Chapter 1—The Essential Guide for Senior Staff

To create the steps, checklists, and lessons learned provided in this Guide, we evaluated stories of success and failure in 10 states where significant transportation funding was sought. We also researched the history of federal transportation funding, at its height and as funding diminished. All 11 case studies are presented in detail in Appendix A.

If your Department of Transportation (DOT) needs funding to implement needed projects, keep reading. Lessons from each of the 11 cases are presented here. We have identified a simple checklist with difficult questions you will need to answer before you go forward to your Legislature or your public and ask for funding. You may find that you have real work to do before you make the leap and ask for funding, or you may find you are ready today. Do you want to know which boat you are in? Read on.

Are you ready to ask for additional funding?
The first step in considering whether you are ready to pursue a transportation funding initiative is to do a candid and critical appraisal of whether the necessary components are in place to support a successful effort. Following the 10 steps listed below, you will find a simple checklist with difficult questions that you will need to answer before you can determine whether you are ready to ask for additional funding. Our research shows that asking for funding prematurely may lead to failure, and a rash decision may poison the well for future initiatives. Proponents of a funding initiative should first engage in a rigorous exercise to address the following issues:

Step 1—Determine your program needs
• Are your bridges falling apart? Are your pavements too rough to ride? Do you have safety and congestion solutions on the shelf without the
funds to provide them? While the strategies and tactics discussed in this Guide can help support a successful initiative, they are not enough to prevail in the absence of an articulation of compelling needs. In an era of limited resources and a wide array of competing priorities, this is a fundamental pre-condition for success. When case study interviewees were asked to identify the key drivers for pursuing an initiative, fulfilling a compelling need in the eyes of the public was almost invariably their first response.

Step 2— Determine the costs, priorities, and benefits of your program
You must have solid technical analysis to support your case for increased revenue. It needs to be rigorous and complete and, since critics will try to discredit the analysis, it would be prudent to engage a knowledgeable third party for a critical peer review. You should strengthen your case before letting the critics have at it.

Step 3— Design your case for the public, political leaders, and the media
Build your case with leaders and the public and effectively communicate why more funding is needed. The technical case needs to be translated into plain English. The public, legislators, and media need to understand quickly why they should care about your initiative. What is your story? It will have to be understandable and persuasive.

Often, arguments from agencies or from the industries that support them are ignored. After all, agencies and industries share a natural bias and stake in the requested new funding. To overcome this problem, in many states elected leaders have established ad hoc advisory committees to take an independent look at the case the agency is making and report their findings in a way that resonates with political leaders and the public.

Step 4— Address your weaknesses
Prior to initiating a request for new funding, engage in a candid assessment of your agency’s shortcomings, real or
perceived, which could hinder the initiative. If the shortcomings are substantial, it may be wise for you to defer the initiative until they can be addressed or you can demonstrate that the funding initiative is an essential part of a solution.

One common shortcoming experienced by agencies is that of credibility. Your agency must have credibility with your public and political leaders to run a successful initiative. You must have a positive track record of spending funds wisely; the information must be readily available to support your case.

There are various ways for an agency to assess its reputation. Some are elaborate and potentially expensive (such as statistical polling and focus groups) and others less formal and perhaps less reliable (survey forms with motor vehicle notices).

In Washington State, a long series of unsuccessful initiatives was reversed by two major successes in a three year period (providing 13.5 cents of added fuel tax revenue) after Secretary Doug MacDonald changed WSDOT’s culture and its manner of communicating with stakeholders. The culture change was built around an extensive use of performance measurement that was communicated effectively in a journalistic style. The result was a dramatic improvement in WSDOT’s credibility.

**Step 5—Find a champion**
The decision to pursue an initiative to increase funding for transportation is not for the faint of heart. It requires that a person with vision and persistence take charge. Moreover, while it is never a one-person show, someone needs to be the leader, the champion—someone whose passion, persistence, and persuasive powers are up to the challenge.

