Chapter 2—Tactical Toolkit

Effective communication with political leaders, the press, and the public is at the heart of this research, and effectiveness depends upon a lot more than whether contact was made and information imparted. Effectiveness means resonating with the listener or reader, gaining a high level of understanding, and evoking a supportive response that will lead to positive action. There are two main components to a communications program: the messages you plan to communicate and the tools you plan to use to communicate them. The following sections highlight the messages and tools that have been effective in creating positive outcomes for many transportation organizations.

Messages
Before thinking about what tools you will use to market your initiative, you have to have a solid message to communicate. If your message is muddy, incoherent, or does not speak to its audience, it will not matter what tool you have used to impart the information. Some messages are designed to inform, while others are designed to convey urgency, or even a degree of fear, and, most importantly, provide a reason to act. Many of the case study interviewees reflected on the importance of having a clear and consistent message regardless of the medium through which it was conveyed. The message must be simple enough to understand quickly and powerful enough to cause a reaction. The audience should hear the same core message, no matter what tool or person is communicating it. Whether or not the data is disseminated, the message should be substantiated and defensible.

Researchers found there were several themes utilized effectively in the case study initiatives. The messages reflected the values of the stakeholders and the issues the transportation leaders felt were important to convey. These themes are summarized below:

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**An effective message**

- Simple and clear
- Consistent, regardless of the medium
- Causes a reaction

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Researchers found there were several themes utilized effectively in the case study initiatives. The messages reflected the values of the stakeholders and the issues the transportation leaders felt were important to convey. These themes are summarized below:
Theme 1— Investment in transportation will save time and money, improve safety, and decrease congestion
Consistently, this message was conveyed in brochures, through radio and television advertisements, and billboards. In the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce’s 2007 Legislative Priorities leaflet, pages 2 and 3 are dedicated to transportation. The pages’ tagline is “Save time, money, and headaches.” Similarly, Ohio’s 2002 “Seeing Red” brochure builds concern with statistics like the following: “At current funding levels, and with the wave of aging bridges nearing the end of their useful design life, ODOT predicts the number of deficient bridges will grow to 16 percent in 2005, to 25 percent by 2010, and up to 29 percent beyond 2020.”

Theme 2— Investment in transportation will support economic development
Many transportation leaders promoted the strong tie between transportation and economic development. In California, job creation and a positive impact on an average person’s daily life were frequently used messages. Similarly, as shown in their report cover (Example 1), the Minnesota tag line was “Our Future is Riding On It.” As stated in the Salt Lake Chamber’s 2009 Legislative Priorities leaflet, “A safe and efficient transportation system is foundational for Utah’s economic vitality, quality of life and growth.” In rapidly growing Maricopa County a recurring message was “Finish the Freeways” in order to serve a population that was projected to double over the next 30 years.

Theme 3— The transportation agency spends its funds efficiently
Many of the agencies researched believe that trust built through past performance was a cornerstone to having won support for revenue increases from the legislators
and the public. It is not surprising, therefore, that this was a consistently a message they chose to communicate.

In California, Caltrans Director Kempton placed special emphasis on implementing and communicating his department’s accomplishments by highlighting improvements in accountability, transparency, and project delivery. In Ohio, the Director of the ODOT repeatedly gave presentations demonstrating the efficiencies associated with internal re-engineering efforts and decreased staffing levels as shown in Example 2.

Titled “Accountability: Keeping Promises,” a full page of one of Maricopa County’s brochures was dedicated to showing how the agency would track progress on its promises. This page included a list of accountability tools, such as independent performance audits, public review, an amendment processes for major changes, and separate fund accounts for each transportation mode.

**Theme 4—The transportation system has deteriorated, and current funding will not meet the needs**

In the cases studied, all of the agencies had to demonstrate the level of deterioration of their infrastructure, and they had to make the case that the situation could not be rectified within the current funding levels. Generally, the arguments centered on increased costs, decreased funding streams, and provided a vision of how these issues could be addressed. Examples of how agencies chose to convey these messages follows.

One example comes from the California case study. In a report completed by the California’s Legislative Analyst’s Office, there is a section called “Traveling in California:
Trends and Mobility.” This section focuses on the supply and demand argument, meaning the growth in highway capacity has not keep up with the state’s population growth and highway usage as shown in Example 3.

