perceived (and public opinion polling later confirmed this perception) to be quite warm to the prospect of linking San Jose and the Santa Clara County to the BART system. Across the Bay Area, BART was generally viewed as a viable, relatively efficient and effective mass transit alternative, and many Santa Clara County residents had personal experience using the system from nearby stops in the adjacent County of Alameda. Much, if not most, of the current voting public was not present when the original decision to opt away from the BART system was made in the 1960s, and few could understand how the Silicon Valley could be excluded from such a popular transportation alternative – particularly as the traffic situation was perceived to be worsening by the day.

DEVELOPING A TRANSPORTATION COALITION

In the context of the Silicon Valley described above, there was relatively great consensus about the need for a public response to the problems of traffic and congestion. Past campaigns and elections had demonstrated that a coalition consisting of the high tech business sector, local elected officials, and a generally sympathetic if not supportive electorate could successfully achieve a great deal with respect to transportation improvements. However, the prospect

of a massive project, such as potentially linking San Jose to the BART system, was fraught with potential potholes in the form of disagreements about timing, routes, and funding for alternative transportation and transit facilities. It was such disagreement that would nearly forestall any action at all as efforts began to take a proposal to the voters.

Due to the time constraints that ultimately arose – the campaign would only have about 75 days – coalition building was not a focal point of the campaign. Opposition did arise, and for the most part it was not from quarters that had any philosophical opposition to expanding transit. Oddly, environmental groups – specifically, the Sierra Club – wound up opposing the measure because they favored emphasis on expanding the existing commuter rail. The area’s Central Labor Council, which in the past had provided at least nominal support of such measures, remained neutral perhaps in sympathy to the individual politicians who opposed the measure. However, neither group has been a critical supporter of past transportation measures, and so these developments were not seen as being likely to doom the proposal

CREATING A TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE

The path to the transportation initiative that eventually appeared on the November 2000 ballot became a complicated one. Indeed, the process was so circuitous and conflict-ridden that some observers believed the proposal that emerged had little chance of success for that very reason.

The source of the leadership that produced the initiative came from the Mayor of San Jose, Ron Gonzales. Upon his election to the office in 1998, Gonzales had promised that the city of San Jose would be “connected” to BART. The promise was vague enough to possibly encompass a number of alternative means of establishing a link to BART. However, the Mayor’s commitment proved to be firm and was probably pivotal to the eventual success of the proposal. As stated earlier, discussion of linking San Jose to BART had frequently surfaced before, but for the first time a major elected official was proclaiming a positive effort to achieve it. Additionally, this push was to occur in a context of great economic prosperity, which seemed to make such an ambitious proposal even timelier in the eyes of many observers.

With the Mayor’s proclamation in the backdrop, the first concrete event that propelled creation of a transportation initiative was the announcement by California Governor Gray Davis of a state commitment of a \$5.3 billion matching grant to localities for the purpose of creating transportation enhancements, including transit. Of this amount, the County of Santa Clara was to receive \$1 billion – with \$726 million earmarked for a BART extension

project. To receive the matching grant, the County would need to raise a like amount – and that would require a new source of revenue.

For several reasons, the logical vehicle for securing the matching funds would be the extension of a past sales tax increase – scheduled to expire in 2006 – placed on the ballot by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. Most important, such a general sales tax increase approved by the Board would require approval from only a simple majority of voters. Additionally, the Board of Supervisors provides geographic representation for the entire County. With this in mind, the Board embarked upon discussions of such a proposal in June of 2000.

Although the Board appeared to be unanimous in its support for the idea of bringing BART to the County, there was considerable disagreement about the specifics of doing so. When supervisors first considered a sales tax proposal (in late June), it was for a 20-year, 1/2-cent sales tax measure that would raise \$3.8 billion. Under this proposal, about half of the money would be spent extending BART 22 miles from Fremont, to downtown San Jose, terminating in the City of Santa Clara. The remaining half of the money would be spent on a host of other transit, highway and road projects. The road projects were seen in part as enticements to voters and elected officials who would not benefit as directly from the BART extension. Nevertheless, only one supervisor was solidly behind that plan and the other four were undecided. More ominously, however, two supervisors said that they would like to postpone the tax measure for a year or more so that some crucial questions about BART could be answered (*San Jose Mercury News*, August 4, 2000).

As discussions wore on, and as other alternatives were weighed by the Board of Supervisors, Mayor Gonzales was steadfast in pushing for a more immediate proposal that could be on the upcoming November ballot. Yet it was clear that the two supervisors who had opposed the original proposal were equally steadfast in their opposition to such a timeframe. They were adamant in claiming that the issue required additional study, including a more precise determination of the long-term costs, although some observers felt that the pair resented the Mayor's leadership in what was, at least nominally, a County area of authority. Ultimately, the reasoning behind the Supervisors' opposition mattered less than the fact that it was sufficient to kill any proposal from the Board to get a BART measure on the ballot. This was due to the fact that the votes of four of the five supervisors were required to put a tax increase to the voters, and only three of the five ultimately agreed to a 25-year sales tax plan.

In response to this apparent stalemate, Mayor Gonzales raised the stakes surrounding the discussion by proposing an alternative means of putting the

issue to voters: the VTA Board of Directors could also propose a tax increase. Specifically, the Mayor proposed a 30-year, 1/2-cent increase that would be used to fund transit projects only – primarily the BART extension, but funds would also go to some other transit projects around the County. (The “increase” was in fact an extension of the existing 1/2-cent levy, supported by voters in 1996 with a nine-year expiration date, which was to expire in 2006.) The alternative measure was probably even less attractive to the two opposing members of the Board, because it would not present any funds for nontransit improvements, i.e., highways, and it would effectively remove the Board from transportation planning in the future. Ultimately, however, the gambit seemed to fail because the Board failed to approve of the original proposal by a final vote of three to none, with the two opposing supervisors abstaining and thereby killing the proposal (*San Jose Mercury News*, August 9, 2000). The chances of a BART-related measure coming to voters appeared dim.

However, Mayor Gonzales made good on his promise to take the matter before the VTA Board of Directors. In fact, the day after the Board of Supervisors rejected the BART proposal, Gonzales brought the matter to the VTA Board. The 1/2-cent sales tax proposal would raise \$6 billion in its 30-year life, and would connect BART to the Santa Clara County cities of Milpitas, San Jose and Santa Clara; as well as build rail connections from San Jose Airport to BART and light rail; expand light rail throughout the county and electrify the CalTrain commuter train to San Francisco. The proposal omitted any funding for additional highway improvements (*San Jose Mercury News*, August 8, 2000).

Although the proposal quickly became identified with the BART system, in reality only a minority of the revenues (approximately \$2 billion of the total of \$6 billion) it would raise would go to the construction and operation of the BART extension. The state matching funds, possibly coupled with federal assistance, were to supplement funds for the BART project. It included more than \$1 billion in rail operating costs, but according to VTA staff, another sales tax to cover operating costs for the life of the tax would probably be needed to cover operating expenses in 2112 or 2114.

Although the plan reflected the wisdom of months of discussion and debate, the details were drafted relatively quickly by a small group of supporters led by Mayor Gonzales, and including the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group (Interview, Jude Barry). Although the measure explicitly proposed to bring BART to Santa Clara County, many questions were left unanswered, including such important details as the route of the BART extension, whether and how much the County would need to pay to “buy into” the BART system, and the cost of operating the extension, etc. Although the measure, if passed, would

serve to secure the state matching funds offered by the Governor, the availability of federal aid was far less certain. Supporters of the measure hoped that its success might help ensure a federal subsidy.

The motion to put this increase before voters in November passed the VTA Board of Directors 11-1, which was not a great surprise to most observers. Five of the VTA Board members were from San Jose, which would perhaps benefit the most from the BART extension. The other members were relatively easy to convince; the addition of funds for light rail and CalTrain helped to achieve the nearly unanimous vote. (The lone dissenter was one of the same supervisors who had opposed the proposal the Board of Supervisors had rejected the previous day.) Immediately, the two supervisors who had favored delaying action on BART articulated their opposition to the proposal (*San Jose Mercury News*, August 9, 2000).

Thus, the proposal had some important strikes against it from the onset.

- Two of five County Supervisors were outspoken, if not adamant opponents. Both were experienced politicians who could be expected to wield local influence.
- It would require a two-thirds supermajority of taxpayers, a threshold of support met by only two of thirty-two previous proposals.
- Although it did contain some benefits for taxpayers outside of San Jose, the proposal contained no funding for highways.
- Supporters would have only about seventy-five days to sell the proposal to voters.
- The measure called for a 30-year tax increase, a longer period than nearly every successful measure in the past.
- Additionally, two San Jose bond measures (for parks and library improvements, respectively) were on the ballot.

USE OF RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Research was critical to the decision to put the proposal on the ballot, in shaping its provisions, and in designing the campaign for its passage. Essentially, survey research conducted by both the supporters of the measure and third parties established one very important fact: voters in Santa Clara County liked BART, and they were willing to vote for a measure that would bring it into the County and San Jose.

A poll conducted by the SVMG in the spring of 2000 found that 62% of County residents were willing to support a sales tax extension for 20 years as a way of connecting BART to downtown San Jose. (The manufacturing group was, of course, a key advocate of the tax.) Perhaps more encouraging than the level of support – which would be insufficient for a supermajority vote – was the fact that transit, and specifically, BART – was the most popular alternative for addressing the area’s traffic woes. Bringing BART to San Jose, in fact, was found to be more popular than filling potholes, a perennial public favorite (interview with Jude Barry). In July, as discussion progressed before the votes that enabled the measure to go to the voters, results from a survey conducted by the *Mercury News* indicated that among a sample of 500 likely voters:

- Seventy percent favored a 1/2-cent sales tax to pay for an extension of BART to San Jose;
- Seventy-nine percent wanted the issue on the ballot in November; and
- Seventy percent said that they believed BART would reduce traffic congestion. (*Mercury News*, July 21, 2000).

The *Mercury News* poll found support for the ballot measure to be at least 60% or more across all areas of the valley, rising to 75% and above in West San Jose, Santa Clara, and Sunnyvale. In Palo Alto, Mountain View and Los Altos, 70% were behind the tax plan as compared to 62% in Gilroy, Morgan Hill, and South San Jose. Support was strong across the board for all relevant demographic groups (*Mercury News*, July 21, 2000). These figures certainly emboldened supporters of the measure as they planned their approach to getting it on the ballot. Coupled with the results from the earlier SVMG survey, the survey suggested that support for a BART-related measure was strong and growing. Supporters used this information to make BART the centerpiece of their proposal. However, even with such high levels of support, supporters faced the challenge of a very small margin to protect, in light of the necessary two-thirds supermajority vote required for passage of the measure.

One important use of research was in targeting specific areas of the County for direct mailings. Tracking polls showed no significant change in the broad-based support for the issue, but they enabled supporters to isolate potential “swing areas.” Second, and perhaps even more important, the surveys helped document the enormous appeal of BART to public opinion. Both of these uses are discussed in further detail in the next section. The supporter’s consultants, to further identify nuances in public support for the measure, also convened focus groups.

DEVISING AND IMPLEMENTING A MARKETING AND CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

With a severely limited time span and the need to keep every possible vote, the supporters of Measure A worked quickly. The campaign was led jointly by Mayor Gonzales of San Jose and his staff, and the leadership of the SVMG, particularly President and Chief Executive Officer Carl Guardino. The campaign raised more money in 75 days (\$2.2 million) than had been raised in six months (\$1.6 million) in the Measure A & B campaign in 1996. (By contrast, previous similar campaigns involved nine months in 1984 and two years in 1992). The fundraising effectiveness was a tribute both to the dedication of the supporters and their allies, as well as the unprecedented prosperity being enjoyed by Silicon Valley companies. The SVMG supported the campaign because its membership feels strongly about the need for effective transportation. The community of high-tech firms views it as a “bottom line” issue that employers are willing to invest in (interview with Carl Guardino). By contrast, opponents of the measure raised only \$10,000, not enough to wage a serious campaign of this type.

The supporters hired the firm of Townsend, Raimundo, Besler and Usher, which had served as the consultants to the SVMG for the previous three successful transportation-related campaigns in Santa Clara County. Statewide, the firm boasted an impressive track record, including victories in approximately 80% of tax increase elections they steered across the state.

The overall strategy that supporters developed for the Measure A campaign was, in a word, BART. BART was a proven magnet for popular support in results from public opinion surveys. In the view of the measure’s sponsors, BART was seen as the fastest and best transit option in the area. Due to the overwhelming problems with congestion on area freeways and beyond, supporters did not have to worry about convincing voters about the problem and could instead focus on a positive response to the area’s traffic mess. Thus, with a few exceptions, the campaign would emphasize the BART extension that would be funded by the measure.

A second major strategy for the supporter’s campaign was to essentially ignore the opposition. Polling data and focus group interviews supported the conclusion that the opponents’ arguments did not resonate well with voters. The supporters decided that to engage the opposition would only serve to publicize it and elevate its standing among voters. Thus advertising did not address the opposition arguments, nor did the proponents seek to debate opponents.

Media coverage of the election was most thorough from local newspapers. Between August and the November election, the *Mercury News* published approximately 30 news and editorial stories concerning the Measure A election. However, the election occurred in the context of a closely contested presidential race, and the Measure A coverage was probably not preeminent during this period. The *Mercury News* did dutifully report the opposition's views, but on the whole its coverage was more focused on the difficulty of getting a supermajority vote – not on the substance of the opposition's views.

It is a commentary on the state of traffic congestion in Santa Clara County that the *Mercury News* has a daily column on local traffic and transportation issues. The writer of that column has generally taken a positive view towards the role of transit in addressing transportation problems, such that he was recused from writing about the Measure A campaign. Nevertheless, coverage about the election never became sharply focused on the merits of the opposition's arguments, and the newspaper – to the surprise of few observers – endorsed the measure in its editorial pages:

Particularly compelling is the fact that this is an opportunity that may not repeat itself. We have the state money in hand if we use it reasonably quickly. We have a good economy, with sales tax returns that raise the tax base...And Santa Clara County voters are thoroughly fed up with traffic congestion...Measure A is more than a BART proposal. The sales tax is meant to fund other transit projects: CalTrain, light rail, Altamont Commuter Express trains, more buses and a people-mover to link BART, CalTrain and light rail with San Jose airport. For these reasons and others, we recommend that you vote Yes on Measure A (*Mercury News*, Oct. 22, 2000).

As stated earlier, the primary theme of the campaign was to be on BART and the benefits associated with extending the system to Santa Clara County. Within that general framework were, of course, more specific strategies and messages. The campaign's BART message was straightforward:

- BART was needed *now* – With traffic congestion at an all-time high, this was a relatively simple proposition.
- BART is nonpolluting – This helped address environmental concerns that might have been raised by the failure of the Sierra Club to endorse the measure.

- BART will help relieve congestion by taking pressure off of other arteries. Because the most congested arteries (Interstates 880 and 680 from the east) existed alongside the proposed BART route, this was a relatively easy claim to make.

More specifically, the campaign claimed that 78,000 car vehicle trips would be reduced daily due to the BART extension. This claim nearly led to a debacle for the campaign, when the *Mercury News* published an analysis – including a menacing graphical representation – that suggested that downtown San Jose would resemble Manhattan if the projected numbers were to come true. The article included interviews with local residents who were terrified of such a prospect (*Mercury News*, Oct. 12, 2000). Fortunately for the campaign, the article was published during a strike by newspaper carriers, and it is possible that relatively few readers saw the article.

In a normal initiative campaign with a simple majority requirement for victory, the BART-centric approach may well have sufficed. However, Measure A supporters needed to not only maintain the support of normally pro-transit voters, they also needed to preserve their more tenuous support from more conservative voters. Therefore, although much of the campaign was aimed at punching home the BART message to more conventional supporters, a second message was honed for those voters considered to be more suspicious of tax increases.