No two champions are alike. They can be out front as the most visible proponent or can work behind the scenes lobbying for support. They can come from the sponsoring agency (the CEO or chair of the governing or

---

**If one champion is good, are more better?**
It is possible to have more than one champion, as long as they work toward a shared goal. It is easy for an initiative to fragment when different leaders have clashes of goals or personalities.
Step 6— Secure support from your governor

For state DOTs, the key elected official is typically the governor. Securing the support of the governor can be a difficult challenge with many non-transportation factors, such as other priorities and the election cycle part of the consideration. However, with the notable exception of Minnesota, all of the successful initiatives enjoyed some degree of support from their governors. Examples range from California, where Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger was the champion for a general obligation bond package that included significant transportation funding, to Ohio, where Governor Taft included the initiative in his State-of-the-State message largely because Secretary Gordon Proctor “… had done so much homework to lay a foundation for this plan.”

It is not uncommon, particularly in the early days of an initiative, for Governors (or Presidents) to let it be known privately that while they are not prepared to publicly support a revenue increase, they will not object to efforts by others—even their own politically appointed agency heads—to test the waters by launching an effort to build support. While having the visible backing of a popular Governor from the outset is ideal, its absence is not necessarily fatal.

Step 7— Analyze your program’s acceptance with the public, political leaders, and the media

Champions and their collaborating group of supporters have to recognize that they cannot go it alone. To have a realistic chance of success, the initiative must gain a critical mass of support.
It is essential that you get a good reading on the degree of “buy-in” you currently have or feel you can gain among key stakeholders. There is a wide variety of ways to do this ranging from informal head counts to statistical polling. Before you ask elected leaders to take actions that sustain an initiative, it is essential to know with confidence that you have that critical mass of support.

In our democratic society, the final barometer of success for a transportation initiative is the vote, whether of the general public or through their elected representatives in the legislature. Any serious consideration of whether to proceed with an initiative should include an initial forecast and continuous reading of these barometers. Here is where polling of the voting public by legislative leaders or lobbyists can make the difference.

If support is not there, you should engage in a strategic reassessment and come up with an approach that has a realistic chance of gaining the necessary support or you should consider a retreat. Retreat may be the better choice to avoid damaging the cause in the future. At the same time, it is not uncommon for funding initiatives to require repeated attempts. The key is to learn from an unsuccessful attempt and devise a turnaround strategy in the interim.

**Step 8— Know your opposition**

Launching an initiative to raise transportation revenue is much like jumping into a competition. There will be adversaries. The key questions are who are they, and why do they oppose your proposal? Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your potential opponents is essential, including an analysis of their likely arguments. By doing this work, you will be able to get ready to counter or overcome those arguments.

Another question you should consider is whether the opponents are strong enough to defeat the effort. Often initiatives fall short of success because proponents failed to address early what appeared to be weak or ineffective opposition. Treat any opposition as a key force that could
eventually tip the balance against you. Find out what they are concerned about and attempt to bring them into the fold. As demonstrated in the New York City, Texas, and Virginia case studies, failure to take potential opponents seriously can lead to defeat.

**Step 9—Determine your resources**

It takes resources to run a campaign. It therefore makes sense to launch an initiative only if there is sufficient confidence that the required resources can be assembled. Generally, two types of resources are needed: a strong non-agency organization for backing and funding.

A formal organization serving as the “official” go-to voice of the initiative is important to raise funds, to hold meetings, to rally support, to advocate with elected leaders, to deal with the media, to get the message across. Public agencies are rarely in a position to do this because of restrictions on advocating and raising money. However, agencies can certainly communicate with such organizations, sharing information relating to past performance, current conditions, and future needs.

Typically, such organizations are ad hoc creations of the business community, often centered on contractors, consulting firms, and vendors who might directly benefit from the initiative. Less common, but potentially even more effective, as occurred in Utah, is an organization led by an established and highly regarded business organization, such as a Chamber of Commerce.

Often, powerful but less visible informal organizations spring up to support a specific initiative or cause. Typically, these are private groups, which are not subject to public scrutiny and prefer to do their work behind the scenes perhaps in fundraising, in advocating, or in assisting with strategic advice. Take care that any interactions with “behind-the-scenes” groups or individuals can pass the public scrutiny test. That is, if such interactions are reported by the news media (as they often eventually are) there should be no cause for embarrassment.
Formal or informal fundraising is one of the primary functions that these organizations provide as they work in support of the campaign. Funding is particularly important in the case of a public referendum and its associated media campaign, which can run into millions of dollars.

Private organizations provided significant funding related to legislative enactments and public referenda in the California, Maricopa County, Minnesota, Ohio, Utah, and Washington State case studies.