In the 2009 Utah Strategic Plan, UDOT relied on graphics to show road deterioration trends (Example 4).

In Maryland, to make the case for system preservation, Maryland State Highway Administration (MSHA) prepared a series of materials that were presented to their Blue Ribbon Commissions, decision-makers in the executive and legislative branches, the media, and the general public. One of the graphics used to depict the growing needs and lack of funding is shown in Example 5.

In 2003, the Ohio County Engineers released a report titled “Ohio’s County Highways.” In this report, the Engineers presented assessment criteria, which provided a baseline for examining the conditions of the transportation infrastructure. For each criterion, the Engineers present the goals and the current performance against the goal. Example 6 shows an example from the report.

**Theme 5—Increased funding will be used to build specific projects**

Whether or not the initiatives required specific projects and outcomes to be identified in the legislation or referendum, most of the marketing materials the researchers reviewed specified how additional funding would be spent. Campaign materials included targeted brochures tailored to emphasize the plan’s benefits to various regions throughout the jurisdiction. An example is shown in Example 7.
Methods

When trying to build support for an initiative, proponents used a variety of methods and tools to reach their constituencies. These general methods can be divided into three types of communications:

- Outreach to establish contact and gain feedback about the initiative
- Education to inform stakeholders about key issues
- Marketing to improve the likelihood of achieving a desired outcome

While most communication plans use a blend of these methods, it is important to recognize the differences. The form and substance of your communications will change depending on the method you employ. Your audience will be different in these different forums as well, and the complexity of the information will have to be tailored to those audiences.

Equally important for those engaged in communication efforts is the need for a common understanding of what you are trying to achieve with the effort, and whether, through the method chosen, you will be able to achieve your goal. For example, while all communication is at least two-way, the amount of listening versus transmitting will be very different depending upon whether you are doing outreach, education, or marketing.

The most important question to consider as you choose your methods and tools is who is your target audience? The second is what are you trying to achieve with the interaction? Stakeholder, legislative, and public audiences have very different characteristics, motivations, and levels of understanding. Understanding these differences is essential to selecting the...
appropriate set of methods and tools that will be most effective. The three methods highlighted above are more fully described below.

**Outreach**
When you engage in outreach efforts, you are initiating contact with those who may be affected by or interested in your initiative. Outreach campaigns provide awareness and information to allow individuals to determine the level of their interest and a potential position and course of action they may wish to follow. Such outreach also allows the sponsoring agency to gather feedback about their initiative, giving them information about what concerns, issues, or benefits the audiences have expressed. The agencies in the case studies used open houses, small group forums, and one-on-one meetings to do their outreach. Many tools were used in their outreach forums depending on the audiences, and the types of information that was imparted or that was being sought. Some examples of tools used were polling, focus groups, presentations, and handouts (such as folios). These and other tools are described more fully in the follow section.

There are significant advantages to engaging in outreach efforts: you find out what the public thinks about your initiative first hand; you get information that allows you to potentially amend or alter your initiative to be more attractive to the public; you have an opportunity to try out different messages with a small group and gauge their receptiveness to them. However, outreach efforts alone will not win the day. The numbers of people that can be influenced through outreach is relatively small. Generally, your message has to resonate with a much larger “public” to be successful.

**Education**
Education involves transferring information to constituencies with enough context to provide them a more complete understanding of the issues. More educated stakeholders are not only in a position to make more informed decisions, but are also in a position to influence, educate,
and possibly convince others. This is a leveraging opportunity with motivated stakeholders willing to take the time and make the effort to become fully engaged. Examples of educational tools include the use of websites, preparation of reports that build a strong technical case while communicating the case to the public, use of presentations, and cultivation of the media, including briefings for editorial boards and encouraging feature stories that help make the case.

There are limitations to education efforts. A good education effort will take a great deal of early and in depth work. Though using the tools identified above allows for a broader audience to receive the information, a relatively small portion of the overall constituency will go to an agency website, read a special report on a transportation subject, or even read a transportation related article.

**Marketing**

Marketing is a targeted process with the objective to not only educate, but to influence decisions and actions taken by stakeholders by convincing them of the merits of a particular viewpoint. Marketing builds upon outreach and education in staking out a position. While some prefer not to call it marketing, and public officials must walk a fine line in terms of advocacy, the fact remains that a success of an initiative is virtually impossible without a significant marketing campaign. Such campaigns are generally run by non-governmental organizations and the private sector that have greater latitude to advocate such agendas.