This message was to focus on the specific benefits that the tax increase would impart. Direct mailings were helped to publicize the geographically appropriate aspects of the package that would benefit specific demographics, which were targeted via the survey research described earlier. Additionally, plans for a citizens oversight committee – which focus group research had suggested would be helpful in convincing more skeptical voters – were publicized. Traditionally anti-tax public interest groups, such as the California Taxpayers' Association, as well as the locally well-known “rabble-rouser” leader of the Santa Clara County Taxpayers' Association were convinced to help support the measure, enhancing the campaign's credibility with potential opponents.

Overall, with a relatively massive campaign war chest, the supporters of Measure A were able to fund both a virtual blizzard of direct mail and a significant amount of radio and television airtime. Campaign consultants and other supporters of Measure A disagreed about which medium was most effective, and perhaps both were of some benefit.

Television was a more important part of a local transit campaign than in previous elections. It was used strategically to help define the issues of the campaign before the opposition could mobilize any public debate on the subject. Drive-time radio was also used to help mobilize commuters who would be likely sympathetic to the cause. And billboards were erected adjacent to the heaviest commuting corridors, further establishing the measure in the minds of commuting voters.

As stated previously, the direct mail component of the campaign was used to “surgically” direct specific messages to specific demographic groups that had been targeted via survey and focus group research. For example, areas that were somewhat remote from the projected BART route received more information about extension of the light rail or electrification of the CalTrain system that the measure would also fund. Many households received as many as eight pieces of mail from the campaign and its allied groups.

Additionally, the proponents made extensive use of a speaker’s bureau, including over one hundred presentations to neighborhood associations and other groups. Silicon Valley firms in the SVMG also provided in-house campaign information to their employees, as they have in past successful campaigns for transit-related and other issues.

EVALUATION

On November 7, 2000, the voters in Santa Clara County approved Measure A by a margin of 357,866 (70.6%) to 148,893 (29.4%), providing its supporters with a stunning and rare victory in an election that required a two-thirds majority. A variety of factors appear to have enabled the victory, which occurred in the face of several significant hurdles beyond the two-thirds requirement. Exit polls confirmed that support for Measure A came from virtually every demographic group, including members of both major political parties, all major ethnic and racial groups, and all age groups. Only in a few instances was support from specific groups below the two-thirds threshold, albeit only slightly.

In broad strokes, it is easy to depict the victory as the result of two enormous and coinciding forces: (a) incredibly bad traffic and congestion, and (b) the popularity of the BART system in the Bay Area. Without these two conditions, it is unlikely the Measure A as written could have succeeded. Unfortunately for supporters of transportation-related tax initiatives, not many communities can appeal to these conditions to help them in their respective efforts. On the other hand, there are some lessons from the Santa Clara County election that may possibly apply to other contexts.

Among the most important reasons that Measure A was successful are the following:

- Urgency of traffic problem;
- Popularity of BART;
- Prosperity of region;
- Political leadership;
- Fundraising;
- A tax extension, not a bona fide increase;
- General election;
- Dismissal of opposition; and
- Direct mail, enabled by survey research.

Urgency of traffic problem

By objective measures and subjective perception, traffic in the South Bay area was (and is) reaching epic proportions. Such a profound congestion condition frustrates many citizens while prompting employers to lose time and money. Even without a campaign, a supermajority of citizens was ready to spend public funds to deal with the problem. The pervasiveness of the traffic problem enabled supporters to avoid wasting time educating the public about the negative side effects of traffic and to concentrate on the positive message of their proposed solution. Without such an imminent problem, it is possible that some sort of transportation-related measure might have passed anyway, but it seems less than likely that an all-transit measure would have passed with a two-thirds majority.

Popularity of BART

Citizens of Santa Clara County have long been frustrated by the inaccessibility of the BART system to their residences. The decision to opt out of the system occurred decades ago, the reasoning behind it obscure to almost all current residents. Public opinion polls confirm that BART is a well-liked and trusted transit alternative in Santa Clara County. Many residents occasionally use the system to travel from its present endpoint in southern Alameda County, and have thus come to appreciate its speed and dependable service. The November 2000 election was the first opportunity for Santa Clara County residents to vote on the matter of extending BART. It is therefore plausible that many voters would have voted for any measure promising to deliver BART, although a supermajority might not have occurred in other circumstances.

Prosperity of region

Supporters of Measure A realized that the incredible economic prosperity of the Silicon Valley had created a positive environment for support of public investments. It stands to reason that a region experiencing gains in personal wealth will be also more amenable to supporting public expenditures. In fact, the downturn of the high technology economy shortly after the November election raises the question of whether it would have passed in the following year.

Political leadership

Mayor Gonzales and SVMG President Carl Guardino were clearly the chief political sponsors of Measure A. Without their personal commitment, and of course the efforts of their respective staffs, the funds necessary for the Measure A campaign might not have materialized. At least in hindsight, their strategic approach to the campaign appeared to be soundly grounded. That being said, the campaign for Measure A did not appear to hinge on personalities. Mayor Gonzales was not as active in the campaign during its closing months, but the measure did not appear to lose any support.

Fundraising

With nearly \$2 million in campaign donations from Silicon Valley industry, the Measure A supporters were able to fund an all-out media blitz on a scale perhaps unprecedented in such a campaign. Most successful campaigns spend closer to \$1 million, at best. With this budget, support for the measure never dipped below the critical two-thirds level, despite plenty of negative news.

A tax extension, not a bona fide increase

Because Measure A provided for an extension of the existing 1/2-cent sales tax levy, supporters were able to accurately depict it as “traffic relief now, with no increase in taxes.” The extent to which this was apparent to the average voter is unknown, however, and this perhaps was counterbalanced by the fact that the measure had a 30-year sunset date.

General election

The election occurred during a close presidential race. The preeminence of national political events helped to minimize coverage of the opposition’s arguments and enabled supporters to maintain control of the public debate (to

the extent that there was any). In an off-year election, there would have been more opportunities for the opposition to attract attention and support.

Dismissal of opposition

The supporters were able to successfully ignore their opposition and its arguments. Their decision to do so was based largely on survey and focus group research, which suggested that the opposition arguments did not resonate well with most potential voters. It was nevertheless a calculated risk that could have backfired had the opponents been more successful in establishing a presence in the local news media. However, in hindsight the decision appears to have been a well-informed one that precluded the opposition from getting attention on the coattails of the supporters' campaign.

Direct mail, enabled by survey research

Supporters of Measure A are convinced that finely tuned direct mail messages, which varied by the demographics of the locales to which they were sent, were instrumental in maintaining the supermajority needed to pass Measure A.

Identification of Factors that Normally Lower the Supporting Voter Percentage

With their success on Measure A, supporters were able to demonstrate that some of conventional wisdom about supposedly fatal flaws to such campaigns was questionable. Three of these factors are discussed below.

First, the measure had a 30-year expiration date, which is quite lengthy. Past experience had suggested that voters favor tax increases with much quicker expiration dates. In fact, our prior report recommended that expiration dates of ten years or less should be used (Haas, Massey, et al., 2000). In Santa Clara County in 1996, in fact, research had suggested that a nine-year expiration was optimal for retaining voter support. This outcome demonstrates that under some circumstances, such as with the extension of an existing tax, the public will support a much longer tax period. In this case, the popularity of the BART extension probably helped to overcome any reservations about the tax's longevity. The result in Santa Clara County of a high supporting percentage of a measure with a lengthy expiration date is supported in four other cases included in this study, including one case with no expiration date: Salt Lake, Davis, and Weber Counties in Utah.

Second, the measure did not have a highway component. Frequently, tax proposals are marketed in tandem with highway improvement or extension proposals, either in the same ballot measure or with a companion measure. Measure A was purely for transit. The VTA did pledge to devote existing

residual funds to highway improvements, although this did not constitute an increase. Opponents attempted to capitalize on their contention that the measure would preclude highway improvements, but the proponents were apparently successful in convincing most voters that funds would remain available for roads. In addition, since a number of recent highway improvements have taken place in the County, it was difficult to argue that highways were significantly underfunded.

Third, some significant opposition existed. Once the supporters' camp decided to go with a VTA-sponsored measure – which required supermajority approval – the conventional wisdom was that it would need a truly united front to gain the needed margin. But from the outset, two experienced and well-known elected officials (one with a strong transportation background) were vocal opponents of the measure. Yet the supporters' research-tested strategy of ignoring them proved successful. With a token campaign fund and arguments that apparently convinced few, the opponents were unable to seize control of the discussion of the issue.

In sum, the success of Measure A appears to be the result of effective political leadership taking advantage of extremely fortuitous circumstances with a thoroughly researched strategy.

FOUR RECENT BALLOT MEASURES WITH A RAIL COMPONENT:

ALAMEDA AND SONOMA COUNTIES, CALIFORNIA; SALT LAKE, DAVIS, AND WEBER COUNTIES IN UTAH; AND AUSTIN, TEXAS

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Although onsite interviews were conducted with the seven prior cases, telephone interviewing was used with four November 2000 ballot measures. While providing information similar to that provided by onsite interviewing, telephone interviewing was used with these four most recent ballot measures to facilitate timely completion of this project. Voters in Alameda County, California, and in Salt Lake, Davis, and Weber Counties in Utah supported the transportation measures. Voters in Austin, Texas and Sonoma County in California did not support the transportation measures at the required legal level. (Approximately 60% of voters in Sonoma County supported the transit measure. However, this measure failed because California requires two-thirds voter support for approval.)

Each of the four cases is discussed separately, in a sequence from the case with the highest percentage of voter support to the case with the lowest percentage of support. Instead of trying to draw conclusions about these four cases collectively at the end of this chapter, the synthesis of these four cases, along with those of the seven measures studied in prior chapters, will be deferred to the next and final chapter.

ALAMEDA COUNTY IN CALIFORNIA

Introduction and Overview

On November 7, 2000, 81.5% of Alameda County voters supported a measure to extend the 1/2-cent sales tax dedicated to both transit and highway improvements for twenty years. Voters approved the 1/2-cent transportation tax with a 15-year expiration date in 1986, and revenue collection began in 1987. Accordingly, the election in November of 2000 was the last chance to have voters approve an extension of this tax, rather than voting to reinstate the tax.

In 1998, Alameda County voters had been presented with a measure to extend the 1/2-cent transportation sales tax for 15 years. Although this measure

received support from 58% of voters, the 1998 measure did not pass because the California Supreme Court ruled in 1995 that a two-thirds supermajority was needed for special purposes, including transportation taxes.

The 1998 measure failed largely because environmentalists, as well as some geographic segments, actively opposed the measure. Given the environmental concerns of voters, combined with the need for supermajority support, supporters focused their efforts on developing a multimodal transportation package that would appeal to business, labor, and environmental organizations, as well as to each geographic segment within the County. Based upon the overwhelming margin of victory, the efforts to build a coalition representing organizations with diverse and even conflicting interests, by involving them in the planning process, was both necessary and successful. The challenge of building a coalition among groups with fundamental disagreements was made somewhat easier by a) the realization by all groups that transportation was a significant problem in the County that would worsen significantly without additional funding, and b) the perception that it would be significantly more difficult to obtain support from two-thirds of voters once they were voting to reinstate a tax that had expired.

Background: Description of the County

Alameda County is large and diverse. The 1998 population was approximately 1.45 million. Some of the communities within the County such as Berkeley tend to be politically liberal, while other communities such as Livermore, tend to be more conservative. Some communities, such as Fremont (approximately 40% Asian), tend to be ethnically diverse, while other communities such as Dublin (74% white), tend to be less diverse. The eastern part of the County is growing rapidly but, at the same time, still has some open space, while the northern part of the county is not growing rapidly and has limited open space.

The diversity within Alameda County creates challenges when obtaining support from county voters, particularly with transportation taxes that require supermajority approval.

Background: the Transportation System

The primary components of the transportation system in Alameda County are a) highways and roads, b) traditional transit systems consisting largely of buses and paratransit, and c) Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), which is a high speed rail system. No light rail lines exist in the County and none have been proposed. Most recent federal and state transportation funding has been devoted to BART extensions as well as highway improvements, particularly the addition of car-pool lanes. Most revenue generated from the existing 1/2-

cent County transportation tax also has been devoted to these two components of the transportation system. On the other hand, AC Transit, which is responsible for the County transit system, received a much smaller portion of the sales tax funds and found it necessary to make some service reductions as a result of financial constraints from other revenue sources. The limited amount of resources devoted to basic transit systems created what some community organizations and Alameda County citizens perceived as an imbalanced and inequitable allocation of resources. This perception of inequity created challenges and conflicts with both the 1998 and 2000 ballot measures.

Based upon the results of a series of paired comparisons in a survey conducted in December, 1999, a significantly higher percentage of residents placed higher priority on extending BART than on either expanding bus service, or widening highways. In a paired comparison with widening highways, 58.7% of respondents attached higher priority to extending BART, compared to 36.1% who attached higher priority to widening highways. In a paired comparison with expanding bus service, 64.1% of respondents attached higher priority to extending BART, compared to 29.2% who attached higher priority to expanding bus service. In the paired comparison between widening highways and expanding bus service, a slightly higher percentage of respondents attached higher priority to widening highways (49.3%) than to expanding the bus system (46.2%). The results of these paired comparisons might well have been different if more specific information had been provided on the magnitude of the extensions and expansions that could realistically be accomplished *with a specified budget*.

Perceived and actual transportation problems exist throughout Alameda County. For example, the number of daily vehicle hours increased from 18,800 in 1994 to 41,800 in 1998. In a survey conducted in August 2000, respondents identified traffic and transportation as the most important problem facing the County, with 50% of respondents indicating that traffic and transportation was the most important problem. Education and schools received the second highest number of mentions (38%). The magnitude of the transportation problem in the County provided a motivation for the various interest and community groups to reach a compromise transportation package.

Background: The 1998 Ballot Measure and its Campaign

The 1998 ballot measure proposed extending the 1/2-cent transportation sales tax for fifteen years and it listed a large number of specific projects and programs along with specific cost estimates for each project and specific budgets for each program. The costs totaled to approximately \$1 billion.

The 1998 Transportation Package and the Process Used to Identify It

Although a significant amount of money would have been generated, the large number of corridors within the County combined with the number of modes of transportation involved, created a challenge in determining how to allocate the estimated \$1 billion that would be generated. A call for projects was conducted in 1997 and projects totaling more than \$7 billion were received. A steering committee was established to prioritize these projects and eliminate projects totaling approximately \$6 billion. The steering committee consisted largely of elected officials and representatives from different public transportation agencies. This committee held public meetings that were contentious at times. Given the difficulty of eliminating a large number of proposed projects with strong differences of opinion about what should be eliminated, it is not surprising that the elected officials on the steering committee were hesitant to exert strong leadership. In addition, business organizations and particularly environmental organizations, were less than satisfied with the process. They wanted to have more involvement in the decision making process.

The five categories, along with the percentage allocated to each category with the 1998 measure were:

- Capital projects, involving both highways and BART (46%);
- Local roads (22%);
- Transit operations (19%);
- Transportation for seniors (9%); and
- Bikes and open spaces (4%).

Opposition to the 1998 Ballot Measure

Many environmental organizations, most notably the Sierra Club and the Environmental Defense Fund, actively opposed the 1998 ballot measure. As mentioned previously, some of these organizations were unhappy with their lack of involvement in the decision making process. More important, they were unhappy with the transportation package. As might be expected, they thought less money should be allocated to highway construction with more money allocated for transit operations. In addition, some of these organizations were opposed to BART expansion projects. Their opposition to the BART projects was based upon a poor cost-benefit ratio, rather than a perception that BART is bad for the environment. Since the 2000 package, which environmental organizations actively supported, included the same BART expansion projects that were part of the 1998 package, their opposition to the

BART projects apparently was not a critical factor, in and of itself, in the decision of environmental organizations to oppose the 1998 measure.