**Step 10—Create a winning strategy**

If you have candidly considered the steps outlined above, you will have begun creating your strategy. A winning strategy will articulate the transportation needs convincingly communicated by a credible agency and champion(s). In addition, it will include a thoughtful, step-by-step process for executing the strategy with scheduled milestones. By answering the questions outlined in the following checklist, you will begin outlining your strategy.

The sequence of steps can be as important as the steps themselves. For example, putting the word out about needed funding before an airtight technical case has been made, or before the governor is consulted, or prior to asking the tough questions about your agency’s credibility, is known in boxing circles as leading with your chin.

Strategies must be multi-dimensional, take plausible risks and pitfalls into account, be frequently validated and adaptable to changing realities, and be communicated to the core group of those actively advancing the campaign to ensure they are all on the same page. As the old adage goes, “Hope is not a strategy.”

So, are you ready to launch your initiative? If you have engaged in a thoughtful and thorough analysis of these questions and found you have positive responses in all or nearly all cases, the stage may be set for launching a successful transportation funding initiative. If not, think carefully about what it will take to get ready and launch an initiative to get there.
Are you ready to ask for additional funding for your program?

Step 1— Determine your program needs
  q What are your specific program needs?
  q Why are the program needs compelling?

Step 2— Determine the costs, priorities, and benefits of your program
  q What are the costs to meet your program needs?
  q What are the priorities and benefits of your program?

Step 3— Design your case for the public, political leaders, and the media
  q Why do they need the program you have identified?
  q What is at stake if your program is not funded?
  q How can you make your program matter to the individual driver/transit rider?
  q How can you express the benefits of your program in ten or less words? (Example: improved safety, decreased congestion)
  q How can you communicate the program needs in a convincing manner?

Step 4— Address your weaknesses
  q What are your weaknesses?
  q How do your weaknesses matter to the public or officials?
  q When and how will you address your weaknesses?

Step 5— Find a champion
  q Do you have a strong leader to be the champion for your initiative?

Step 6— Secure support from your governor
  q Will your Governor support the initiative?

Step 7— Analyze your program’s acceptance with the public, political leaders, and the media
  q Have you gained “buy-in” from key stakeholders?
  q If not, how can you?

Step 8— Know your opposition
  q Who are your opponents and why are they opposed?
  q What are their concerns?
  q Can you counter their arguments?
  q How are they organized and funded?
  q Can you address their concerns and neutralize their opposition?

Step 9— Determine your resources
  q What resources are available to help launch a successful campaign?
  q Which organizations might be willing to take up your cause?
  q How might you support this organization within ethical boundaries? What kind of information can you provide that will be useful to them?

Step 10— Create a winning strategy
  q Have you satisfactorily answered all the questions above?
Essential Elements Necessary for Success
In researching the case studies for this project, the team noted three recurrent themes that were essential to the success of the initiatives studied and present in nearly all of the cases. We grouped these themes into three categories: validated transportation needs, agency credibility, and well-designed strategy.

Do you have a documented and validated transportation need?
The first step in securing new funding is to develop a well-documented, well-communicated, comprehensive, balanced statement of needs. Creation of these materials is as much an art as a science, and this Guide includes good examples (for example, see the materials prepared by Ohio DOT in the Tactical Toolkit).

The state DOT or other agency sponsor typically provides the underlying information in support of transportation needs. Often a governor or legislature will invoke a “legitimizing process” in which an independent task force or commission reviews and endorses the statement. Such endorsement can provide cover for legislators who will be asked to take the unpopular action of increasing taxes. This function was performed by the Transportation and Policy Committee in Maricopa County, the Transportation Task Force in Maryland, the Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission in New York City, the Transportation Review Advisory Council in Ohio, and the Blue Ribbon Commission in Washington State. Not to be outdone, the federal government established two transportation commissions pursuant to the SAFETEA-LU legislation, each with essentially the same assignment, and each reported with recommendations for significant increases in transportation funding.