Often DOTs and other public agencies or organizations are prohibited from advocating for ballot measures. This was true in Maricopa County, and Minnesota, for example, where public marketing campaigns were championed by construction industry associations. In Maricopa County, initially the local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) was involved in the formulation of a project-specific expenditure plan supported by an extension of the county transportation sales tax. However, once the plan was endorsed by the Legislature and readied for approval
by the public at the ballot, the MPO was compelled to step out of its advocacy role. A strong contracting industry and business-led campaign effort took over, marketing the initiative to the public using various tools.

In Minnesota, the state DOT has discretion in setting transportation spending priorities. This meant that it had much to gain from the proposed motor fuel tax increase, and the governor was opposed to the increase, so it was the construction industry that led the marketing effort.

The most commonly used marketing tools are targeted radio, television, and print ads. The marketing tools utilized in the case studies varied. The following section provides examples of the wide-ranging marketing tools that helped transportation organizations effectively communicate their message. In addition, although an agency might not find itself directly using the marketing tools described in this section, its ongoing successful use of outreach and education can provide the essential information that will enable outside advocacy groups to market the transportation funding message.

**Tools**

Whether you are conducting outreach, educating, or marketing, you will likely employ one or more of the tools outlined below. Researchers found that initiative proponents described the tools below as useful and often essential to success.

**Polls and surveys**

Many agencies poll their constituents for the purpose of gauging the transportation agency’s credibility and the level of public support or interest. Although a widely used tool, for which the case studies revealed both heavy reliance as well as some unfavorable sentiment, caution should be exercised in their application. Polling can often be misleading or can miss the mark, particularly in election seasons. Nonetheless, polling by professional survey researchers, while not foolproof by any means, can provide great insights if it is done objectively and
thoroughly. The key, assuming the desired outcome is objective information, is to avoid biases in the polling process, which means it should be conducted by professionals with a proven record for integrity and competence. Unfortunately, polling for the purpose of gaining a pre-ordained outcome is not uncommon, using biased sampling, slanted questions, or skewing the reporting of results. Such polls tend to undermine the legitimacy of polling as a useful tool when executed correctly. Fortunately there are established standards for integrity and competence in survey research; these should be adhered to.

Polling can be expensive and it may not be feasible or even legal for some DOTs to directly justify in their budgets. (Some DOTs do informal and non-scientific surveys by eliciting information from the public—such as in motor vehicle registration mailings or from booths at shopping malls or state fairs—but these are typically of relatively limited value in terms of probing controversial issues such as proposed transportation tax increases.) Industry partners often assist with polling, but to have credibility and value, the poll must be professional and unbiased.

In Maricopa County, polling was used extensively to ascertain which aspects of the Proposition 400 sales tax extension plan resonated most with the public, and these were subsequently integrated into campaign outreach materials and advertisements. Also, in the critical month leading up to the November election, a 300-person tracking poll was employed to gauge “real time” public support for the measure on a daily basis. In this way, simultaneous marketing efforts could quickly be tailored in response to the poll’s results. (A tracking poll works on a rolling basis, by which a subset consisting of the oldest members in the poll is replaced by a new, equally sized group. In the Maricopa County example 100 individuals were replaced each day.)

Similarly, polling by the American Automobile Association prior to the 2004 Maryland initiative indicated that
65 percent of respondents supported increased transportation funding. And, in the State of Washington, Secretary Hammond reported that polls were extremely helpful in guiding their initiative. After years of working on their communication, focusing on accountability and project delivery, WSDOT saw their poll ratings go up. Polls also demonstrated to the Washington Legislature that transportation was at the top of the list of issues that their constituents cared about. The understanding provided by polling of just how important transportation was to the public provided an important part of the foundation that the political leadership could use to move forward with a significant tax increase for transportation.

In contrast, however, the use of polling in Minnesota to gauge public support for the 2008 funding package anchored by a motor fuel tax increase was not considered helpful, especially because of its relatively high cost. There, focus groups were deemed more beneficial.