Environmental organizations were not highly dissatisfied with the transportation projects identified for funding in 1998. In an interview, one representative indicated that the 1998 measure gave them half a loaf while the 2000 measure gave them three-fourths of a loaf.

Largely because of environmental opposition, some prominent local politicians opposed the 1998 measure. The environmental organizations also targeted editorial staffs of newspapers and were partly successful in these efforts, as both San Francisco newspapers took an editorial position in opposition to the 1998 measure. The other major newspapers supported the 1998 measure.

In addition to a grass roots campaign often used by opponents, the environmental groups were able to raise sufficient funding to hire a political consultant (This consulting organization was hired by *proponents* in 2000.) and to conduct a targeted direct mail campaign, with mailers sent to about 20,000 households in Oakland and Berkeley.

The primary argument used by opponents was that the transportation package included some pork items and this was expressed in their theme that “B stands for a billion dollar boondoggle.” In support of this argument, they also argued that a better transportation package could be developed before the current tax expired. This latter argument was difficult for proponents to counter.

A Low Cost and Disorganized Proponents’ Campaign in 1998

Proponents raised approximately \$120,000 in 1998. This amount is significantly lower than many other supporting campaigns, including the 2000 campaign in Alameda County. The lack of fundraising success probably can be attributed to the lack of involvement of prominent politicians in fundraising efforts during this campaign.

Proponents did not even hire a political consultant in 1998 although they had sufficient resources to do so. This decision suggests that they lacked a feeling of urgency. Proponents knew ongoing funding would not be jeopardized by the defeat of the 1998 measure, since another opportunity would exist to obtain an extension if the 1998 measure failed. In effect, proponents may have viewed the 1998 ballot measure as a type of “test market.”

Summary of 1998 Ballot Measure

Even with strong opposition and an ineffective supporting campaign, the 1998 ballot measure was supported by 58% of the voters. This result was more encouraging than discouraging to those who decided shortly after the 1998

election to develop a new ballot measure. Proponents also were able to gain valuable experience that they applied to the 2000 ballot measure.

The 2000 Transportation Package

Supporters of a transportation sales tax extension faced two major challenges in revising the 1998 transportation package. First, they wanted to obtain the active support of most, if not all major environmental organizations, while at the same time, maintaining the support of business organizations and ultimately increasing the number of supporting voters. Business organizations and the majority of voters tended to want capital improvements to BART and highways, while environmental organizations opposed both types of capital improvements. Second, they wanted to obtain more voter support in targeted geographic locations in which they obtained comparatively lower levels of support in 1998, while not suffering a loss of support in other geographic locations.

The first of the two challenges identified in the previous paragraph was the most difficult one to resolve. The primary organization representing both business and labor interests, the California Alliance for Jobs, strongly resisted any reductions in the funding allocated to capital expenditures while environmental organizations refused to support any package that did not allocate more funding to basic transit improvements. The key factor in resolving this conflict was a decision to increase the amount of revenue by changing the expiration date on the extension from fifteen to twenty years. This change added at least \$200 million to the expected revenue pool.

Surveys had been conducted to test voter reaction to different expiration periods for the extension both before and after the 20-year extension option was seriously considered. The results were somewhat inconsistent. The first set of results identified voter sensitivity to a 15 vs. a 20-year extension while the second set of results identified less sensitivity to these two sunset periods.

With the use of a longer expiration date, the only project deleted from the 1998 transportation project was a highway construction project and this project was deleted only because federal funds had been allocated for it. However, additional funding was provided for a) transit operations, b) paratransit for seniors and the disabled, and c) expansion and improvement of bicycle routes.

Differences between the 1998 and the 2000 transportation packages in the percentage of the revenue allocated to expenditure categories are identified in Table 9-1.

Table 9-1. Differences Between 1998 and 2000 Transportation Packages

	1998 Percentage Allocation	2000 Percentage Allocation
Capital Projects	46%	40%
Local Roads	22%	22%
Transit Operations	19%	22%
Paratransit	9%	11%
Bicycle Routes	4%	5%

Of the money allocated to capital projects with the 2000 transportation package, approximately 58% was allocated to BART while approximately 42% was allocated for highways, transit bus, commuter rail, and local roadway projects.

In interviews, representatives from both the California Alliance for Jobs and the Sierra Club thought a compromise was facilitated by the perception that this was the last chance to obtain voter approval of an extension prior to the existing transportation sales tax expiring. In addition, both sides thought it would be significantly more difficult to obtain the two-thirds supermajority support after the existing tax expired.

The second challenge identified at the beginning of this section, namely obtaining support throughout the entire County, was less difficult than the first challenge to resolve. This second challenge was resolved by dividing the County into four *geographic* segments of approximately equal numbers of residents. These segments agreed that the percentage of revenue distributed to each one would be equal to the projected percentage of the County population of each group in 2005. A faster growing segment of the County initially argued for using 2010 rather than 2005 as the year to use in the geographical allocation of funding. However, once again, compromise was facilitated by the rapidly approaching expiration date for the existing tax. Once the amount to be allocated to each of the four areas was determined, each area was allowed to select its projects, subject to the constraint of the categorical percentage allocations identified previously in Table 9-1.

The Proponents' Campaign

Proponents raised approximately \$900,000 for the 2000 campaign, with the leader of the fundraising efforts being a prominent local politician who opposed the 1998 measure.

To maintain the rather fragile coalition of business/labor and environmental organizations, two political consulting organizations were hired. One consultant was selected by business organizations and the other consultant was selected by environmental organizations.

The campaign itself was rather typical and had no unusual features that needed to be identified. Both focus groups and surveys were used to help frame the message. Television was the primary medium used for advertising with some use of direct mail and outdoor ads. Their main message was that the transportation package was balanced and comprehensive and was supported by a diverse group of politicians and private organizations. The campaign avoided providing a list of specific projects, largely because they thought this could generate controversy. Based upon the paired comparison survey results identified previously, they also gave less prominence to the large amount of money going to basic transit operations than to the other components of the package. The campaign also emphasized that the promises from the prior ballot measure had been kept.

Opposition

Largely as a result of the dedicated effort and pragmatic perspectives that prevailed with key stakeholder groups, no organized opposition existed in the 2000 campaign.

Conclusion

The most interesting characteristic of the Alameda County case is the decision to use a longer sunset period to build a consensus. Voters may be more willing to accept a long sunset date with an extension of an existing sales tax than with a new sales tax, particularly when past spending essentially has been consistent with prior campaign claims, and when no new mode of transportation is being included in the package. (Unlike a number of other communities studied, which were proposing funding for the *start* of a light rail system, the rail component of the Alameda County package involved extensions of the *existing* and popular BART system.)

Obtaining a consensus also was facilitated by the ability to develop a multimodal solution. The popularity of BART, combined with the absence of a

light rail component, may have preempted one of the frequent sources of opposition, namely organizations strongly opposed to light rail.

Finally, this case demonstrates that groups with conflicting views on transportation packages may be more likely to reach an acceptable compromise when an existing transportation sales tax is close to expiring. Compromise is facilitated in this situation by a common perspective that the current transportation system is unacceptable. This common perspective definitely existed in Alameda County.

SONOMA COUNTY IN CALIFORNIA

Introduction and Overview

Two ballot measures involving the initiation of a County sales tax dedicated to transportation were presented to voters in March of 2000. One measure consisted of a 1/2-cent County sales tax for eight years, dedicated largely to adding one lane in each direction to the highway on the one major corridor in the County. The second measure consisted of a 1/4-cent sales tax for sixteen years, dedicated largely to financing a commuter rail line along the same major corridor. Both measures were supported by a significant majority of voters, with the highway measure receiving support from 58.4% of voters, while the rail transit measure received support from 60.2% of voters. However, since dedicated county sales tax measures need a supermajority of two-thirds in California, both of these measures failed.

This case demonstrates the difficulty of developing a transportation package that both business and environmental organizations will support, even when congestion is perceived as a significant problem by many voters. The use of separate measures in the election of March 2000, combined with some opposition to the highway measure from influential environmental organizations, demonstrates a lack of consensus and coordination among environmental and business organizations.

Given that proponents of the passenger rail measure did no fundraising, this case also demonstrates that a well-funded campaign is not necessary to receive a significant majority of voter support, when a) at least one recent well-funded campaign existed, and b) little if any opposition exists.

In 1998, Sonoma County attempted unsuccessfully to obtain approval of a *single* sales tax measure that included funding for almost all the highway improvements in the 2000 highway ballot measure and all of the passenger rail improvements in the 2000 passenger rail measure. This unsuccessful attempt was studied in the earlier phase of our research and is described in our prior report (Haas, Massey, et al., 2000). Since a detailed description of relevant

background information is provided in this prior report, this section will provide an abbreviated description of relevant background material. Interested readers should read the prior report for a more detailed background description. The abbreviated background description below will include a comparison with Alameda County, which is in very close proximity to Sonoma County, to help explain why Sonoma County has been less successful than Alameda County in constructing a multimodal transportation package that receives the support of both business and environmental groups.

Background: Low Population Density in Sonoma County

The population of Sonoma County (approximately 450,000) is significantly smaller than the population of Alameda County (approximately 1.45 million). Not surprisingly, given this population difference, population density is much lower in Sonoma County (272 people per square mile) than in Alameda County (1,858 people per square mile).⁷

The significantly lower population density in Sonoma County than in Alameda County has two implications that can help explain why environmental and business groups have had a more difficult time reaching a compromise on a comprehensive transportation package in Sonoma County than in Alameda County.

Stronger Anti-Growth Attitudes in Sonoma than in Alameda County

Anti-growth sentiment almost certainly is much stronger in Sonoma County than in Alameda County. In a study previously discussed in the prior section on Alameda County, 16% of respondents identified growth and urban sprawl as the most important problem facing Alameda County. Although directly comparable results were not identified with Sonoma County, in a 1990 survey identifying attitudes towards growth, 72% of respondents identified themselves as either being in favor of no growth (39%) or slow growth (33%). The strong no-growth attitudes in Sonoma County are manifested in attitudes towards transportation, particularly highway expansion. Some residents, who are at least as concerned with limiting growth as with lessening congestion, are likely to vote against any transportation package that is perceived as lessening congestion if it also is perceived as encouraging growth.

The strong anti-growth attitudes in Sonoma County also make it very difficult for any transportation package to receive support from a supermajority of

⁷A qualification needs to be provided to the population density figure for Sonoma County. Approximately 70% of the population of the County lives along a single corridor within the County and this corridor includes significantly less than 70% of the area of the County. In other words, significant variance exists within Sonoma County in terms of population density.

voters without the enthusiastic support of most of the numerous environmental organizations within the County. At the same time, both prior surveys and the results with prior ballot measures demonstrate that a passenger rail only measure, without a companion highway measure, is unlikely to receive supermajority support, even with the enthusiastic support of environmental organizations.

A Poorly Developed Transit System and Limited Use of this System in Sonoma County

It is difficult to design an efficient and effective bus transit system, let alone an effective and efficient rail transportation system in a county with a low density. Unlike Alameda County, which has both a large bus transit system and a well-established rail transit system with additional communities competing for BART extensions, Sonoma County has only a small bus system and no rail system. As one example of the state of the bus system, even in Santa Rosa, the largest city within the County, buses run at no more than 30-minute intervals. With limited bus service, it is not surprising that bus ridership in the County is quite low.

Given the low population density within Sonoma County, many environmentalists are pessimistic that major investments in the transit system will provide a significant benefit to citizens within the County. Accordingly, many do not seem willing to support a transportation package with a significant highway component even if it has a significant transit component.

The poorly utilized transit system also has influenced the business community's attitude towards improvements in the transit system. Unlike some other communities studied, in which the business community often has enthusiastically recommended a multimodal solution, many elements within the business community in Sonoma County attach significantly higher priority to highway improvements than to transit improvements.

Background: Business Distrust of Environmental Groups

Transportation tax measures were placed on the ballot in Sonoma County in both 1990 and 1998. Some segments of the environmental community opposed both of these measures even though the business community perceived that environmental groups had agreed to not oppose these measures. As a result of this distrust, the business community made no effort to try to work with the environmental community in developing their transportation measure in 2000.

Development of the Two Transportation Ballot Measures in 2000

The Highway Measure

The ballot measure consisting of a 1/2-cent increase in the sales tax for eight years, with the revenues to be used solely for highways was developed first. Most of the revenue would have been used to add one lane in each direction to the highway on the major corridor in the County. Representatives from the business community initiated this measure. With the exclusion of a small portion of this highway, due to nonlocal funds being allocated for this segment, the highway projects were identical to those in the 1998 measure.

A survey was conducted to help formulate this measure. This survey examined sensitivity to both the tax rate and the sunset period, along with ascertaining voter priority attached to highway vs. transit projects. According to one of the leading members of the business representatives who developed this measure, the results indicated that a) voters were unlikely to approve a sales tax rate higher than 1/2-cent, b) voters were unlikely to approve a sunset period longer than ten years, and c) higher priority was given to highway projects than to transit projects. Although this group was not philosophically opposed to transit improvements, they could not include both significant highway and transit improvements with a 1/2-cent rate and a sunset period of less than ten years. Since highway expansion was a higher priority than transit expansion among respondents, their decision to focus on highway improvements was reasonable, particularly given their not unreasonable perception that some environmental groups would oppose the measure regardless of whether or not it included a significant transit component.

The Passenger Rail Measure

The passenger rail measure, which included some funding for transit and bicycling, was initiated by a County supervisor who was up for reelection in the March election, and who was also opposed by a candidate supported by many environmentalists. His stated motivation for placing the passenger rail measure on the ballot was to give voters a choice.

This measure was virtually the same as the transit component of the 1998 measure. Without conducting any research, the supervisor assumed that it was essential to keep the combined tax rate of the two measures at less than one-cent. Since he already knew that the highway measure would be on the ballot with a 1/2-cent rate, he decided to have a 1/4-cent rate with his measure. With this rate, it was necessary to have the lengthy sunset period of 16 years to provide the estimated revenue needed for the identified projects.

Besides not conducting any voter research, the supervisor made no apparent effort to organize a fundraising effort, nor did he engage in prior consultation with environmental organizations to determine whether he had their support.

Proponents' Campaigns

No organized campaign was developed in support of the passenger rail measure, either by the supervisor who took the initiative to have the measure placed on the ballot or by some environmental groups that supported the measure.

Proponents of the highway measure raised more than \$800,000 which is a considerable amount of money in a county with a population of less than 500,000 people.

Since the focus of this report is on ballot measures with a significant rail component, the nature of the highway campaign will not be specifically described. However, based on a comparison with other campaigns, it appeared to be a solid one. The primary media used were television and direct mail. Research was conducted to help formulate the content and arguments used, and the arguments also were developed in anticipation of the opponents' arguments. In addition, the proponent campaign directly responded to opponents rather than ignoring them, and they also appeared to take a proactive approach with the news media.

Given the failure of both measures to use a coordinated multimodal approach, the Sonoma County Transportation Authority did not support either measure. Each measure had at least a few endorsements from elected officials, but each also had at least a few elected officials who opposed the measure.

Opposition to the Two Ballot Measures

Little organized opposition to the passenger rail measure existed, although the Greenbelt Alliance did oppose the measure. This organization threatened legal action against both measures. A taxpayers association, which opposed the 1998 measure largely because of the rail component, chose not to oppose the 2000 passenger rail measure. It decided to focus energy on supporting the highway measure rather than opposing the passenger rail measure.