Does your agency have credibility with the public and decision makers?
Another nearly universal theme we found in the case studies focused on agency credibility—the need to be viewed as responsive, to be trustworthy, to have strong relationships with key decision-makers, and to have a

What needs to happen behind the scenes?
The reality is that certain activities work best behind the scenes. Just because they occur behind the scenes does not mean there is anything unsavory happening. Yet the public, and particularly the press, have a seemingly naïve aversion to such quiet diplomacy. The specific issue(s) that may need to be addressed behind the scenes will vary greatly for different initiatives. A typical example would be securing the support of a key legislator prior to a public announcement, or gaining a governor’s tacit acceptance to test the waters without their public support. The point is to be sensitive to the need for behind-the-scenes activities and to address them in the development of your winning strategies, while at the same time recognizing the legal restrictions emanating from sunshine laws in some jurisdictions and the risks of media characterization of wheeling and dealing in the proverbial “smoke-filled“ back room.
demonstrated history of effective use of allocated funds using a clear prioritization process and efficient project delivery. The three subcategories under credibility include fiscal responsibility, demonstrated delivery (on time and on budget), and credibility of agency leadership.

**Agency’s system stewardship**
To be successful in your funding requests, you must be perceived as having been an effective steward of the existing system even within your financial constraints.

There is a natural tension between demonstrating that you have effectively managed the system while presenting a convincing case for the need of additional funds. You will have to show that you are doing all that you possibly can to preserve the current transportation system with funds at hand while at the same time demonstrating that the current funding levels will not take care of all the transportation needs. The agency articulating the needs has to be credible in the eyes of the public, their elected representatives, and the media. In all cases, these relationships need to be nurtured over time through consistent performance and effective communications.

**Agency’s demonstrated delivery**
The other side of the credibility coin is showing you can deliver projects on time and within budget. Within the case studies, some agencies (e.g., Maryland State Highway Administration (MSHA) and Utah DOT) enjoyed a longstanding tradition of project delivery success and had strong relationships with state legislators and other decision-makers. This worked to their advantage in securing multiple funding increases. Utah DOT emphasizes a “need for speed” in project delivery from environmental review through construction. The Department recognizes that the results of a positive vote for transportation funding need to be apparent to elected officials and their constituents within a very short time period, consistent with the election cycle.

In other states, when difficulties with credibility via program delivery (real or perceived) significantly
improved, their new positive record became a key factor in winning new funding. This was the case with Caltrans, Maricopa County (Arizona DOT), Ohio DOT, and WSDOT.

**Agency's Leadership**

Agency credibility begins at the top with the agency leadership. Each of the examples noted above had strong leaders that maintained or restored credibility through program performance and strong relationships (MSHA Administrator Neil Pedersen, UDOT Director John Njord, ADOT Director Victor Mendez, ODOT Director Gordon Proctor, and WSDOT Secretary Doug MacDonald). Each of these leaders enjoyed the respect, appreciation, and confidence of his respective governor, legislature, and the general public. However, it is also true that leadership emerges not solely from a single individual, but from a cohesive, focused core team that works with a common

---

**When should you launch your initiative?**

Everyone has a different opinion about the right time to launch an initiative. For legislative approvals, one view is that starting the initiative campaign early in the election cycle is preferred because this provides the maximum amount of time for public discontent with a tax increase to subside. Another approach agencies adopted was a two year program. The first year was used to get legislative backing and conduct studies that established the transportation needs. In the second year, they would move forward and seek the funding. In contrast, for the multiple initiatives in Utah and Washington State it appeared that the election cycle was not a major concern.

Public referenda occur at the same time as general elections. Here the timing you have to decide is whether a national election with high expected voter turnout or an off-year election with low turnout will assist your initiative. Opinions are mixed. One camp holds that the national election is the better venue because transportation is popular with the broad majority of the electorate. This makes it less prone to a small group of opponents having a disproportionate impact, as could occur in an off-year. The counter argument is that a referendum conducted during a national campaign is more expensive, and there is a danger that your message will be drowned out by the bigger issues of the day.

Another timing consideration is the condition of the economy. The general consensus was that it was easier to secure approval of a transportation revenue increase during good economic conditions than bad, when the public is more focused on increased living expenses.
vision and mutual respect for one another. The existence of such a team is one of the key factors for a successful transportation funding initiative, which will be discussed in later sections.

Creating a Winning Strategy

Once the decision has been made to proceed, you must identify the components of a winning strategy that will work for the case at hand. In our research, we found that there were significant variations in the approaches taken depending upon whether legislation or a public referendum was the mechanism to secure funding. However, even across this divide, the research team identified several common themes. Further, several of the case studies involved both legislative actions and referenda (California, Maricopa County, Utah, and Washington State).

