GWINNETT COUNTY, GEORGIA

Transportation Funding Initiative

_Election Cycle:_ November 2013

_Ballot Measure:_ Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax

_Type of Initiative:_ The Gwinnett Commission proposed designating 70% of the county’s sales tax program to transportation projects. Once a formal resolution was passed by the commission on August 20, 2013 by the Commission, voters then had the opportunity to confirm this through a ballot measure during the upcoming November election.

_Sponsor of Legislation:_ Gwinnett County Commission; Chairwoman Charlotte Nash

Background: In 2012, the Transportation Investment Act failed, which was a regional referendum. The County decided to address this issue because the county government will need to pay for maintaining roads and bridges with or without voters supporting this new sales tax proposal.¹

_Status of Legislation:_ In the November election, this referendum passed with 58 percent of voter support.

_Overview of Legislation:_ This proposal allocates 70% of a three-year sales tax program for only transportation projects. Approximately $275 million would be used to support “repaving or widening roads, bridge repair, drainage, building sidewalks and other pedestrian safety improvements.”²

Gwinnett County has 16 cities within the county, and these mayors are expected to approve of this plan next week; the proposal would give 21.1% of the sales tax revenue to these cities. Funds for each city will be determined by a formula that includes the city’s population and the number of miles of roads. The County also agreed to allocate $25 million to support joint transportation projects among cities and the county. Cities within the county have also agreed to spend 65% of their funds on transportation projects.

Because this ballot measure was approved on November 5, 2013, the tax renewal will begin on April 1, 2014 and go through March 31, 2017. During the negotiation process, the County had initially discussed both a 3 year and a 5 year tax renewal proposal, and ultimately, the County chose the 3-year renewal plan because they believed it was a more politically feasible option that would appeal to voters. Commission Chairwoman Nash said that “it’s very easy for us to demonstrate the need for this money and we figured the shorter time period allows us to be more concentrated because it doesn’t look as far into the future…we tried to honor what we think is important to the community and restrain ourselves.”³ If voters approve this sales tax measure, residents serving on a committee will identify the order in which the transportation projects will be funded.

_Lessons Learned:_ Collaboration Between County and Cities; Political Feasibility

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¹ Here is the link to the referendum that failed in 2012: http://www.metroatlantatransportationvote.com/
² Klepal, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
³ Klepal, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
References


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