Environmental organizations conducted an energetic campaign against the highway measure, using a low cost grass roots campaign. This campaign relied on door-to-door contacts, encouraging press coverage, and placing ballot arguments in the voter information pamphlet. Their primary argument was that highway expansion would generate growth and sprawl and would do nothing to relieve congestion in the long run. Since some nonlocal funding had been

provided for highway expansion after the 1998 election, opponents also argued that local funding was not required.

Conclusion

The importance of trying to minimize credible opposition might be the most important conclusion to draw from the 2000 Sonoma County case. This tentative conclusion is based upon the highway measure obtaining a slightly lower percentage of voter support (58.4%) than the passenger rail measure, (60.2%) even though a) survey results indicated that voters were more supportive of the highway measure than the passenger rail measure at the beginning of the campaign, and b) the highway campaign was much stronger than the nonexistent passenger rail campaign. Under these conditions, the most plausible explanation for the passenger rail measure doing better than the highway measure, is the difference in the opposition with the two measures. The passenger rail measure had virtually no opposition while the highway measure had active and credible opposition. This conclusion is supported in some other cases studied in which ballot measures have not passed when active and credible opposition exists even when proponents have a substantial fund-raising advantage. At the same time, this conclusion needs to be qualified. The primary opposition to the highway measure in Sonoma County consisted of environmental organizations. These organizations have credibility in Sonoma County, as evidenced by the strong anti-growth sentiment in the County. However, the credibility of environmental organizations probably is higher in Sonoma County than in many other local communities throughout the country.

In addition to demonstrating the importance of trying to minimize active and credible opposition through coalition building, the Sonoma County case also demonstrates the difficulty of developing a transportation package and ballot measure that is successful in building a coalition that minimizes this opposition. Reasons for the difficulty that Sonoma County has encountered in building a coalition between business and environmental groups have been described previously in this case analysis.

Finally, the Sonoma County case demonstrates that an existing legal framework can make it very difficult to obtain voter acceptance of funding for a transportation package. In this case, as well as in the other two cases from California, a two-thirds supermajority was required for passage. Although both Alameda and Santa Clara Counties have demonstrated that achieving this supermajority threshold is possible, it is, nevertheless, a difficult threshold to achieve. Many proponents of transportation improvements are skeptical that a two-thirds supermajority support can be achieved for any transportation package in Sonoma County in the foreseeable future. Accordingly, they along

with others, are trying to persuade the state legislature to lower the supporting threshold needed for success and also trying to persuade Governor Davis to support this legislation. To date, these efforts have been unsuccessful.

Although neither one of the 2000 transportation ballot measures received the supermajority support needed for passage in Sonoma County, both measures received more support than other successful measures, such as the one in Charlotte, and the one discussed immediately below in the greater Salt Lake City area.

SALT LAKE, DAVIS, AND WEBER COUNTIES IN UTAH

Introduction and Overview

In November of 2000, voters in Salt Lake County, along with two other counties within the service area of the Utah Transit Authority (UTA) were presented with separate but identical ballot measures. Each ballot measure proposed a 3/4-cent increase in the dedicated transit sales tax from the existing level of 1/4-cent.⁸ No expiration date existed for the increase, nor does an expiration date exist with the current 1/4-cent tax. UTA indicated that the increased revenues would be used to a) expand basic bus service in each county that approved the tax, b) expand the light rail system in Salt Lake County if it approved the tax, and c) develop a high speed commuter rail system through all three counties if all three counties approved the tax. The amount of money allocated to each of these three uses was not identified, on either a dollar or percentage basis.

The measure received majority support in each of the three counties. The measure received the highest margin of support in Davis County, with 57.5% of voters supporting the measure, compared with percentages of 53.6% in Salt Lake County and 52.8% in Weber County.

The primary lesson from this case is that success can occur even when a number of conditions normally associated with *failure* are present. More specifically, at least four critical conditions normally associated with failure existed within Salt Lake County. These conditions are a) proponents only spent \$163,292 on the campaign, b) no expiration date existed with the tax increase, c) a specific expenditure plan did not exist, and d) a survey conducted at the beginning of the campaign indicated the measure was behind by about 10% in Salt Lake County. In addition to these four factors, organized opposition

⁸Although it is appropriate to use the term “transit” rather than “transportation” for this tax, legislation passed in 1992 required that Salt Lake County use 25% of the revenues generated from the existing 1/4-cent sales tax for I-15 highway improvements. This legislation also applied to the 1/4-cent sales tax increase with the 2000 ballot measure.

existed, although the opposition had difficulty developing a credible message for reasons discussed later.

Three factors probably combined to compensate for the negative factors identified in the preceding paragraph. First, UTA was quite aggressive in using its funds to communicate with voters through both a comprehensive mailing and through the paid use of television during the campaign. This factor compensated for the minimal amount of campaign funds raised and it also probably had a major impact on the percentage of support for the ballot being approximately 10 percentage points higher than the percentage of support expressed in a survey at the beginning of the campaign. Of course, having a well-financed campaign is unlikely to be effective without a credible message that resonates with voters, and two conditions existed in Salt Lake County that provided this resonance. One condition was the popularity of UTA's existing light rail line. The second condition was a significant amount of highway congestion resulting from delays in highway construction. This condition probably generated more sympathy for transit, along with generating antipathy toward highway construction as a solution to congestion.

Background: The Transportation System and A Prior Ballot Measure in 1992

In 1974, voters approved a 1/4-cent sales tax dedicated for transit. This revenue was used for bus and paratransit. In 1992, voters in Salt Lake County only were presented with a ballot measure to increase the existing sales tax by 1/4-cent. This measure was quite similar to the 2000 measure in that it did not have a sunset date, nor did it have a specific plan. It did propose using the money to expand and improve the bus system along with constructing and operating a light rail system. This measure was defeated by a margin of 57% to 43%. Observers interviewed attributed this defeat to a) congestion not being viewed as a critical problem at that time, and b) uncertainty about the impact that light rail would have on congestion. As is typically the case, the opposition to the 1992 measure focused on the light rail component, arguing that it was costly and would be used primarily by existing transit users.

Even with the 1992 defeat of the tax increase, UTA was able to obtain funding for a 15-mile light rail line, with most of the construction funding provided by the federal government. Additional funding came from the existing 1/4-cent tax. Both population growth and a strong economy provided sufficient funds to UTA to use its existing funding source for light rail without diverting funds from its bus and paratransit service. This light rail line opened in December of 1999, and construction was completed on time and within the budget established. The only controversy during construction involved the closure of

Main Street in downtown Salt Lake City for up to six months during construction. This closure resulted in a lack of access to a number of downtown businesses. All people interviewed, including a lead opponent, indicated that the light rail line was very popular, with the cars being full and ridership being higher than projected. It is interesting that ridership is even higher on Saturday (about 21,000) than on Monday through Friday (about 19,000). The high weekend ridership suggests that a number of residents probably are only occasional riders of light rail.

After the defeat of the 1992 measure, the area did receive approximately \$2.5 billion of federal funding to widen I-15, which is a very important corridor in each of the three counties. State and local funding also were used for this project. The construction began in 1995 and was still ongoing during the 2000 campaign. Only two lanes have been open in each direction during most of this time, with frequent evening and weekend closures. Although this highway widening may have a positive impact on congestion once it is completed, it has had a significant negative impact on congestion during its lengthy construction. All people interviewed agreed that the lengthy construction on I-15 contributed to the success of the 2000 ballot measure. The construction problems made it difficult for opponents to argue, as they often do, that highway widening is a higher priority than transit improvements. In addition, the construction problems increased the number of residents who viewed highway congestion as a significant problem and also may have increased voter appeal of the commuter rail line component in the 2000 package, since this line was proposed for the I-15 corridor. The lack of popularity of highway expansion during the 2000 campaign is evidenced by the decision of proponents to not make any mention of the use of 25% of the 1/4-cent sales tax increase in Salt Lake County for highway improvements on I-15. Still further evidence of the lack of popularity of highway expansion in 2000 due to the I-15 construction problems is provided by the reasoning stated by a few mayors in Salt Lake County for their neutral position on the ballot measure. They said they could not support the measure as long as some of the revenue would go to highway improvements. In other words, these neutral mayors would have supported a ballot measure that truly was a transit-only measure.

Background: Geography of the Three Counties

As mentioned in the introduction to this case, Salt Lake, Weber, and Davis Counties each had separate, but identical, ballot measures in 2000. Although separate measures were involved, funding would not have been available to fund all the projects described by proponents unless each of the counties passed the measure. Passage in Salt Lake County was particularly essential as

significantly more revenue is generated from the sales tax in this County than the combined revenue of the two remaining counties.

According to 1999 figures, the combined population of all three counties was 1.275 million, with Salt Lake County having approximately 67% of the total population for the three counties. The population estimates for each of the three counties was 850,243 for Salt Lake County; 239,364 for Davis County; and 185,469 for Weber County.

Davis County is immediately north of Salt Lake County. It consists of a number of smaller communities, with the largest one being Bountiful, with a population of approximately 37,000 people. Most of the communities are on the I-15 corridor and approximately 47% of residents work outside the County.

Weber County is immediately north of Davis County with most of its population also residing on the I-15 corridor. A significant number of Weber County residents live in Ogden (approximately 80,000 population) and surrounding areas.

Most of the population of Weber and Davis Counties exists on the I-15 corridor because the Great Salt Lake constrains population growth, as well as highway corridors, west of this corridor; while the Wasatch Mountain range constrains both population growth and highway corridors east of the I-15 corridor.

The 2000 Transportation Package

The mayor of Ogden, in Weber County, appeared to be the prime mover for the 2000 ballot measure. His primary motivation involved obtaining funding for a commuter rail line that would run the approximately 35 miles between Ogden and Salt Lake City. As soon as he heard that the Governor was trying to obtain a right of way agreement with the Union Pacific Railroad that could be used for the commuter rail line, he obtained agreement from other mayors in Weber County to place the 1/4-cent sales tax measure on the ballot. The commuter rail line also seemed to be the main reason why the mayors in Davis County then agreed to place the measure on the ballot.

Since Salt Lake County is significantly larger than Davis and Weber Counties combined, the commuter rail project could not have been funded without a sales tax increase in Salt Lake County. Salt Lake County had difficulty even getting the measure on the ballot. Approval apparently was needed from the three-person Salt Lake County Commission. One of the commissioners was strongly opposed to placing the measure on the ballot. However, the other two members eventually voted in favor of placing the measure on the ballot, with one of these members apparently being rather undecided until the actual vote.

Since the commuter rail line would have benefited residents of Davis and Weber Counties more than those in Salt Lake County, transit improvements beneficial to residents in Salt Lake County were needed. This was done by including five light rail spurs in the transportation package, with each spur existing within Salt Lake County. Bus service expansion also was included to offer service later at night, initiate service on Sundays, and expand feeder service to the light rail system. These bus service improvements would occur in each of the three counties.

As noted in the introduction, neither the ballot measure nor communications from proponents, provided estimates of the percentage of revenues allocated to each of the three components of the transportation package; nor were any numbers provided on the percentage of funds allocated to each of the three counties. In addition, a time line for completion of the commuter rail line was not identified.

Proponents' Campaign

The campaign apparently began only about two months prior to the election and the mayor of Ogden was a leader in organizing the campaign, through an ad hoc group labeled "People for Sensible Transportation." Compared to most other measures studied, fundraising efforts were not very successful. Proponents raised and spent approximately \$160,000 on the campaign. This was a sufficient amount to hire a political consultant and do a targeted direct mail campaign combined with drive-time radio advertising, yard signs, and a proactive effort to obtain free media coverage. Each of these components is briefly described below.

One mailing of direct mail pieces was sent to approximately 65,000 households. All households were in Salt Lake County. As mentioned in the introduction, some survey results indicated that the measure was behind by about 10% points in Salt Lake County and the commuter rail line could not have been funded unless the measure passed in this county. Only households who resided close to one of the proposed light rail spurs were sent direct mail, with each piece focusing only on the spur closest to each household.

Several radio ads were developed. Given the need to focus on appealing to voters in Salt Lake County, these ads focused mostly on the light rail spurs, emphasizing that \$640 million in federal funding would be lost if the measure failed, arguing that a number of other communities were competing for these federal funds.

Approximately 4,500 lawn signs were distributed, with about 3,500 of these signs being placed in Salt Lake County. Most of the signs were placed along

major thoroughfares. The signs in Salt Lake County included a visual rendering of a light rail train, while those in the other two counties included a rendering of a commuter rail train.

A critical and legally risky part of the proponents' strategy consisted of an expensive and aggressive public education campaign paid for with UTA funds. UTA mailed a four-page information piece to all households in each of the three counties in October and it also ran over 300 paid television "ads," with slightly less than half of these ads running in September, and the remainder running in early November.

The theme of the UTA mailer was "Even if you don't ride it, you still use it." As is usually the case, this theme was emphasized by linking the measure to traffic relief and better air quality. The only statistic cited was that implementation of the "full, long range plan could increase the number of cars eliminated from our roads to 250,000." Similar to the radio ads and the campaign's direct mail piece, light rail extensions received the most emphasis, followed by the bus service improvements, with the commuter rail component receiving the least emphasis.

UTA ran two different television ads and both used the theme identified in the previous paragraph. One ad depicted a person driving on an empty highway and attributed this to UTA taking 81,000 cars off the road every day and this ad also had a visual towards the end of a light rail train traveling adjacent to the highway at the same speed as the car. The second ad conveyed the same theme in a different manner. It showed a congested highway with a light rail train adjacent to the highway moving by quickly while the cars were inching along. The audio component said that UTA could take a "couple hundred thousand cars off the road."

The Salt Lake County commissioner who voted against placing the measure on the ballot also took offense to UTA's aggressive information campaign and sued UTA, as a public citizen, for illegal use of public funds. The court initially ruled in favor of UTA, and an appeal has been dismissed.

Opponents' Campaign

With virtually the entire political establishment supporting the three ballot measures, the opposition was led by two citizen organizations, the Utah Taxpayers Association and a second ad hoc organization consisting primarily of people opposed to light rail. Since the opposition was surprised by the decision to place a measure on the November 2000 ballot, they did not have much time to organize a campaign. As is typically the case, opponents had

little money available for advertising, although they were able to run some radio ads the week prior to the campaign.

The ad hoc group of opponents used the frequent approach of attacking light rail. The second opponent group, the Utah Taxpayers Association, decided to take an unusual approach. They made no attempt to argue against transit improvements, including expansion of the light rail system. Instead, they argued against using the sales tax as the revenue source. They argued that this was a very regressive tax, partly because food purchases were included in the sales tax. The impact of this argument was neutralized when the NAACP and other organizations representing lower income people publicly supported the measures.

The aforementioned popularity of the light rail line, combined with the I-15 construction difficulties, made it difficult for the opposition to mount an effective and persuasive campaign. The popularity of light rail made it difficult to argue that light rail was costly and inefficient, while the I-15 difficulties made it difficult to argue that highway improvements would solve congestion without rail transit. In addition, since UTA had completed the previous light rail project on time and within budget, it was difficult for opponents to argue that the vagueness of the plan with its lack of cost estimates would result in the additional revenue being used inefficiently. In addition, UTA was able to counter this argument by saying that many other similar communities had a higher tax rate than the 1/4-cent rate that UTA had prior to the election.

Opponents were able to obtain some free media coverage, although this also was hampered by the short length of the campaign and a presidential election. Opponents were able to organize only one debate and it was not televised.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction and overview section, this case demonstrates that success is possible even when a number of conditions normally associated with failure exist. Although the *specific* combination of both the failure and the countervailing factors existing in Salt Lake County might be atypical, this case demonstrates that no common recipe for success exists that can be applied across the board.

