

Best Practices

- 1. Stakeholder Coalitions: The grassroots mobilization of broad coalitions, coupled with effective campaign strategies that focused on job creation and economic benefits, can help states pass transportation funding initiatives.**

Although the emergence of a grassroots coalition of organizations does not guarantee the success of a proposed transportation funding plan, it can work in tandem with other elements of a campaign to help an initiative gain awareness and momentum. For instance, Washington’s policymakers did not support a gas tax increase, which ultimately contributed to the proposal’s failure despite the strong support from the “Keep Washington Rolling” coalition.

Success Stories

Many victorious transportation funding initiatives received external support from coalitions and outside campaigns. These coalitions tended to garner support from the local Chamber of Commerce and other public and private sector entities. For example, the Move Arkansas Forward Campaign was the official committee that worked to pass Issue 1 in Arkansas 2012 election. This coalition was made up of both private sector and highway proponents, and the organization included members from the Chamber of Commerce and the Municipal League. This campaign focused on a strategy that highlighted the economic benefits of the transportation funding. For example, the campaign’s fact sheet included: “Issue #1 will support 40,000 statewide jobs and improve Arkansas’s economy, while making roads safer for all, including school buses, emergency vehicles, and drivers sharing the highways with big trucks.”

Other example of a successful outside campaign was Maine’s “Keep Maine Moving Coalition,” which played an instrumental role in helping propel this legislatively-referred state statute to victory. The “Keep Maine Moving Coalition” was spearheaded by the Maine Better Transportation Association, and this broad alliance was led by Maria Fuentes from the Maine Better Transportation Association. Members of this diverse coalition included the Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce, the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Women in Construction, the Bicycle Coalition of Maine, and many more organizations.

The Keep Maine Moving Coalition emphasized three main benefits of this proposed transportation measure: jobs, safety, and Maine’s economy, and the campaign’s tagline was, “A *YES* vote on #4 will help make Maine roads safer, spark economic development and create thousands of homegrown jobs.” In April 2012, the unemployment rate in Maine was 7.3%, and the national unemployment rate was 8.1% (Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research & Information). The Keep Maine Moving Coalition highlighted the underlying economic need for this bond measure. The messaging essentially tied the transportation infrastructure bond measure to the larger economic context for Maine. In addition, the Keep Maine Moving Coalition presented the benefits of the proposal in economic terms to voters, and

the campaign’s marketing materials discussed how this strategic investment in infrastructure would facilitate business growth and job growth in Maine.

Other successful coalitions with effective campaigns include Wyoming’s “Save Wyoming Roads” Coalition and Massachusetts’ “Campaign for Our Communities.”

Unsuccessful Campaigns & Lack of Mobilized Support

One of the characteristics of recent unsuccessful transportation funding initiatives was that they lacked external coalition support. For example, Connecticut, Mississippi, and Nevada had unsuccessful transportation initiatives and also lacked outside organizations advocating for the passage of these various proposals.

In addition, Los Angeles County and Alameda County in California both had effective coalitions despite both campaigns narrowly failing to secure 2/3 of the vote for the respective ballot measures. Los Angeles County’s “Yes on J” campaign and Alameda County’s “Yes on B1” campaign both effectively mobilized the public as well as private sector organizations to advocate for transportation funding.

Campaign Strategies and Messaging Focused on Job Creation & Economic Benefits

A common characteristic shared by successful transportation initiative campaigns run by outside organizations was that they focused on a similar campaign strategy. Successful coalitions ran campaigns that emphasized the positive potential economic benefits of passing the transportation funding proposal. Moreover, these campaigns also focused on job creation, where campaign messages focused on highlighting the number of jobs that would be added over the long-run.

The 2012 “Keep Maine Moving Coalition” focused on a strategy that emphasized jobs, safety, and Maine’s economy, and the Move Arkansas Forward Campaign’s highlighted that the proposal would “support 40,000 statewide jobs and improve Arkansas’s economy, while making roads safer for all, including school buses, emergency vehicles, and drivers sharing the highways with big trucks.”

Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley framed the gas tax debate over his transportation in economic terms, where he emphasized the positive economic benefits that would result if the measure was enacted. D

Despite the fact that Los Angeles County’s “Measure J” narrowly failed —66.11% voted in favor, but the measure needed 67% voter approval to pass— the campaign was clearly successful because 66.11% of voters endorsed this tax increase proposal on election day. The “Yes on J” campaign strategy was extremely effective because it focused on job creation and traffic relief in Los Angeles, and although the measure narrowly failed, this successful messaging ultimately convinced a clear majority of voters to support the measure in the election

2. Political Leadership: The governor serves as a strong champion and prioritizes transportation.

Successful Case Studies

When the governor is a champion of the transportation funding proposal, the transportation funding package has an increased likelihood of passing. This was clearly evident in the cases of Wyoming, Vermont, Texas, and Massachusetts.

Governor Matt Mead of Wyoming (R) made the gas tax a key priority of his administration. He advocated for the legislation in his State of the State speech and encouraged legislators to pass the gas tax increase in order to fund road maintenance and help Wyoming establish a sustainable funding source for transportation projects in the future.

Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin (D) also strongly supported a house bill to raise the motor fuel tax, and he played an active role in the legislative process by brokering a negotiation that ultimately allowed both the House and the Senate to pass the bill in the same day. Shumlin said that Vermont has “a leaky bucket in the transportation fund...if we don’t repair it, we’re not going to be able to make the progress on roads and bridges that are crumbling before our eyes.”

In Texas, Governor Rick Perry (R) was a champion of a transportation funding proposal that did not raise taxes on Texas residents. He made this legislation a key priority for the Texas legislature, and this ultimately contributed to the passage of a funding package during the third special legislative session that he summoned in 2013. After the legislation failed to advance during the regular legislative session, Governor Perry called the legislature back for three separate special sessions, and during the third session, the legislation finally passed. Governor Perry diligently fought for this legislation, and he said, “When it comes to transportation, the stakes facing our state could not be higher and a failure to act now could take years – if not most of a decade – to correct, as traffic congestion increases and harms our quality of life.”

Passing a transportation funding package was one of the main legislative priorities of Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick (D). Some of the democrats in the legislature opposed the governor’s ambitious \$800 million transportation proposal, and after the governor vetoed the legislature’s more modest legislation, the legislature then voted to override the governor’s veto. In the end, a more modest transportation bill was implemented than the one that Governor Patrick had initially advocated for. The bill included a 3-cents-per-gallon gasoline tax increase as well as cigarette and software services taxes. After the gas tax was implemented on August 1, 2013, Governor Patrick still praised the tax hike as a legislative victory, and he said that “we’ve got—and citizens know it—a long neglected transportation infrastructure...it’s time to reinvest in our infrastructure for the sake of our growth, for the sake of our economy and for the sake of our quality of life.”

Unsuccessful Case Studies

Some states with unsuccessful transportation funding legislation shared a common characteristic: the governor was either neutral or opposed to the funding proposal. The transportation funding initiatives in Minnesota, Mississippi, and New Hampshire all lacked their governors' support, and consequently, all three of these proposals were unsuccessful. Furthermore, Nevada's governor strongly opposed the proposed increase in funding, and consequently, the legislation failed.

The governor's support for a proposal does not *necessarily* ensure the passage of a transportation funding measure, but it does tend to improve the political feasibility of the plan. In 2013, Washington was the only state with a transportation funding proposal that received strong support from the governor, but the bill still failed to advance in the state legislature.

3. Compromise & Bipartisan Support in State Legislatures.

Success Stories

Transportation funding initiatives that receive support from both Democrats and Republicans tend to be successful. Ohio's legislation received the majority of support from Republicans in the state legislature, and some Democrats in both the House and Senate also endorsed the measure. Similarly, although Wyoming's legislature only has a handful of Democratic representatives, all four Democratic senators and six of the eight Democratic House members voted with the majority of Wyoming Republicans to pass legislation to raise the state's motor fuel tax.

In Virginia, the legislature was able to overcome gridlock by creating a broad coalition of supporters, which included both Republicans and Democrats. Moreover, Republican Governor McDonnell and Terry McAuliffe, the Democratic candidate for governor, both actively supported the legislation. For example, Mr. McAuliffe individually called Senate Democrats to persuade them to support the transportation proposal.