How much to request

Perhaps the most fundamental question to address in designing a funding initiative is the question of “how much?” This is a two-step process—first, determining how much you need, and second, deciding how much you can reasonably expect to receive once requested. It is a delicate balancing act. You may need several billions but, if asked for, sticker shock could cause you to receive nothing. Ask for much less than you need and receive it, and you may be plagued with the question “could we have gotten more?”

Another issue to consider is that securing approval of a funding initiative involves significant economies of scale. That is, the degree of staff time, funding commitments, and other resources involved in promoting a, say, $2-billion program is not likely to be significantly greater than for a $500-million program. Therefore, there is a tendency to aim high, especially if a public referendum is involved. The critical factor is the linkage back to compelling needs. The higher the funding level requested, the more challenging it is to persuasively make the case.
The California experience is a good case in point. Initial funding goals were much more modest and well below stated needs. Interviewees reported that Governor Schwarzenegger decided that if he was to take the political risk of supporting increased infrastructure funding, it should be for an amount that would make a bigger difference. The Governor’s package included $20 billion for transportation plus an additional $17 billion for housing, schools, and flood control, which were significantly beyond initial goals. One interviewee, who was pleasantly surprised when the boost in funding goals occurred, after winning expressed regret that the funding level was not higher yet.

**Determine the revenue mix**

Another consideration is what the split will be between “pay-as-you-go” and a program supported at least partially by debt financing. States vary widely in their practices depending upon financing traditions and legal constraints in each jurisdiction. At one end of the spectrum was the California general obligation bond program, which was entirely supported by debt financing and involved no increase in current taxation levels. The other extreme would be the federal highway program, which has always operated on a strictly pay-as-you-go basis. There have been attempts over the years to introduce bond financing for the federal program, notably by the Clay Committee in its 1955 recommendation to finance the Interstate Highway System, but these have consistently been defeated. Thus, the federal highway program’s capital expenditures are funded solely from current revenue; certainly, an ironic situation when one considers the degree to which debt financing is relied upon to support operating expenditures in the balance of the federal government. The other case studies tended to be in between these two extremes, with increases in tax levels complemented by increased debt capacity.

The other aspect of revenue mix is the selection of specific taxes to generate the funding. Common taxing mechanisms include motor vehicle fuel taxes, registration fees,
and titling fees, which are often used in combination with each other. These tax options are most common at the federal and state levels while sales taxes tend to dominate at the local level. As described in the case studies, many states have successfully obtained increases in the fuel tax in recent years, which is in stark contrast to the federal government, which has not increased fuel taxes for transportation purposes in many decades. Even at the state level, however, increases in the fuel tax are sometimes avoided. In Maryland, for example, a 2004 initiative supported by increases in vehicle registration fees and associated bonding was followed by a 2007 initiative funded by an increase from 5 percent to 6 percent in the vehicle titling tax. In both instances, Maryland DOT suggested increasing the fuel tax, which had not been adjusted since 1993, but two different administrations (from different political parties) each concluded that other measures would be more politically acceptable.

**How to use the funds**

Among the key considerations in the disposition of funds is the modal composition of the transportation program. In the past, it was common to have a program entirely dedicated to highways. However, it is now much more common to have a multi-modal program that includes all surface transportation modes. This is the case even in states with a relatively high dependence on the automobile, such as Utah. The proponents of the Ohio initiative acknowledge that the program would need to be multi-modal if it were to be successful in today’s climate. In Maricopa County, funds were dedicated to three principal uses: freeways/highways, arterial streets, and transit (including a new light rail transit system). Each of the three uses had a geographically oriented base of support. The key to this initiative’s success was a careful balancing of these three priorities following an extended and sometimes heated period of negotiations. California, Maryland, Minnesota, New York City, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington State were all multi-modal initiatives.
Another aspect of use is the type of project within a mode. Conventional wisdom has long held that major new capacity projects are necessary in order to secure approval, whether by the legislature or the public and new capacity projects are certainly predominant within the case studies.