This case also demonstrates that an incremental approach to constructing a light rail system can be effective in diffusing the common argument of opposition that light rail is costly and ineffective. This incremental approach is most likely to be effective when voter approval is not needed with the starter line and when light rail expansion can be combined with expansion of basic bus service, such as including Sunday bus service. Of course, this incremental

approach will work only if the initial line generates high ridership and is popular with the public. All of these conditions beneficial to the incremental approach existed in Salt Lake County.

AUSTIN, TEXAS

Introduction and Overview

On November 7, 2000, approximately 200,000 residents in Austin, Texas, in the remaining smaller communities in Travis County, and in a few communities in Williamson County voted on whether to use part of an existing one-cent sales tax dedicated to transit to fund a 52-mile light rail system estimated to cost approximately \$1.9 billion. The measure was narrowly defeated by 1,956 votes, which was a margin of approximately .8% (49.6% to 50.4%). The measure was supported by a very small majority of voters in the city of Austin (50.6%), but the larger percentage of voters who rejected the measure in the remaining communities that contributed sales tax revenues to Capital Metro, the transit agency, was large enough to defeat the measure even though the vast majority of voters resided in the city of Austin.

Although the margin of defeat was quite small, the measure failed even though a) proponents had a significant spending advantage over opponents, b) an existing tax, rather than a tax increase, would be used to fund the proposed light rail system, c) virtually no prominent politicians or organizations opposed the measure, and d) congestion was perceived to be a significant problem. Given these positive factors, the case demonstrates the difficulty of obtaining voter approval of an expensive and comprehensive light rail system when arguments can be made that highway improvements are comparatively underfunded, and when the transit organization has a history of financial mismanagement.

Background: Transit Funding and Capital Metro

In 1985, voters in the greater Austin area approved, by a large margin, a full one-cent dedicated transit sales tax, with the understanding that a comprehensive light rail system would be constructed and operated with a portion of the revenues generated with this tax. Due to delays and problems in quickly moving forward with the light rail system, the Capital Metro Board reduced the tax to a 3/4-cent rate in 1989. The Board then reinstated the full one-cent tax rate in 1995, with the intention of using the incremental 1/4-cent to create a reserve for a light rail system.

Based on a comparison with other communities, which tend to have a 1/4- to 3/4-cent sales tax dedicated to transit, if they even have a dedicated source of transit funding, Austin is susceptible to the criticism that its transit budget is

larger than needed. Charges that some of the revenue dedicated to transit should be diverted to other purposes, including highways, intensified after a federal audit, conducted in 1997-98, revealed that Capital Metro had engaged in financial mismanagement. As a result of this audit, the state legislature mandated the replacement of the entire Capital Metro Board of Directors. Most of the management team was subsequently replaced.

With Austin being the state capital of Texas, state legislators were aware of concerns about Capital Metro's budget and the financial mismanagement. The legislature has threatened to divert some of the transit revenues to highway improvements and/or to local jurisdictions within the Capital Metro service area. Given the involvement of the state legislature, Capital Metro thought they needed to a) obtain voter approval before moving ahead with a light rail system even though no tax increase was required, and b) act quickly to obtain voter approval to prevent the legislature from diverting funds from their budget.

Background: The Highway System

The lead opposition consisted of an organization with the acronym ROAD, which stands for "Reclaim Our Allocated Dollars." This organization selected an acronym that communicates its orientation that the highway system has been significantly underfunded and is not capable of meeting the needs of the population. Data from the Texas Transportation Institute seemed to support this conclusion. Austin was ranked eleventh in the entire country in traffic congestion in 1999 as measured by person—hours lost due to congestion. Each of the ten communities ranked above Austin is significantly larger than Austin.

Fast population growth has contributed to the highway congestion. The population of the city of Austin grew from 465,622 in 1990 to 642,994 in 2000, which is an increase of 38%. In addition, the community voted in 1985 to prevent a loop highway system from being constructed and this constraint has contributed to the highway congestion.

Although in the mid-1980s, Austin voters were opposed to an extensive highway system, the results of the November 2000 election suggest that the attitude of the voters toward highway construction had changed. The mayor of Austin had two highway bond measures on the same ballot as the light rail measure. One \$150 million bond measure was for the city of Austin, while a second \$28 million bond measure was for Travis County, which includes Austin plus some smaller surrounding communities. Both of these bond measures passed with over 60% of voters supporting each one.⁹

Background: The Role of the Chamber of Commerce

In most other communities studied, The Chamber of Commerce has supported the ballot measure. The Austin Chamber did eventually support the light rail measure. However, the Chamber also conducted a well publicized study that may have helped the opposition. This study was initiated because a consensus initially did not exist within the business community on the light rail ballot measure. The report, which was released in the middle of August through a series of public forums, reported findings rather than making recommendations. Both proponents and opponents found positive things in the report. However, it seemed to provide more support to opponents on the critical issue of the impact of the light rail system on highway congestion. It concluded that light rail would reduce highway congestion by about 3% and that improving the highway system was a better short-term solution to highway congestion.

Background: Population, Demographics, and Voter Tendencies

Austin's population was slightly over 656,000 in 2000. Most of the city is in Travis County, which had a population of 749,426 in 2000 but a smaller part of the city is in Williamson County.

Austin is a diverse community, with 28.3% of the population consisting of Hispanics and 11.5% consisting of African Americans. As a percentage of the population, the Hispanic community is growing. It is not surprising that both proponents and opponents attached high priority to targeting both African Americans and Hispanics because collectively they make up slightly more than 40% of the population of the city of Austin.

The 1985 vote (mentioned in a previous section) opposing development of a loop highway system suggests that Austin may have liberal voting tendencies. The vote in the 2000 presidential election reinforces this conclusion. Even though George Bush was the Governor with Austin being the state capital, he received only 46.9% of the vote in Austin. The liberal voting tendency also is reinforced by the percentage of votes received by Ralph Nader (slightly more than 10%).

⁹The mayor was a supporter of the light rail measure. Proponents suggested that these bond measures were placed on the same ballot as the light rail measure to help the light rail measure by suggesting that a multimodal approach was being used. However, given the imbalance between the amount of highway money involved in the two bond measures (\$178 million) compared to the \$1.9 billion cost of the light rail system, the inclusion of the specific highway bonding measures may have helped reinforce opponents' primary argument that a spending imbalance existed between transit and highways.

The Transportation Package and the Process Used to Develop It

Capital Metro had been considering a light rail system for a number of years prior to the management and Board turnover in 1997-98 resulting from the federal audit. The new management team essentially started the planning process again in early 1999. Thus, the light rail system was developed rather quickly and with limited voter research and political input. As examples of the speed of development, engineering studies had not been completed prior to the election and routes seemed to change during the campaign. If the previously mentioned legislative pressure had not existed, Capital Metro probably would have included their ballot measure in a later election, both because they wanted to have more time for planning and outreach and because they wanted more time to improve the image of Capital Metro, after the image was hurt in 1997-1998 with the audit and the financial mismanagement issue.

Opponents did attack the vagueness of the plan and linked this argument with questions about Capital Metro's ability to properly manage a \$1.9 billion project given their recent past history. Some proponents also suggested that the vote was adversely influenced by the lack of time available for longer-term community outreach and education. For example, although the Capital Metro Board decided over a year prior to the election to extend the first phase route into predominantly African American neighborhoods, some voters in these neighborhoods were confused about this routing issue. This confusion probably contributed to the less than expected support for the measure in these neighborhoods. This confusion might have been lessened if more time was available for community outreach.

The state legislature dictated the ballot language that Capital Metro needed to use. The language essentially precluded a single package with both a rail transit and a highway component. Thus, Capital Metro was prevented from developing a multimodal transportation package that some other communities have used successfully. This was an important constraint, since it is easier to provide benefits to different geographic segments within the voting area with a multimodal approach, consisting of road improvements, bus improvements, and a rail transit component than it is with a rail only measure. With a rail only measure, a comprehensive and expensive system is required to provide access to most geographic segments within a community. Voters may not accept such a system due to the combination of high costs and uncertain ridership. On the other hand, voters may not accept a starter system because many residents would not have convenient access to this system.

Even with an expensive and extensive light rail system, many residents did not have convenient access to the light rail system. The likelihood of voter support

was positively correlated with voter proximity to the proposed light rail system. Of those who lived within one-half mile of the proposed system, 55.9% voted for the light rail measure.

Proponents' Campaign

According to the *Austin America-Statesman*, proponents raised close to \$900,000. This budget allowed proponents to conduct extensive research, along with doing an extensive amount of advertising. Television was used as the primary medium, with over \$500,000 spent on television advertising. Billboards, radio, and newspapers also were used with limited and late use of targeted direct mail.

Three different television ads were used. One used the local and well respected cycling and cancer survivor celebrity, Lance Armstrong, to endorse the light rail measure. To take full advantage of this advertisement, it was run primarily during the Summer Olympics, even though this meant running it in the early portion of the campaign. The second advertisement, which was run closer to the election, had the mayor endorse the measure and also tried to take advantage of Austin voters' liberal tendencies and dislike of Houston. Houston has relied primarily on highways as a mode of transportation and it has a high level of air pollution. The third television advertisement, also run in the late stages of the campaign, attacked a misleading television ad run by opponents. More will be said about the opponents' television advertisement in the next section.

The radio ads were similar to the second television ad. They used the mayor as a spokesperson and stressed that Austin should not use the Houston solution, which relied almost exclusively on highways.

A single direct mailer was sent out in late October to approximately 100,000 households in the northern portion of the city and county. Unfortunately, this mailer was sent out after a number of people had already voted through early voting.

Due to the large percentage of Hispanics in Austin, proponents did some advertising with Spanish language newspapers and radio stations. According to a voting analysis conducted by Capital Metro, the measure lost in predominantly Hispanic precincts in spite of strong efforts by proponents to target them. The voting pattern in these precincts also was somewhat surprising because the starter line was accessible in these precincts and some residents in these precincts were transit users. The representative from Capital Metro interviewed about the voting results attributed the lower than expected

support in Hispanic precincts primarily to concerns about gentrification and development that might ensue as a result of the light rail line.

Proponents also spent a considerable amount of effort targeting the African American community. They thought they should be able to obtain strong support from these voters but they got off to a bad start. First, as mentioned previously, initial descriptions of the 20-mile starter route did not include predominantly African American neighborhoods. Second, the only city councilperson who opposed the light rail measure was an African American and other prominent African Americans, including a popular radio personality also opposed the measure. Proponents tried to overcome resistance and distrust within the African American community with a predominantly grass roots campaign. Here, as with Hispanics, the efforts of the proponents were less than highly successful based upon voting analysis provided by a person with Capital Metro. He concluded that the measure lost in predominantly African American precincts on the east side of Austin.

The light rail issue received a significant amount of media attention, particularly in the newspapers and on radio. In addition, at least three debates were widely televised. Given the media attention, along with being aware that opponents typically focus on free media due to limited funding available for advertising, proponents should have realized the importance of having a well-conceived strategy for dealing with the newspapers and radio stations. Their failure to even have a campaign person whose primary responsibility involved this critical planning component until the middle of October suggests that proponents did not attach as much importance to this component as needed.

In an issue oriented campaign in which the opposition tends to focus heavily on obtaining free media coverage, including debates, someone from the proponents' campaign must be aware of the arguments that opponents are likely to use and also have the knowledge of light rail to be able to counter and possibly preempt these arguments. A lead proponent campaign person acknowledged that this was an underlying problem with their campaign. More specifically, she said that opponents tended to put the proponents into a defensive posture of reacting to the arguments of opponents and often not having an effective immediate response. Opponents were able to stay on the offensive in part because they changed some specific aspects of their arguments over time. This campaign person concluded that competitive research along with more preparation time would have been useful and this seems to be an insightful conclusion. This research is not that difficult since most of the arguments used by opponents against light rail in Austin have been used in a number of prior campaigns.

In summary, although hindsight suggests that proponents could have conducted a more effective campaign in some respects, campaign mistakes are essentially inevitable when quick decisions need to be made during the course of a campaign. However, particularly since limited time was available for campaign planning, fewer mistakes probably would have been made if consultants had been used who had prior experience with light rail measures.

Opponents' Campaign

Compared to other opponent campaigns studied, the opponent's primary organization, ROAD, was quite successful in its fundraising efforts, raising approximately \$230,000, even without adjusting for the smaller population of Austin compared to other communities studied. The budget allowed them to conduct a reasonable amount of television and radio advertising in the last few weeks prior to the campaign. Both the radio and television advertising focused on Capital Metro's financial mismanagement problems and this decision was based upon results of a survey conducted by the opposition. The advertising proved to be quite controversial and the *Austin American-Statesman* threatened a lawsuit if the advertising was not modified. The issue of contention with this ad was the implication that the financial mismanagement was a current, rather than a prior problem. Under legal pressure, opponents did modify the ad. As mentioned in the prior section, proponents took advantage of this opponent blunder by attacking their credibility through depiction of the misleading advertising.

Even though opponents were able to conduct a reasonably aggressive advertising campaign, they also were very aggressive in obtaining free media coverage, relying heavily on scheduling a series of debates in which proponents agreed to participate. As mentioned previously at least three debates were widely broadcast and at least six radio debates took place. A lead opponent also was on public access television at least ten times and wrote three opinion editorials in the *Austin American-Statesman*. They relied heavily on statistics provided by Wendell Cox and other critics of light rail, along with some from the aforementioned report from the Chamber of Commerce.

Opponents also made extensive use of yard signs, with their message being that light rail "costs too much, does too little" and they did a lot of neighborhood outreach, particularly in the African American community and with small businesses. They appealed to African American distrust of government, in part by arguing that basic bus service would deteriorate with a light rail system designed primarily to serve the middle class. Their basic appeal to small businesses was that the construction of light rail would disrupt business through restricting access.

In summary, with the exception of having a significantly larger budget than opponents typically have had, the opposition campaign in Austin is similar to campaigns in other communities with a few minor differences. The differences were a) an ability to claim that some of the existing full one-cent sales tax should be allocated to the deficient highway system, b) an ability to attack the credibility of Capital Metro based upon mistakes made by a Board and management group that no longer existed, and c) greater media access than in campaigns in some other communities as a result of public interest in this measure and the transportation system. This measure was the primary local issue on the ballot.

Conclusion

Public concern with the significant amount of highway congestion, a population that opposed a highway loop in 1985, a ballot measure that did not involve a tax increase, a well-financed proponent campaign, and limited opposition from prominent politicians and organizations combine to suggest that Austin's light rail ballot measure might have been expected to pass by a large margin. One tentative conclusion of the defeat of this ballot measure, given the above circumstances, is that it is difficult to obtain voter support for an expensive light rail only measure when a reasonable argument can be made that the money could be better spent on highway improvements.

At the same time, the results in Austin may well have been significantly different if either Capital Metro had not encountered its prior financial mismanagement problems, or if there had been more time for the new management of Capital Metro to change its image prior to the election.

CONCLUSIONS: CRITICAL FACTORS AFFECTING OUTCOMES OF TRANSPORTATION TAX INITIATIVES

INTRODUCTION: CAVEATS ON FINDINGS

The eleven cases presented in this report represent a wide variety of urban environments, including different transportation systems and political milieus. In the course of collecting data for these cases, and on the basis of patterns identified in the previous volume of this study, a number of factors that seem to be systematically associated with success or failure of these ballot measures have been identified.