**Focus groups**
Focus groups are a form of intensive polling, involving personal interaction with randomly selected participants who meet with a research professional as they respond to questions or scenarios that may be posed. The tradeoff between focus groups and traditional polling centers on the ability to probe complex issues more deeply and to examine not only the points of view that may be expressed but the underlying reasons behind them. This is particularly important when testing the public’s response to proposals, which on the surface may evoke a quick negative response. Tax increases for transportation are a perfect example of where a first response might be negative, but a second or third response might be very different when discussing how the impact might compare with the cost of one’s daily cup of coffee or how guarantees can be invoked to ensure that tax revenues are used as intended to improve transportation services. Focus groups make it possible to gather information on the likely responses people have to a variety of scenarios. This
information would be very difficult to gather through traditional polling.

Focus groups were used in several of the case studies examined; again Maricopa County and Minnesota provide an informative contrast. Various forms of polling were employed throughout the public campaign for Maricopa County’s Proposition 400, while focus groups were relied upon to a much lesser degree. However, focus groups in Minnesota played a crucial role in the 2005 passage of a constitutional amendment to increase guaranteed transportation revenue from the motor vehicle sales tax, a critical precursor to the successful 2008 funding package. The data gathered from focus groups indicated that the cumbersome wording of Minnesota’s amendment, coupled with Minnesota’s difficult constitution amending process, would prove to be formidable hurdles to passage. These findings helped shape a message that was simple, and focused on logic and fairness. As a result, the amendment was simplified and included no acronyms or confusing references.

Focus groups also played an important role in Minnesota’s 2008 funding package. In that instance, a legislative campaign was necessary to support the State Legislature’s passage of the funding bill and override the Governor’s veto. Data gathered from focus groups helped proponents create campaign messages that reflected public and stakeholder sentiment, which in turn were used as a basis to lobby state legislators for their support.

**Reports**

Reports are the tool for gathering and presenting complicated information and data needed to educate critical audiences of the need for increased transportation funding. In-depth, technically oriented reports are essential to document the needs underlying a funding initiative. These may be difficult for most lay people to grasp, but there is a high probability that the basic case will be challenged by some with access to a significant level of expertise. It is therefore essential that the case for
needs—current conditions and performance, future goals and performance targets, and resources required—be thorough and complete. In-depth reports must be technically sound, factually rich, and sufficiently detailed to make an airtight case that would withstand the most informed skeptics who have a sufficient level of analytical skills to grasp the breadth and depth of the technical case. One way to achieve this is to ensure that state-of-the-practice technical tools are employed. It is worth applying thorough quality assurance techniques to screen out inaccuracies and ambiguities before critics are left to find them and possibly make mischief of them.

In terms of communicating with those who simply lack the technical expertise or, more commonly, the time to digest in-depth, technically-based reports, summary reports are commonly used to portray an agency’s needs and proposals for new funding in clear and reasonably simple terms. Summary reports can serve as an overview for widespread public consumption, leveraging the key points of the in-depth technical report, but presented in easy-to-understand, every-day language. These promotional reports are reader-friendly and make extensive use of graphics. WSDOT used a summary document form to great effect. Dubbed “folios” (Example 8), WSDOT created dozens of these summaries, which describe the issue, provide useful data, and direct the reader to more in-depth resources.

In most of the successful case study initiatives, the reports that provided a much-needed critical mass of credibility to the effort came in the form of ongoing department reports on the condition and performance of
the DOT’s assets. This was true in California, Maryland, Minnesota, Ohio, Utah, and Washington, where the reports varied considerably in scope and frequency but had in common the following characteristics:

- Factual data
- Objective analyses
- Credible findings
- Reported publicly

In other words, these agencies took an asset management, performance-based approach, and cast that approach in a continuing framework of accountability and transparency. This approach enhanced the agency’s credibility since it reflected a way of doing business rather than preparation for a single event initiative.

An impressive example of a technical report is Ohio’s “Study of the Adequacy and Distribution of the Motor Fuel Tax.” In 2002, Ohio’s General Assembly created a “Motor Fuel Tax Task Force” to find ways to address the needed repairs, construction, maintenance, and safety issues of Ohio’s transportation system at the state and local levels. This Task Force conducted regional meetings and heard testimony from various agencies, organizations, and individuals, including the Ohio Department of Transportation, the County Engineers, the Ohio Troopers, and the Contractors Association. By so doing, the Task Force ensured they were working with the most valid and non-partisan information, figures, and statistics. As a result, they developed a 109-page technical report that identified the state’s transportation needs and made recommendations to increase and re-allocate the state’s motor fuel tax and other revenue sources.