Researchers found anomalies, however. In Maryland, the agency sponsor successfully made the case that the Department’s long-standing “preservation first” philosophy should apply to funding initiatives in 2004 and 2007. In Minnesota, the realization that the state’s extensive network of bridge structures required rehabilitation, as graphically demonstrated by the collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis, was a key driver. The Maricopa County, Ohio, and Washington State programs all contained preservation elements, albeit less celebrated than the new capacity projects. It is noteworthy that all of these jurisdictions have a history of applying asset management processes in addressing preservation needs.

Also significant is the distribution of funds among governments. Most states have a tradition of sharing highway user revenues with local governments, usually distributed in accordance with a legislatively negotiated formula. These local governments typically share in the proceeds from state initiatives, and their representatives can be some of the most influential supporters of these programs, particularly with the legislature. In Ohio, for example, County Engineers (elected positions) were very effective advocates for the legislation, and local governments received a disproportionately large share of the proceeds in the initial years.

**Applying the funding—a balance between merit-based and politically based allocation**

Researchers found that most programs consisted of both merit-based program definition with politically based projects added in. This compromise seems almost inevitable because of the political nature of such large funding requests. However, it is worth noting that the two perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive. While
there are glaring examples that give rise to the “pork-barrel” image of politically driven projects, the fact is that most politically driven projects have a legitimate underlying technical rationale.

While transportation executives are focused on the performance of assets for which they are directly responsible, the broader perspective provided by elected leadership often leads to program modifications that are beneficial from a societal and political viewpoint. For example, for the New York City congestion-pricing program, the politically appointed Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission adopted several modifications to the original plan that significantly improved it. In Washington State, where every project was carefully itemized in the legislation, there seemed to be consensus that these were worthy projects. The simple political equation cited by some elected officials is that if they are to take the risk in supporting increased funding for transportation, they felt quite justified in tapping into the potential political rewards associated with project selection and ultimate delivery.

Geographic and social equity issues
Among the issues that elected leadership may be most sensitive to are questions of geographic and social equity. With respect to geography, it is simply impractical to disregard the locations from which revenues are raised. While constraining formulas are typically resisted, some semblance of balance in the distribution of projects and funding (urban and rural, suburban and central city, upstate and downstate) that is perceived to be “fair” is usually necessary for a successful initiative. Similarly, social equity concerns about such issues as disparate benefits, costs, or impacts to particular income or ethnic groups are often better addressed in the political environment. It seems that elected leadership is typically in a better position to determine the definition of “fair and equitable” than agency leadership.
**Degree of project specificity**

Another significant consideration is the degree to which individual projects are specifically identified in the initiative. For initiatives requiring legislative approval, many states have a tradition that projects should be selected and scheduled by the responsible agency in accordance with a merit-based process, and specific projects should not be arbitrarily inserted into legislation. Virtually all transportation executives prefer this approach because, among other factors, it provides the flexibility to adjust project selection and scheduling in response to changing conditions. However, this good government practice is sometimes stressed during the heat of the legislative process. For example, Minnesota places great reliance upon a structured planning process supported by constitutionally protected funding sources and formulas that produce well understood and relatively predictable funding streams. But, in a departure from this practice, the transportation funding legislation was amended to mandate construction of a generic project type, but one that was so specifically defined that it applied to only one project in the state, located in the district of a representative whose vote was deemed to be crucial to enacting the program.

In another state, senior legislators referred to “The list that didn’t exist,” a list of projects that was nowhere publicly described but was understood by insiders to be associated with the revenue program. In Ohio, projects were not identified in the legislation, but to some extent the Department promised the completion of certain projects. This became problematic when the double-digit inflationary increases in subsequent years made it impossible to deliver all of these projects as scheduled, damaging the Department’s credibility.

The extreme example of project specificity involved the two funding initiatives in Washington State. In this case, virtually the entire program was allocated to specified projects by year and by project phase, and, in many cases, only partial funding was provided. Accordingly,
WSDOT’s ability to manage its program is extremely constrained, but this was accepted as the price of obtaining additional funds. Ironically, during the recall referendum to repeal the 9.5-cent-per-gallon increase, it was this very specificity that enabled the Department and others fighting the repeal to point to particular projects that would be scrapped. This was cited as a key factor in defeating the repeal at the polls.