The approach used here is to consider a number of common factors that were deduced from the data collected for the case studies (as well as the preceding study) and to consider how important they appear to be, either contributing to the passage or to the failure of transportation tax measures. Rather than seeking to identify quantitative relationships, this report addresses the logical possibilities about the importance of such factors. To what extent does each factor appear to be critical to the success or failure of transportation tax initiatives? For the most part, because the requisite data is lacking to assure that causal relationships exist, the factors are discussed in terms of being either necessary or sufficient for the passage of a transportation tax initiative.

Even though these cases do include nearly every major transportation tax initiative with a rail transit component completed during the past four years, the identification and verification of generalizable causal relationships are beyond the scope of this study for a number of reasons. First, the independent variables often are correlated with each other. For example, a) the degree to which the business community enthusiastically supports the measure, b) the degree to which the business community was involved in selecting the transportation package (likely to contribute to business enthusiasm), c) the amount of money available for proponents in the communications campaign (likely to be influenced by business enthusiasm), and d) the ability to use an integrated communications campaign with extensive use of both television and direct mail advertising (which can be done only with successful fundraising) tend to be highly correlated. Given these correlations, it would be virtually impossible to isolate the impact of individual variables even if a sufficient number of cases existed.

Second, because significant interactions exist among the variables identified here, it is extremely difficult to make reasonable generalizations about the degree and nature of the impact of independent variables upon voting behavior.

Such elections appear to be highly idiosyncratic and the possibility exists that certain factors may interact with unique circumstances in some localities creating anomalies that may confound otherwise valid interpretation. For example, the need and importance of having a transportation package that includes a highway component depend on a) the current status of the highway system (which would influence the priority that voters attach to including highway improvements in the package), b) the degree of impact that environmental groups may have on voting behavior if they oppose the measure (which they are likely to do if it has a substantial highway component), c) the degree of importance that environmental groups place on beginning or improving a passenger rail system (which would influence their willingness to accept a highway component because these groups tend to support transit and, more specifically, rail transit), and d) the extent that environmental groups perceive that an immediate solution is needed to improve the passenger rail system (which also would influence their willingness to compromise and thus support a rail ballot measure with a highway component or with a linked ballot measure with a highway component).

Third, because factors that vary over time can influence the results and because all the ballot measures studied occurred within a four year interval, with most occurring within only a one year interval, the results may not be generalizable to the future. At least three factors, namely a) changing economic conditions, b) recently approved federal tax changes, and c) future ridership on rail transit systems funded by ballot measures included in this study, along with the costs of constructing these systems, are likely to cause the results of future ballot measures to be different than the results of the recent ballot measures included in this study.

ORGANIZATION OF REMAINDER OF CHAPTER

Independent variables that could be defined with reasonable precision and which also were relevant to most, if not all cases are identified below in Table 10-1. Ten of the 11 cases are included in the table (The Sonoma County case is not included in the table because it is difficult to determine whether to classify this case as a success or as a failure. This measure technically failed, even though it was supported by approximately 60% of voters, which is a higher percentage than two of the successful measures. It failed because California requires a two-thirds supporting threshold for specific purpose local tax measures.). Each case is classified on each of the 17 independent variables included. To facilitate ease of interpreting the results in the table, only three

categories were used with each independent variable, even though more than three possible categories, or levels, exist with many of these variables.

Some relevant independent variables were not included in Table 10-1, typically because some of these variables do not lend themselves to a simple description or label. Many of these variables involve detailed aspects of the communications campaign used by proponents. A discussion of some of these campaign variables follows the discussion of those variables included in the table.

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS INCLUDED IN TABLE 10-1

To briefly explain the cell entries in Table 10-1, an upward arrow indicates that the factor did exist or was associated with the specified location; a downward arrow indicates that the factor was not present. A horizontal double arrow is used to indicate a middle category between the two extremes, realizing that many of the independent variables are not truly dichotomous in nature. For each factor, upward arrows are expected to correspond with passing initiatives, whereas downward arrow should correspond with failing initiatives. Note that several factors are expressed as the lack of a condition; in these instances, an upward arrow means that the case did lack the specified item, whereas downward facing arrows signify cases that did not lack this item. This enables a consistent pattern of upward facing arrows for items associated with passage, and vice versa.

Finally, in instances where the existence of a factor did not correspond with the outcome of the cases, the cell is shaded. This signifies an anomaly, where the case and the specified factor did not match the hypothesized pattern. With successful cases, an anomaly exists when the factor is not present. With unsuccessful cases, an anomaly exists when the factor is present. Classifications in the middle category are not considered to be anomalies, but are not counted when evaluating the overall match of the factors.

To facilitate meaningful comparisons, the cases are arranged with the cases that passed first, followed by the cases that failed. More specifically, the cases are sequenced by the supporting voting percentage. The case with the highest supporting percentage, Alameda County, is at the far left, while the case with the lowest supporting percentage, San Antonio, is at the far right

Table 10-1. Status of Each Case on Selected Critical Influencing Factors

	Alameda	Santa Clara County	Denver	Phoenix	Charlotte	Salt Lake City	Austin	Columbus	St. Louis	San Antonio
	Pass*	Pass*	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail
Traffic congestion "crisis"	↑	↑	↑	↔	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓
Sponsorship by business community	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↔	↔	↔	↑	↓
Sponsorship by key elected official(s)	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↔	↓	↓	↓
Fundraising near \$1 million	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↔	↑	↓	↓	↓
Recent initiative experience	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓
Support from environmental groups	↑	↑	↑	↑	↔	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Multimodal proposal	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↔	↓	↓
Highway funding	↑	↓	↑	↓	↔	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Benefits distributed throughout area	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓
Sunset provision of 10 years or less	↓	↓	N/A	↓	↓	↓	N/A	↑	↓	↓
Extension of existing rail system	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓

Table 10-1. Status of Each Case on Selected Critical Influencing Factors

	Alameda*	Santa Clara County*	Denver	Phoenix	Charlotte	Salt Lake City	Austin	Columbus	St. Louis	San Antonio
Lack of problems with existing transit system	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓
Extensive stakeholder participation in development of package	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
General election	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓
Consultant with initiative campaign experience	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↔	↓	↑
Use of combination of direct mail and television ads	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓
Lack of effective opposition	↑	↔	↑	↔	↑	↔	↓	↓	↓	↓
Number of negative factors	1	2	3	4	3	3	10	11	12	15

LEGEND FOR TABLE 10-1

↑	Condition existed
↓	Condition absent
↔	Condition inconclusively present
	Anomalous condition

* Denotes required two-thirds supermajority to pass

Global Evaluation of Table 10-1

On the whole, the factors in Table 10-1 tend to fit the hypothesized relationship with the passage or failure of each measure. In only 30 of 155 testable instances (19.4%) were the outcomes of the election in direct conflict with the hypothesized existence of a factor (or lack thereof) (The two cells in which a case was classified as “not applicable” and the 13 cells in which the value of a case was in the middle category are excluded from the total number of cells (170) in determining the number of testable instances.).

Only two of the 17 independent variables had more than three anomalies and only one variable, namely whether the measure had an expiration date of ten years or less (six anomalies) had more than four anomalies.

Insights can be gained by examining the number of negative factors separately for the unsuccessful and for the successful cases. This number is identified with each case in the last row of Table 10-1. Each of the four unsuccessful cases had at least 10 negative factors. Particularly because Austin, which is one of the four unsuccessful cases, was supported by nearly 50% of voters, even though 10 negative factors existed in this case, this finding, by itself, suggests that a measure can succeed even if a moderate number of negative factors exist. However, a tabulation of the number of negative factors with the successful cases indicates that this suggested conclusion is erroneous. None of the six successful cases had more than three negative factors when the expiration date variable is excluded.

The distribution of the number of negative factors per case, that involves clusters at both extremes (When the expiration date variable is excluded, 10 or more negative factors exist with each unsuccessful case compared to four or less negative factors with each successful case.). The fact that no case has between five and nine negative factors suggests that many of the independent variables are positively correlated with each other. When independent variables are positively correlated, a negative value on one of these variables can result in negative values on a whole cluster of them and vice versa.

Given the existing positive correlation among some independent variables, it is important to identify the specific variables that tend to be correlated, along with identifying the specific variables most likely to cause the correlation. Based upon a combination of the results and reasoned judgement, nine independent variables appear to be at least moderately correlated with each other. These variables are listed below, with the sequence being based upon possible causal relationships.

- Traffic congestion crisis;

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- Multimodal transit and/or a highway component included in or linked with transit ballot measure;
 - Reputation of transit agency;
 - Degree of public involvement in planning process;
 - Degree of enthusiasm of business community support;
 - Degree of enthusiasm of support by key elected officials;
 - Degree of fundraising success;
 - Extensive use of combination of direct mail and television advertising; and
 - Effectiveness of opposition.

Although the values on each of the first four of the variables in the above list tend to be the same within each case, reasoned judgement suggests that some of these correlations may be artifacts. For example, a traffic congestion crisis can exist in a community in which the transit agency has a good reputation or in one in which the agency has a poor reputation. As another example, a high degree of public involvement in the planning process could exist both with a transit agency with a good reputation, or with an agency with a tarnished reputation. The first four of the variables in the above list are included primarily because each is likely, both individually and collectively, to influence directly or indirectly each of the last five variables in the above list. More specifically, both the business community and key elected officials are most likely to enthusiastically support a ballot measure when a) voters perceive that a traffic congestion crisis exists and the solution of this crisis is a high priority among most voters, b) the transit agency has a sufficiently strong reputation and are perceived as being able to use the funding provided both effectively and efficiently, c) the business community and key elected officials are enthusiastic about the specifics of the transportation package and involved in the planning process, and d) the transportation package does not consist solely of rail transit (because the business community and the public tend to be more supportive of a balanced solution to a traffic congestion crisis than of a solution that relies solely on rail transit). The enthusiastic support from both the business community and key elected officials certainly facilitates fundraising, and fundraising is needed for the extensive use of both direct mail and television advertising. In addition, opposition tends to be isolated and has more difficulty persuading the public to vote against funding when a positive value exists on each of the first six of the above variables.

To summarize, the first four variables in the above list probably are the most critical ones as they tend to influence each of the remaining five variables. In

other words, it is very difficult to be successful with a ballot measure unless a) a perceived traffic crisis exists that is seen as a high priority problem, b) the transit agency is perceived as having the ability to use funding effectively and efficiently, c) extensive public participation in the planning process exists, and d) the transportation package does not consist solely of rail transit.

Each of the 17 variables is discussed below in a separate.

Traffic congestion “crisis”

Definition: This factor refers to the perception, real or not, that a community is facing traffic congestion of such magnitude that it is a high or very high priority for most citizens. Typically, survey data may be used to determine the extent to which transportation problems are considered to be a “crisis” in a given community.

Rationale: If the traffic problem is perceived to be harmful to the economy, the environment, and/or the quality of life of a community, it can motivate voters to support tax increases that will fund transportation improvements. Failing a crisis atmosphere, citizens may be less motivated to do so, particularly when the opposition creates uncertainty about the ability of rail transit to take a significant number of vehicles off the road.

Fit to data: Excellent (1 anomaly and 1 ambiguity). In only one community, (Austin) did this factor fail to predict the outcome of an election. Communities where transportation is a front burner issue all passed tax increases in support of transportation improvements. Cities like San Antonio—where congestion is regarded as relatively mild—failed to pass them.

Evaluation: The outcomes suggest that this factor may well represent a necessary condition for passage of a transportation tax increase. Communities that are not experiencing a traffic congestion “crisis” will face an uphill struggle to demonstrate the need for a tax increase. At the same time, the existence of a perceived congestion crisis is unlikely to be a sufficient condition for success because the transportation package may not be perceived as having a significant impact on the crisis. Such was the case in Austin. It had a major congestion crisis but the proposed transportation package, consisting solely of a comprehensive light rail system, was not perceived as providing an effective and efficient solution to the crisis.

Enthusiastic support by business community

Definition: This factor refers to the degree to which the local business community actively supports the transportation tax increase. In most instances, this means that local business leaders play an active, if not a key role in

creating and campaigning for the passage of a transportation tax initiative. It does not necessarily connote financial support, although the two are generally closely linked.

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

Fit to data: Very good (1 anomaly and 3 ambiguities). With the exception of Salt Lake, in which the business community supported the measure but was not prominent in the campaign and was unsuccessful in fundraising, each of the passing measures received notable support from the respective business communities, although one measure failed despite such support (St. Louis) and two measures failed with moderate support (Austin and Columbus). It is noteworthy that three cases were in the middle category with this variable. This occurred largely because the business community is not a single group and differences can exist within the community. Such was the case in Austin, for example. Some prominent members of the business community were very enthusiastic supporters and extremely successful in raising funds. At the same time, one of the leading opponents was a prominent member of the business community. In addition, the Chamber wrote an influential mixed report. This mixed nature allowed both proponents and opponents to use parts of this report in their campaign.

Evaluation: This factor would seem to typically be a necessary condition for passage of a transportation tax measure. It is difficult to imagine passage of such a measure absent explicit and tangible support from significant segments of the business community. However, as demonstrated in the St. Louis case, such support clearly does not assure passage. Thus, this factor is not a sufficient condition for success. In addition, support from the business community often may be mixed and measures can succeed when business support is mixed.

Enthusiastic support by key elected official(s)

Definition: This factor involves the combination of one or several key elected officials taking a visible leadership role in the promotion of the tax initiative and virtually no officials opposing the measure.

Rationale: Voters look to community leaders for cues on issues like tax increases. Mayors and other well-recognized officials can marshal support

among a variety of groups and help to squelch disagreements among political factions. Absent such leadership, voters may perceive an initiative to be relatively unimportant or receive cues from opposing groups.

Fit to data: Excellent (0 anomalies and 1 ambiguity). In each community that passed a transportation tax, the leadership of one or more key elected officials was closely involved. In Santa Clara, for example, Mayor Ron Gonzales made passage of transportation improvement a keystone of his campaign for mayor and followed through with political leadership. Three of the four communities that failed to pass a measure lacked such leadership; the fourth had only limited leadership.

Evaluation: This factor is quite probably a necessary condition for passage. Because no failed measure had strong enthusiastic support, the data do not allow the rejection of this as a sufficient condition. However, if all local funding initiatives are included, certainly many of them fail even with enthusiastic support from most, if not all, local elected officials. Thus, this factor does not appear to be a sufficient condition for success.

Fundraising near \$1 million

Definition: Fundraising for the transportation tax initiative nears or exceeds \$1 million.

Rationale: Effective campaigns require significant expenditures for consultants, research, publicity, media, direct mail, etc. This is particularly the case with tax increase initiatives that voters may oppose unless they are confident the funding will have a substantial impact on a high priority problem. Because it is often easy for opponents to attract media attention without spending much money, a poorly funded campaign can easily fail.

Fit to data: Excellent (1 anomaly and 1 ambiguity). With the exception of Salt Lake, each of the successful campaigns had very large campaign war chests. Salt Lake was not a true exception because the transit agency compensated for the lack of private funding by using a substantial amount of its public funds for a public education campaign consisting of both television ads and direct mail.

Three of the four losing campaigns failed to raise sufficient funds. Only one city, Austin, had a large campaign fund and failed to pass its tax measure.

Evaluation: Although obviously not a sufficient condition (see Austin), this is probably a necessary one. Campaigns that lack significant funding seem destined to lose.

Recent initiative experience

Definition: Some communities put a tax initiative on the ballot shortly after a preceding effort. Because there is little reason to do this if the preceding effort was successful, this typically is done after an unsuccessful prior effort.

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

Fit to data: Good (3 anomalies). Only one campaign (Charlotte) was successful in a community without a recent transportation tax campaign. Charlotte was successful despite its inexperience because of extensive support from the business community coupled with political leadership and a sophisticated campaign. Two communities failed in spite of a recent experience (Columbus and St. Louis). St. Louis is unusual in that they were successful on their first attempt but failed on their second attempt. This suggests that success may breed overconfidence, which is one of the explanations for the failure of the most recent measure in St. Louis.