According to House Democratic Chairman Mark Sickles, reaching compromise was not a quick or painless process; rather, he said that "as with any real compromise, the conference report was not a slam dunk. Terry [McAuliffe] got on the phone, and working with Governor McDonnell, brought home the votes."

In addition to these efforts, Governor McDonnell also worked towards compromise with the Democrats by making concessions throughout the legislative process. In the end, he was able to reach a comprehensive and bipartisan compromise while also making Virginia the first state in the country to eliminate and replace the motor fuel tax. Governor McDonnell praised the bipartisan nature of this legislative victory and he said, "Following on the heels of nearly three decades of inaction on the critical challenges facing transportation funding in Virginia, this

historic bi-partisan legislation supported by Republicans and Democrats from each chamber will provide more than \$3.4 billion in additional statewide transportation funding, more than \$1.5 billion in additional funding for Northern Virginia, and more than \$1 billion in additional funding for Hampton Roads, over the next five years alone.”

Maryland: An Outlier

Although several other states passed similar gas tax transportation bills with bipartisan support, Maryland is an exception to this rule. *The Washington Post's* editorial board wrote that, “Somehow Republicans in Annapolis did not get the word about the growing bipartisan accord nationally on the need to modernize transportation infrastructure – and the consensus that the gasoline tax is the most sensible way to raise the money. Essentially every Republican lawmaker in both houses of the General Assembly voted against Mr. O’Malley’s gas-tax legislation.”¹

Unsuccessful Proposals & Lack of Bipartisanship

States that had failed legislative proposals also lacked bipartisan support. Senate Democrats in Washington unsuccessfully tried to force the bill to the floor on the final day of the legislative session after an inability to gain bipartisan support. As a result, the transportation package was defeated without a formal vote, and the bill died at the end of the legislative session. Lastly, in Montana, Missouri, and Nevada, strong Republican opposition to raising any form of taxes ultimately hindered the ability to advance gas tax legislation.

4. Political Leadership in the Legislature: Strong State Leadership Can Shape & Influence Fate of Transportation Funding Initiatives.

State leadership’s active support for transportation funding initiatives also can help pass legislation. Maryland’s state leadership in both parties worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the transportation funding package. Virginia’s legislative strategy also included working with state leadership to advocate for the proposal. In the cases of New Hampshire, Nevada, and Mississippi, the lack of support from state leadership may have contributed to these unsuccessful attempts to pass new transportation funding plans. More specifically, even though the legislation received bipartisan support in the New Hampshire House, there was a lack of Senate leadership support in New Hampshire. Consequently, policy makers who opposed the legislation were able to employ procedural maneuvers in order to stall and eventually kill the proposed legislation. Lastly, in Texas, the state leadership was divided on Governor Perry’s transportation package, which perhaps contributed to the long and drawn out process that involved Governor Perry calling the legislature back for three separate special sessions after their failure to address the bill.

¹ The Washington Post, Editorial Board, 4/5/13

5. National Momentum.

States throughout the nation—including Wyoming, Maine, Arkansas and others—have recently passed gas tax legislation. Texas State Senator Robert Nicols (R) and Chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee recently said “it doesn’t matter whether you’re Republican, Democrat, tea party...everybody recognizes the need for transportation funding.”² Throughout the country, private sector leaders have embraced this transportation issue, and in Wisconsin and Iowa, and Texas, they have pushed for tax increases and fees and argue that “good roads are a competitive advantage for states.”³

6. Effective Messaging & Communication to the Public.

According to Lee Munich, the director of the State and Local Policy Program at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs, focusing on how the benefits of proposed infrastructure investment are presented to the public is a key factor of success. Therefore, messaging strategies need to be targeted to the specific audiences. Munich said, “Certainly in urban areas, congestion is a major issue. In rural areas, it’s going to be the access to jobs and businesses and things like that. So I think you’ve got to convert it into terms that people can see what the public investments are going to be.”⁴

² Johnson, The Wall Street Journal

³ Johnson, The Wall Street Journal

⁴ Capitol Research, CSG, Page 11