For initiatives requiring public referenda, it is generally acknowledged that some degree of project specificity is necessary in order to enlist voter support. In California, a list of “illustrative” projects was supplied to voters in order to provide some idea of what was under consideration. However, the state stopped short of committing to specific projects by specific dates, a wise precaution. In Maricopa County, the initial sales tax program approved in 1984 significantly over-promised what could be delivered, and this created a credibility problem for Arizona DOT that lingered for some time, impacting the 2004 referendum. Notwithstanding this lesson learned, initiative proponents in 2004 again felt it was necessary to promise a specific program of projects to obtain voter support. In fact, identification of a specific program that could be mutually supported by somewhat competing interests was the central activity that led to the successful referendum.

**Stakeholder coalition**

A coalition of supporters backing the funding initiative was reported to be present in virtually every case study. Typically, transportation consultants and construction contractors were at the heart of these coalitions, providing funding, strategic advice, and other resources throughout the process, but particularly in the gestation period. Broader business interests were also often involved. In Washington State, for example, Boeing was outspoken in its comments about the need for additional transportation improvements and specifically linked transportation conditions to its pending decision on where to assemble the 787 Dreamliner.
The role of the stakeholder coalition was particularly significant in Minnesota since the governor’s position opposing the funding initiative precluded Minnesota DOT’s involvement. In this instance, the Minnesota Transportation Alliance and a special public relations effort led by the Alliance, Progress in Motion, were the principal initiative proponents supplanting the role typically played by the agency sponsor. It was these groups that crafted the program, worked with the legislature to secure its initial enactment and subsequent override of the governor’s veto, and led the public education campaign as the Department was forced to the sidelines.

In California, the Alliance for Jobs representing more than 1,700 heavy construction companies and 50,000 union construction workers in Central and Northern California was the primary stakeholder coalition. In Utah, the state’s chambers of commerce, which are connected organizationally with the Salt Lake Chamber as the focal point, played a central role in marketing proposed transportation funding to the legislature and the public.

One of the challenging aspects of a stakeholder coalition is keeping the individual parties, who inevitably have somewhat disparate interests, on message and working for a common purpose. In Ohio, the concrete paving industry was a member of the stakeholder coalition, but appeared to be most interested in addressing the concrete vs. asphalt issue and attempted to modify the funding legislation to encourage the selection of concrete pavements. This was an unhelpful distraction that worked against coalition unity.

Creating a captivating message
In an era of fierce competition for the attention of legislators and the public, it is essential that a concise and compelling message capturing the spirit of the initiative be crafted and reinforced at every opportunity. Transportation professionals often resist this “sound bite” approach to marketing a funding initiative. They believe that a more
comprehensive and analytical presentation is necessary in order to fully articulate the case for the initiative. Such a presentation is certainly one of the necessary elements to have a credible overall campaign, but it is not sufficient. The campaign must be complemented with a more succinct story that can be easily remembered and repeated by those less involved.

The California campaign in support of the Proposition 1 general obligation bonds featured “The 1 Plan to Rebuild California.” This message, focusing on goods movement, traffic flow, and jobs, was intentionally kept simple to prevent individuals—when lobbying their elected representatives—from “adding their own spin” and blurring the message.

In Utah, the emphasis was on addressing traffic congestion with the phrase “Fix it now, or fix it later?” This was an interesting example of the importance in understanding local perceptions when crafting a message. By the standards of most of the metropolitan areas in the country, Salt Lake City and environs experience relatively modest traffic congestion, approximately 30 hours of delay a year per peak traveler according to the Texas Transportation Institute. Yet this level of congestion is viewed as intolerable by many Utahans, and the successful campaign by the Salt Lake City Chamber of Commerce to accelerate key projects played to this perception.

In Texas, the vast size and boldness of a Trans Texas Corridor iconic image, thought initially to be an asset, became a liability. The widely circulated graphic depicting a 1,200-foot right-of-way, intended to be a selling point, elicited strong opposition from farmers and environmentalists, which obscured the underlying progressive goals of accommodating passenger and freight rail as well as utility lines in a common right-of-way with highways.
Lessons Learned—What Can Undermine Success?

The simple answer to the question of what can undermine success is a failure to address the factors described above. For example, if agency credibility has not been established, that will usually undermine success. However, to take the discussion a step further, review of the case studies does reveal some other recurring themes in initiatives that have encountered difficulties.