Evaluation: Although clearly neither sufficient nor even necessary to win, experience seems to promote more palatable proposals and more effective campaigning. Experience does not guarantee victory, but it does seem to help many campaigns.

Enthusiastic support from environmental groups

Definition: Local environmental groups endorse and/or campaign for the measure and no opposition exists from any of these groups.

Rationale: Many communities have active environmental groups that endorse and offer support for transportation tax measures; this support can provide a cue for some voters, while its absence can signal political dissension and

negative publicity. Their opposition of a transit only measure may be very credible because they tend to be perceived as being pro-transit. At the same time, this perceived pro-transit orientation may lessen their credibility as supporters of a transit only ballot measure.

Fit to data: Mixed, very good with successful cases but poor with unsuccessful ones (4 anomalies, each with an unsuccessful case and 1 ambiguity). Although five of the six successful campaigns obtained enthusiastic support from environmental groups, so did each of the four unsuccessful campaigns. Environmental groups tend to be supportive of transportation measures that fund mass transit, so this is not surprising.

Evaluation: Although environmental opposition did not exist with any of the most recent ballot measures studied in each community, this opposition did exist with failed prior measures in both Sonoma and Alameda County. The environmental opposition was considered to be an important reason for failure in both instances. Thus, although the evidence is quite limited, it does suggest that avoiding environmental opposition may be necessary for success in some communities.

Multimodal proposal

Definition: Tax initiative contains a proposal for funding of more than one mode of transit. The inclusion of a highway component is considered separately under the next variable. Thus, the definition of “multimodal” is a narrow one that essentially considers whether a bus component is included in the package in addition to a substantial rail component.

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

Fit to data: Excellent (1 anomaly and 1 ambiguity). Only one proposal that passed (Denver) was not multimodal in a narrow sense. However, this measure was multimodal in a broad sense because a separate highway measure was closely linked to the light rail measure.

Evaluation: Although it is conceivable that a rail only measure can be successful in rare instances, the data suggest that it is necessary to combine a rail component with a bus and/or a highway component. At the same time, because including multiple modes tends to increase the cost of the package,

this strategy is not a sufficient condition for success. Moreover, the tradeoff between this variable and the costs of the package creates a challenge when designing a specific multimodal package. This challenge is demonstrated by the failure of prior multimodal measures in some of the communities, such as Alameda County, Sonoma County, and Phoenix.

Highway funding

Definition: Proposal (or companion proposal) contains funding for highway improvements along with transit enhancements.

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

Fit to data: Mixed. Fair at best with successful measures but good with unsuccessful measures (3 anomalies, each with a successful measure and 1 ambiguity, also with a successful measure). Of the six proposals that passed, only two included increased funding for highways. Phoenix, Salt Lake City, and Santa Clara did not, yet measures in those communities passed. However, it is important to note that recent or current ongoing highway construction existed in each of these three communities. None of the failing measures included highway funding however and the lack of this funding appeared to be an important reason for failure with Austin and San Antonio.

Evaluation: This factor is difficult to evaluate, because its efficacy may depend on the quality of existing highways, traffic conditions, and fiscal resources for highway improvements. Highway funding is clearly not necessary for the passage of a measure, although lack of highway funding may be sufficient to kill a measure when recent highway improvements have not occurred and when the business community perceives that highway funding is required in addition to transit funding.

Benefits distributed throughout area

Definition: Proposal contains provisions for transportation improvements that are dispersed throughout a wide portion of the jurisdiction voting on the measure.

Rationale: Distributing the traffic relief, transportation, economic and other benefits associated with transportation tax measures helps to broaden the

political base of support. Failure to disperse benefits may lead to geographically based pockets of opposition, creating divisions among voters.

Fit to data: Excellent (1 anomaly). Only one successful measure (Denver) did not provide widespread benefits and an important caveat needs to be stated with this case. It did not involve either a tax increase or an extension of an existing tax. Voters living in communities that did not benefit from the light rail extension may have been less likely to support the measure if it had involved a tax increase. No measure that failed did spread benefits, although the failure to spread benefits did not appear to be an important reason for failure in any of these cases.

Evaluation: Given the caveat with the only anomaly, the spreading of benefits appears to be a necessary condition for success. Although the evidence from the most recent cases in the table does not allow us to reject this variable as a sufficient condition, the prior 1997 measure in Denver demonstrates that this is not a sufficient condition. In order to provide benefits throughout the large region with a rail only measure, Denver needed to propose an extremely expensive package. The measure failed, with the extremely high cost of the package being instrumental in the defeat.

Sunset provision of 10 years or less

Definition: Proposal contains a time limit of ten years or less on the imposition of the tax. A decision was made to use 10 years as a threshold because our prior report, as well as other prior studies, recommended a short expiration date.

Rationale: Voters are more likely to support measures with finite time limits, particularly with rail transit when the community has no prior experience with this transit mode. Indefinite tax periods make the measure more vulnerable to opponents.

Fit to data: Very poor (6 anomalies). None of the five relevant successful cases had an expiration date of ten years or less and two of them did not have any expiration date. In addition, two of the three relevant unsuccessful cases had an expiration date of ten years or less.

Evaluation: The idea that short sunset provisions might enhance the probability of passage was derived from the previous study (Haas, Massey et al., 2000). This prior conclusion is definitely inconsistent with the cases included in this study, possibly as the result of improved economic conditions. However, due to selected characteristics of each of the five successful cases that involved use of a sales tax for funding, the finding that voters seem to place little importance on the length of the tax should not be generalized to

many other cases. More specifically, this finding should not be generalized to ballot measures that involve a) a sales tax increase above an existing dedicated sales tax for a basic transit system, b) the transportation package consists primarily of rail transit, and c) the community has no existing rail transit system when the ballot measure occurs. None of the five relevant successful cases had the combination of these three characteristics (The issue of a sunset date is not applicable in the successful Denver case because this case did not involve either a tax increase or extension.). The Alameda case did not meet any of these three characteristics; the Santa Clara case did not meet the first and third of these characteristics; the Charlotte and Phoenix cases did not meet the first and second characteristics; and the Salt Lake case did not meet the third characteristic.

Extension of existing rail transit

Definition: The community had a rail line or lines prior to the most recent ballot measure.

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

Fit to data: Good (3 anomalies). When the conditions with the two anomalies with successful cases are considered (Phoenix and Charlotte), they are not strong anomalies. In Phoenix, the light rail component was only about one-third of the total package and it was not a comprehensive system. Charlotte de-emphasized the light rail element of their package. It was communicated to be a transit package and the light rail component was not specified. The anomaly with the unsuccessful cases (St. Louis) is an important one. It demonstrates that disputes over existing plans can result in failure, even when the initial system is very popular.

Evaluation: This variable does not appear to be either a necessary or a sufficient condition for success. At the same time, it appeared to be a very important contributing factor to the success of the Alameda, Santa Clara, and Salt Lake measures and to the defeat of the Austin and San Antonio measures. For example, Salt Lake opponents acknowledged that they could not use the normal approach of criticizing light rail in this campaign because the initial light rail line was so popular. As another example, Santa Clara positioned its measure as a BART extension, even though a significant majority of the funding was devoted to other elements. It positioned it as a BART extension because of the popularity of BART. In addition, voters in both Austin and San

Antonio were hesitant to vote for a comprehensive light rail only package when they had no prior experience with light rail in their communities.

Lack of problems with existing transit system

Definition: Some transit agencies develop a reputation for poor management (deserved or not), or have been beset by controversy about service levels, routing decisions, empty buses, inefficient use of resources, etc.

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

Fit to data: Excellent (0 anomalies). Austin demonstrates the importance of this factor. Opponents focused on prior mismanagement by the transit agency as one of their major themes and the measure failed even though no tax increase or extension was involved.

Evaluation: If a transit system or agency has a bad reputation, it appears to be very difficult for a measure to pass. At least in the cases studied in which the agency/system had a bad reputation, the opposition focused much of their attack on this issue. At the same time, because two of the successful cases (Alameda and Phoenix) had recent failures and the transit agency had no problems at the time of these failures, this variable is not sufficient for success.

Extensive stakeholder participation in the planning process

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

Rationale: Important stakeholders, such as the business community, environmental groups, and elected officials expect to be involved in the process. Because compromises may need to be made, it is important to get agreement from relevant groups that the compromise is acceptable before going forward with the package. Systematic input on citizen preferences through surveys obviously is relevant because these people will eventually express their views through their ballots. At the same time, preferences expressed through surveys may not always be reliable. For example, two

different surveys were used in Alameda to measure attitudes towards expiration date thresholds and conflicting results were obtained.

Fit to data: Excellent (1 anomaly). The only anomaly existed with Salt Lake. Actually, this is not a strong anomaly. The package was initiated in the political arena so this stakeholder group was involved. However, neither the business community nor the public was involved. At the same time, because the popularity of the existing light rail system was well known, as was public dissatisfaction with the ongoing highway construction on a critical corridor, it probably was not necessary to use a formal process to determine voter preferences prior to going forward with the measure.

Evaluation: The involvement of one or more groups almost certainly is necessary for success. At the same time, when strong conflicts exist, an acceptable compromise may not be reached even with significant involvement. Such was the case with prior measures in Alameda and Sonoma. Thus, extensive involvement is not a sufficient condition for success.

General or congressional election

Definition: A measure is placed on the ballot to coincide with a presidential or congressional election.

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

Fit to data: Good (3 anomalies). The two anomalies with successful cases (Phoenix and Denver) can be explained by the absence of energetic opposition, which is required to exploit the opportunity for substantial news coverage.

A discussion of the extent of fit existing with the two hypothesized conditions identified in the rationale subsection is needed because, unlike most other explanatory variables, the general election variable is unlikely to have a direct impact on voter attitudes towards these ballot measures.

Although a rigorous and systematic analysis was not conducted, the amount of news coverage typically was substantial when few if any other issues were on the same ballot. Such coverage appeared to be less substantial in some general

elections. However, Austin is an important exception to this tentative observation. The amount of coverage was substantial in Austin even though the campaign took place during a presidential election. This case demonstrates that energetic opposition can be successful in stimulating substantial news coverage in a general election, at least when the measure is controversial and when a transportation crisis exists that is newsworthy.

Exit polling or other post election survey data is needed to identify voting patterns among different segments. As indicated in chapter 1, this data typically was unavailable. Accordingly, sufficient data does not exist to either tentatively support or reject the hypothesis that supporters of these ballot measures are more likely to vote in a general election.

Evaluation: This variable is neither a necessary or sufficient condition for success; moreover, it apparently does not directly influence voting behavior. At the same time, the potential for substantial news coverage in a special election creates an opportunity for energetic opposition to exploit, particularly if the opposition has some potentially effective issues to exploit. This combination of conditions existed in three of the four unsuccessful cases (St. Louis, San Antonio, and Columbus).

Consultant with initiative campaign experience

Definition: The campaign for the transportation tax measure is managed by a consultant who has successfully managed prior initiative campaigns. The prior campaign did not need to be a transportation initiative.

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

Fit to data: Excellent (1 anomaly and 1 ambiguity). Every successful campaign retained the services of a consultant with considerable experience in the task at hand. Unsuccessful campaigns tended to be managed by amateurs or consultants without directly relevant campaign experience, although San Antonio is a notable exception to this assessment. Some of these consultants (Phoenix, Charlotte, and Salt Lake) had no prior experience with transportation initiatives but were familiar with the local environment. This demonstrates that consultants with both local experience and successful prior experience with transportation initiatives may not exist.

Evaluation: This factor is somewhat subjective, in that evaluating the experience and expertise of a campaign consultant is difficult, and evaluating the quality of the campaign is even more subjective. However, the data collected for this study point strongly to the conclusion that the successful campaigns hired outstanding, experienced consultants who used advanced

research techniques coupled with sophisticated campaign strategies. They suggest that the use of such consultants is indeed a necessary step for a successful campaign. The anomaly with the San Antonio case, which lost by a huge margin (only 30% support) even though the consultants had substantial and successful experience with prior initiatives, demonstrates this variable is not a sufficient condition for success.

Extensive use of targeted direct mail and television ads

Definition: The campaign makes extensive use of both (a) direct mail that is targeted to selected audiences on the basis of survey research, and (b) television advertising for general audiences. Other means of communication may also be used. This variable is highly correlated with the previous fundraising variable. Extensive use of both television and direct mail cannot exist without a sufficient budget and consultants will almost invariably use both direct mail and television advertising when a sufficient budget does exist.

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

Fit to data: Excellent (1 anomaly). Each of the successful campaigns used the mixed approach suggested by this factor. One of the unsuccessful cases (St. Louis) did have this combination and still was unsuccessful. This case demonstrates that extensive advertising will not compensate for public concerns about a transit agency, at least when partisan bickering exists.

Evaluation: In many communities, obtaining majority support for a tax increase, or even a tax extension, is challenging. Voters may be unlikely to support such an initiative unless they are confident that it is needed. Organized opposition usually exists and this opposition usually is able to obtain at least moderate and balanced coverage of the initiative in the local newspaper or newspapers. Significant advertising appears to be a necessary condition to compensate for the public’s hesitancy to support tax initiatives and balanced newspaper coverage. At the same time, St. Louis demonstrates that this is not a sufficient condition for success. Extensive advertising probably will not compensate for negative publicity, nor will it compensate for a poorly conceived transportation initiative presented prior to the existence of a perceived traffic crisis.

Lack of effective opposition

Definition: Opposition to the tax measure is disorganized, unfounded, or nonexistent. Given the existence of some opposition with each of the ten cases, a judgment needed to be made about the effectiveness of this opposition. We initially considered using the amount of funds raised by the opposition as a means of classifying cases on this variable, as this is an objective means of classification. However, this means was not used because it is not a good indicator of the effectiveness of the opposition. The effectiveness has been evaluated using a) the degree of effort exerted by the opposition particularly in attempting to get their message heard, b) their prominence and credibility within the community, and c) the arguments used.

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

Fit to data: Very good to excellent (0 anomalies but 3 ambiguities). The three ambiguities, or middle classifications, demonstrate that this variable is both subjective and is not conducive to a simple dichotomous classification.

Evaluation: Effective opposition did not exist with any of the successful cases. These results suggest that the avoidance of effective opposition is a necessary condition for success. However, this conclusion probably is incorrect, particularly given the large margin of victory in two of the successful cases that also had moderately significant opposition (Santa Clara and Phoenix). A well-conceived transportation package, combined with a well-funded and effective campaign, based on both competitive and voter research, which utilizes a proactive approach with the news media, can be successful even when effective opposition exists.

IMPACT OF COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN USED BY PROPONENTS ON VOTING BEHAVIOR

Only one of the variables included in Table 10-1 could be classified as a characteristic of the communications campaign (extensive use of both direct mail and television advertising). Because they do not lend themselves to simple definition or classification, many relevant communications campaign-related variables are omitted from the table; this despite the fact that the data suggest that they may have a substantial impact on voting behavior. In this section, the potential impact of a few of the apparently more significant aspects of campaign communications is discussed.

Content of Advertising

Determining the content of advertising typically does not appear to be a difficult decision, as the advertising themes tend to be quite similar from one campaign to another. For example, virtually all campaigns focused on the magnitude of the congestion crisis and at least implied that the transportation package will help solve the crisis. In addition, although most advertising campaigns did not discuss the cost of the transportation package, many did mention federal funding that would not exist if the measure failed. Readers should refer to relevant prior chapters, most notably the Phoenix and Denver chapters, to obtain more detail about advertising content.

Although it was stated in the prior paragraph that content decisions typically are not difficult, one decision—namely the degree of specificity to use in describing the transportation package—does appear to be a difficult one. This is a difficult decision because providing either limited specificity or substantial specificity creates a platform for opposition criticism, albeit different platforms. When the specifics are not disclosed (e. g., St. Louis), opponents criticize the plan as lacking specifics and argue that approval basically involves giving a government agency a blank check. In addition, the opposition may argue here that proponents are afraid to describe the specifics because they fear that the specifics will not be enthusiastically accepted by voters.

On the other hand, if the proposition provides a specific description of the transportation package, the opposition then begins to criticize some of the specific characteristics. For example, the opposition often criticizes specific routing for rail lines along with criticizing construction issues that may increase costs. They also will criticize changing cost estimates, estimated travel times if they are provided, etc. (Austin and San Antonio). On the surface, it is difficult to generalize about which of these two vulnerabilities is worse. In addition, it is difficult to see a consistent pattern when examining the results with the successful cases studied. Santa Clara, Charlotte, and Salt Lake provided very little detail in their advertising while Denver, Phoenix and Alameda provided a higher degree of specificity.

Although no single appropriate level of specificity appears to exist, a few observations are identified below.

- If specifics are presented, it is important to try to maintain focus on general themes, such as the underlying importance of the transportation crisis and the typically balanced nature of the transportation package. This approach was used successfully in Phoenix. A rather specific description of the transportation package was presented though a limited number of direct

mailers, combined with a high frequency television and/or radio advertising campaign that focused on general themes.

- Research can be used to identify specific segments of undecided voters who are unlikely to support the measure unless they are provided with some specifics. Targeted direct mail can then be sent to these specific segments. This approach was used successfully in Denver.
- A moderate amount of specificity on the critical issue of rail routes can be effective. This approach was used successfully in Phoenix, where first phase routes were specified, but only options for later phase routes were presented.
- Voters are more likely to accept less than complete specificity on rail routes if a reasonable process for decision making both has been used with any routes that are specified in the package and that will be used with any unspecified routes, probably with citizen involvement in this process. This approach was used in Phoenix and the approach was described in some advertising.
- It may be more important to avoid cost specificity in advertising. Particularly because opponents will tend to seize on these estimates and question them, the campaign can quickly degenerate from a focus on benefits to a focus on costs. Such a focus will almost certainly benefit the opposition. This happened in Denver with their prior 1997 measure and also happened in San Antonio. One way of avoiding cost specificity, while at the same time, not avoiding costs totally, is to provide an approximate percentage distribution of funding to the different components of the package. This approach was used successfully in both Alameda and Phoenix.

Use of prominent political figures in advertising

Some proponent campaigns had at least a portion of their ads involve endorsements from prominent current or previous office holders. In most instances, the use of prominent elected officials seemed to have little positive impact on voters. For example, both Austin and San Antonio in their unsuccessful campaigns, had a significant portion of their television advertising consist of endorsements from political figures. The endorsement of prominent elected officials often may have limited credibility specifically with tax measures because these officials often are seen as being supportive of tax increases, which was the case in both Austin and San Antonio. However, these

endorsements can be effective when made by an official who typically is opposed to tax increases. For example, this endorsement approach was successful in Denver. The person used in Denver, a conservative Republican governor, had credibility because he typically is critical of both rail transit and of tax increases.

Strategies for dealing with opposition: Overview

As mentioned earlier in this chapter when discussing the variables in Table 10-1, the degree of effective opposition appears to be an important independent variable as each of the unsuccessful cases had effective opposition and none of the successful ones had effective opposition (although three of these successful cases were in the middle category on this variable). Given the degree of impact that the effectiveness of opposition has on voting behavior, it can be important to try to develop a transportation package and a coalition that both minimizes and neutralizes opposition. In addition, because developing a transportation package and coalition can only lessen the probability of effective opposition, rather than preventing it, a plan for lessening the impact of effective opposition on voting can be effective. Each of these two dimensions of dealing with opposition is discussed below.

Developing a transportation package to lessen and/or neutralize opposition

Both the Alameda and Denver cases demonstrate that the nature of the opposition can be influenced by the transportation package. In each of these two cases, the opposition was substantially greater with a prior measure that failed than with a more recent successful measure. The 1997 Denver measure was opposed by one of the two main newspapers and by many prominent elected officials, primarily Republicans. Both the relevant newspaper and most of the relevant elected officials switched positions and actively supported the 1999 transit measure, primarily because significant changes were made to the 1997 transportation package to lessen opposition. In Alameda, environmental organizations lead the opposition to the 1998 measure. As a result of this opposition, some newspapers and some prominent elected officials also opposed this measure. However, in 2000, virtually no opposition existed as a result of differences between the 1998 and 2000 transportation packages that were made to gain the support of environmental organizations.

One of the more effective means of lessening opposition involves having a transportation package that includes a highway component as well as a transit component. Such a package may gain the support of highway advocates and organizations who are less than enthusiastic about transit and also gain the support of transit advocates who are less than enthusiastic about highways.

This was the approach taken in both Denver and in Alameda. Yet, as demonstrated by the 1998 ballot measure in Sonoma County discussed in our prior report, as well as in the 1998 measure in Alameda County (that did attempt without success to obtain support from environmental groups), it is very difficult to develop a specific combination that both sides will support because each side essentially opposes one component in the combination. Special circumstances existed in both Denver and Alameda that contributed to the relevant package being acceptable to both camps. In Denver, highway supporters endorsed the transit measure partly because no tax increase was needed (which is rather atypical) and partly because passage of the transit measure was needed to prevent a new environmental impact study from being conducted prior to commencement of highway construction. In Alameda, highway and transit advocates both realized that the 2000 election was the last opportunity to obtain an extension of the existing sales tax.

Because it is very difficult to lessen potentially effective opposition in many communities, proponents in a few communities have been successful in neutralizing the opposition. Because the opposition generally has focused their arguments on rail transit rather than on bus transit, a transit package with a substantial bus component can be effective in partially neutralizing opposition. Phoenix, Salt Lake, and Charlotte provide positive examples of using this strategy to neutralize opposition and opponents in Phoenix and Salt Lake acknowledged that this strategy did, indeed, make it more difficult for them to mount an effective campaign. Another option involves attempting to construct a starter rail line in the community utilizing the existing budget, combined with federal and/or state funding. If this starter line is successful and popular, it becomes difficult for opponents to use statistics in other communities, which is what they tend to rely on, to argue that rail transit is inefficient and ineffective. Salt Lake and Denver, to a lesser extent, have used this strategy successfully. Of course, this strategy will backfire if the starter line or system is unsuccessful.

Plans to lessen the effectiveness of the opposition

Identification of likely opponents and their arguments

Proponents interviewed in communities with effective opposition, such as in Columbus, San Antonio, Austin, and Denver in 1997, indicated that they were surprised by some of the tactics and arguments used by the opposition and thought they lost control of the campaign because of their failure to even attempt to carefully anticipate the opposition. This recurring experience demonstrates that a necessary and preliminary step in developing a plan to cope with opposition involves the attempt to anticipate both the identity of the

opposition as well as the arguments that the opposition is likely to use. This appears to be a critical step partly because the opposition tends to rely on the news media to communicate their message and short response times exist when dealing with these media.

Because organized opposition to transit only packages usually originates with a) anti-tax groups or elected officials, and/or b) anti-rail groups, with environmental organizations being a third source of opposition to a transportation package with a highway component, the identification of likely sources of opposition is relatively easy. Identification of the arguments likely to be used by the opposition also is relatively easy, as many of the general arguments, as well as some of the specific arguments used against measures with a substantial rail component have been repeated in a number of campaigns throughout the country. This repetition occurs largely because much of the data used by local opposition is provided by the same people, such as Wendell Cox and the Texas Public Policy Foundation. Their arguments, along with the statistics supporting them, appear on their websites and in position papers. Some of the arguments used, along with possible responses, were discussed in our prior study (Haas, Massey, et al., 2000).

Appropriate preparation for such arguments can be facilitated by using outside experts with thorough knowledge of the arguments and statistics that opponents are likely to use and possible responses can be prepared in advance. Opponents have used outside experts with some degree of success in such places as Denver with the 1997 ballot measure, Sonoma County in 1998, and the most recent measures in Austin, San Antonio, and Columbus. Of the cases studied, Charlotte is apparently the only one in which proponents used an outside consultant in this capacity.

In terms of recent tactics, the opposition took legal action in two communities (Salt Lake and San Antonio) against transit agencies for using public funding for campaign purposes. Another tactic used involved attending and participating in most public outreach meetings organized by the transit agency (San Antonio). Still another tactic employed in selected communities, such as Columbus, San Antonio and Austin, involved attacking the credibility and management ability of the transit organization. This tactic is implemented in part by closely examining statistics presented in literature from the transit agency as well as in major investment studies and long range transportation plans.

One common observation is that proponents in a number of communities have modified the transportation package and/or their campaign after an unsuccessful ballot measure in the community. Given the successful passage of

a number of recent ballot measures, opponents are likely to modify some of their arguments and tactics.

Planning for debates

Because the opposition typically has a very limited budget, it relies primarily on a) grass roots efforts, b) debates, and c) the news section of newspapers and radio talk shows to communicate their messages. Of these three components, the debate mode is the one that proponents have the most influence on the ability of the opposition to use. If proponents do not agree to engage in debates, then the debates will not take place.

The results in the cases studied seem to support the conclusion that debates tend to benefit the opposition more than proponents. A series of debates were conducted in four of the communities studied (Austin, Columbus, Phoenix, and San Antonio). The ballot measures were unsuccessful in three of these four communities. Debates appear to help the opposition more than proponents for a number of reasons. First, proponents typically have sufficient funding available for substantial advertising. Thus, proponents should, as a rule, prefer advertising, with which the message is controlled, to debates, with which the message is not controlled. Second, debates provide underfunded groups communicate with a forum and can give them credibility, at least if they are well prepared and they carefully select their spokespeople. Third, the debates tend to be covered by the news media, which extends both the reach and frequency for the opposition arguments. Fourth, debates are conducive to opponents of tax initiatives because generating doubt among a majority of voters typically is sufficient to defeat these measures. Opponents often use this forum to cite statistics from reputable sources that can be effective in generating such doubt.

Although agreeing to debate with the opposition often does not appear to be in the best interests of proponents, refusing to debate can be risky. It allows the opposition to suggest that proponents have something to hide or that they are afraid to debate because they know that their arguments cannot withstand scrutiny. The news media may then begin to cover this issue, which can result in the refusal of proponents to debate becoming a campaign issue.

Planning publicity

For the same reasons as stated in the previous subsection on debates, proponents typically would prefer that newspapers would provide no more than minimal coverage to the ballot measure. Because such coverage tends to be balanced, it will provide a means for an underfunded opposition to communicate their message and it may allow the opposition a means of

focusing attention on specific issues that benefit them. However, unlike debates, which will not exist if proponents do not agree to debate, newspapers may provide extensive coverage even if proponents are not accessible to the reporters. In fact, coverage in the newspapers typically has been at least moderately extensive in most of the communities studied, even when the ballot measure is on the same ballot as a presidential election (Austin, Alameda, and Santa Clara). Extensive coverage tends to exist because transportation tends to be a newsworthy issue in many communities that consider transit ballot measures. Many of these communities have a transportation crisis and many of the newspapers have a designated transportation reporter. In addition, the opposition often encourages extensive coverage, knowing that it may be the only available means of communicating their message through mass media.

Proponents in such communities as Denver in 1997, Sonoma County in 1998, Phoenix in 1997, San Antonio, and Austin acknowledged that they might have been more successful if they had taken a more proactive approach with the news media. The successful campaigns with the most recent campaigns in Phoenix and Denver provide examples of such a proactive approach.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that a) the nature of the transportation package, b) the process used to determine it, and c) communications campaigns used by both proponents and opponents influence voting behavior on ballot measures involving funding for a transportation package with a substantial rail component. Two tables, Table 1-1 and Table 10-1, illustrate the findings that support this conclusion.

Table 1-1 demonstrates that voting results can change quickly and dramatically within the same community. For example, a transportation package presented to Alameda County voters on a ballot measure in 2000, which was similar in many respects, but also different in some important specific respects, to one presented to these voters in 1998, received support from 81.5% of voters in 2000 compared to 58% support in 1998. Such rapid and large within community differences, corresponding to differences with the transportation package and the communications campaigns used by proponents and opponents, demonstrate that characteristics of the transportation package and the process used to determine it, along with characteristics of the communications campaigns used by proponents and opponents, can have a significant influence on voting results.

Table 10-1 demonstrates that the actual results with 15 of the 17 explanatory variables in the table are consistent with the expected results. A number of these variables appear to approach being necessary for success but none seem

to be sufficient for success. Conversely, the absence of some of them appears to be close to being sufficient for failure.

Additionally, the results in this table demonstrate that a number of the explanatory variables appear to be correlated with each other. Involving the business community and prominent elected officials, as well as environmental organizations in some instances, often leads to the development of a multimodal transportation package. Such a transportation package, presented when a perceived traffic crisis exists, often results in enthusiastic support from these groups. This may result in a well-funded campaign that uses a combination of mass media and direct mail advertising, and may even result in lessening or neutralizing opposition.

The results also demonstrate that the nature of the transportation package is a critical, but also a difficult decision. Appropriate packages vary across communities, but also over time within a community. The unfixed nature of an appropriate transportation package is demonstrated by the conditional nature of the analysis with variables in Table 10-1 pertaining to the nature of the transportation package, such as whether and how a highway component is involved in the package and the extent that an incremental approach is used with a rail component of the package.

Although it is not reflected either by the simple classification used in Table 10-1 or by the discussion of each variable following the table, some of the case chapters demonstrate that the details of the transportation package are critically important and that these details can be difficult to determine when multiple stakeholder groups, with different priorities, are involved in the decision making process. Both the Alameda and the Phoenix cases (chapters five and nine) demonstrate the importance and difficulty of reaching a consensus on the details of the transportation package. For example, it was difficult in Alameda County to reach a consensus on the specific percentage allocation to different modes of transportation.

The mean supporting percentage with the most recent ballot measure across all eleven communities (56.4%) is well over the 50% threshold typically required for passage, suggesting that the probability of success is somewhat better than the probability of failure. However, this interpretation is misleading. First, a recent prior attempt had been made in four of the eleven communities with significantly lower supporting percentages (see Table 1-1). Second, although the focus of study in this report is on decision or actionable variables, many environmental variables can influence the results and some of these environmental variables can change quickly over time. The significant volatility in voting behavior within a community discovered in this study

suggests that voting results can be influenced, both positively and negatively, by these environmental variables.

One essentially uncontrollable environmental variable is the nature of the opposition. The results with our study suggest that the opposition does modify their strategies and tactics over time. Opposing groups almost certainly will continue to make these modifications, requiring in the strategies and tactics employed by proponents. The probability of success with future measures also will depend in part on the degree of success with building and operating the rail lines and systems that were approved in the six successful ballot measures included in this study.

Finally, the uncertainty concerning results based on the case methodology must be borne in mind. Whereas there is little doubt that some of the variables this study has emphasized are indeed critical to the success or failure of the typical initiative, the limitations of this method do not enable precise descriptions of how important each is. The rather vague estimates provided here are based primarily on reasoned judgment and direct observation. Extreme caution and common sense ought to be exercised with regard to embracing these factors in practice.

Much of this report has been expressed in terms of the interest of the supporters of transportation tax initiatives. Careful reading, however, will reveal much that is of use to opponents. Perhaps most significantly, in none of the eleven cases did a measure prevail against an organized, reasonably well-funded opposition. That fact alone should inveigh in favor of caution in applying the results of this research.

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