Premature announcement

Proceeding with a program before doing all of the homework and credibility building will lead to poor results. For example, the 1994 attempt in Maricopa County to increase and extend the local option sales tax was not accompanied by a program of projects, but rather was justified on the grounds that the initial tax adopted in 1984 had proven insufficient and additional funding was necessary. This measure was defeated. Having learned a lesson from this, proponents in the 2004 referendum to extend the sales tax devoted considerable time to crafting a carefully balanced program of projects that had appeal to all important constituent groups. This measure was successful.

Inconsistent message

If proponents deliver a message that wavers over time in terms of the initiatives’ purpose or benefits, it may create a vulnerability that opponents can exploit. For example, when the New York City congestion pricing initiative was initially unveiled to the public, it was promoted as a sustainability-inspired method of managing congestion levels in Manhattan. The revenue-raising aspect was either not mentioned at all or was dismissed as a very secondary consideration. However, as the plan continued to be reviewed and debated it became apparent that the revenue involved, and its ability to fund needed transit improvements for the Metropolitan Transit Authority, was very much on the minds of proponents and, in fact, was the most important aspect of the plan to many. As the debate continued, proponents became increasingly candid in acknowledging this, creating a backlash among some who...
felt they had been initially misled. The congestion pricing initiative would have been far better served had there been a frank acknowledgement from the outset that sustainability, congestion management, and the raising of needed revenue were all important objectives of the program.

Relying solely upon technical arguments
Development of an analytically rigorous demonstration of need is a necessary component for a successful initiative. However, it is not sufficient. There must also be recognition that securing approval of a funding program, whether by the legislature or in a public referendum, is essentially a political process. Transportation officials seeking approval of an initiative need to be keenly aware of this reality. In fact, they should embrace it—in a democracy, that is the way the system is supposed to work. WSDOT was unsuccessful for a number of years in obtaining funding increases until, in 2003, it succeeded in communicating its message in a manner that the political establishment and the public could understand and appreciate.

Lack of positive coordination with stakeholders
Failure to appreciate who can block the initiative, and not taking the time to ensure they are on board with any major transportation funding program, can also lead to failure. Such programs will always involve a wide range of diverse, and often disparate interests, and the wise advocate will attempt to enlist the support (or at least non-opposition) of all of them to the extent possible. However, a strategic approach to managing an initiative campaign also involves identifying those key individuals and organizations who have the ability to block the initiative and devising plans to ensure that they will not be obstacles to success. In Texas, the Trans Texas Corridor concept was championed by two powerful individuals—the Governor and his then current Texas Transportation Commission Chairman. As this very ambitious plan moved forward, it inevitably generated opposition from the many interests who felt impacted by it. The local toll authorities established in Texas to develop county toll roads would have appeared to be natural allies of the toll-dependent
Trans Texas Corridor concept. Instead, when differences arose the local toll authorities became opponents—along with farmers and environmentalists. Later, the legislature severely restricted TxDOT’s ability to negotiate agreements with concessionaires and the Trans Texas Corridor as a statewide initiative was lost.

In New York City, most of the discussion regarding the congestion-pricing program was at the local level as the City and the Traffic Congestion Mitigation Commission reviewed and refined the program, with the aim of securing approval of the City Council. Despite the fact that the $354-million federal grant was also contingent upon receiving approval by the state legislature, there appears to have been limited interaction with affected legislators and their leadership until shortly before the deadline for approval. While the Mayor clearly embraced this proposal, there is little evidence of his personal involvement in persuading state legislators. In particular, there is little evidence of discussions with the State Assembly Speaker whose Manhattan district was very much affected by the congestion-pricing plan. Shortly before the deadline for legislative approval, the Mayor’s Office engaged in an intensive lobbying blitz that was variously described by legislators as “testy” and “threatening.” In the end, the Speaker refused to hold a vote on the matter. The Mayor’s inability to gain the support of legislative leaders, such as the Speaker, whose own constituency supported the Mayor, led to the demise of this proposal.

Similarly, in Virginia attempts in recent years to increase transportation funds have been stymied by the strong anti-tax posture of the House of Delegates leadership. Notwithstanding the fact that the Commonwealth has embraced many of the strategies described in this report, this posture has proven to be an insurmountable obstacle in the period 2004–2008. Until such time that a successful strategy to alter this leadership position is identified and implemented, additional Commonwealth funding initiatives are problematic.