California offers a good example of a non-technical, promotional report as shown in Example 9. It presents a reader-friendly, attractive, and approachable summary of the Governor’s infrastructure investment plan and the revenue measure to help fund it. A non-technical audience—the public, media, and legislators—would have
little difficulty absorbing the messages communicated here—there is a need, there is a plan, and there is a sensible way to pay for it.

An example of a technical report that can be easily understood by non-technical audiences is the WSDOT quarterly report, officially titled, “Measures, Markers, and Mileposts,” and referred to as “The Gray Notebook” (Example 10). These quarterly reports are packed with data and information in tables and charts, which might take much more time to absorb, were it not for the readable narratives that accompany them. Secretary MacDonald used these reports to demonstrate how he and his managers track progress of projects (scope, schedule, and budget), track issues around operation and maintenance activities, and inform the legislature and the public of issues. In other words, the Department chose to operate in the proverbial fish bowl. What sets these reports apart in content and intended audience are their ability to bridge the gap between the technical and promotional, between the professionally knowledgeable and the average public. In this manner, the Gray Notebook represents a hybrid of the in-depth technical and the easier-to-grasp summary report.

Presentations

Presentations provide the advantage of controlling the setting as well as the message, maximizing the likelihood of a favorable impact. Several examples in the case studies illustrate the use of careful orchestration by government officials’ staff, where time, place, audience, and other factors can judiciously be set.

Presentations at special forums or as part of regularly scheduled meetings are a commonly used practice for
disseminating information, educating stakeholders and eliciting feedback. Presentations in a public forum can serve a dual purpose—first for those in attendance and second as an opportunity to reach an even wider audience. The key is to be strategic about what may seem like ordinary events. By leveraging the event through inviting the media, holding press conferences, and giving interviews, the potential is always there for getting more exposure for the investment in time involved in what otherwise might be a modest gathering with much more limited impact.

This is not to discount the importance of many appearances in front of a relatively small, local audience where the implications of a broader proposal can be placed in the context of a local town or region. Presentations offer the opportunity to communicate the details of a funding proposal or the issues surrounding its needs in a manner that is germane to the audience. In this manner, the answers to important questions such as “how does this affect me?” or “why do I have to pay?” can be made clearly and convincingly, important considerations in gradually building the case for statewide initiatives, which often can seem abstract or immaterial without a local context. But it is important to bear in mind that a broader audience can also be reached through television and other media outlets, especially if the featured speaker is a high-profile individual who would be more likely to draw the media. Having the Governor lead a presentation is a virtual sure-bet as a significant media event. If the Governor is there with a message of statewide significance, a local audience is likely to respond favorably while also serving as a “backdrop” for a wider range of statewide viewers.

In California and Virginia, the Governors themselves, along with cabinet members and other senior officials, embarked on statewide circuits in their respective states, occasionally referred to as, “the road show.” In California these visits occurred during the Governor’s re-election campaign, but careful attention was paid to focusing on
the transportation funding initiative and what it meant to Californians in the long run, as opposed to the shorter-term question of who was going to be California’s next Governor. In that case, giving presentations on the revenue measure became part of the Governor’s political strategy (Example 11).

In Virginia, at each visit the Governor and others would identify projects that were important to that area and promise to build them out of new revenue funds. In 2004 and 2005, Virginia’s Governor and Secretary of Transportation held numerous “town hall” meetings focusing on the transportation “crisis”. These visits energized the local advocates for transportation improvements who were expected to influence their legislative representatives.

An annual “road show” is also a key element in the Maryland DOT preparation of its capital program and securing elected official and public support for that program. Every year in every county (plus Baltimore City), the Maryland Secretary of Transportation and senior officials representing each of the modal administrations having projects or services in that area review in detail the Department’s past year performance in living up to its commitments and present the upcoming program for local political leaders, state legislators, the press and the public. These forums offer ideal opportunities to strengthen the Department’s credibility in terms of delivering projects as promised, as well to send the message about what it would require to address unfunded needs.

In Maricopa County, early efforts to build support for extending the existing transportation sales tax two years before its expiration were undertaken by an industry-led coalition. Presentations were delivered to chambers of commerce, business organizations, and other community associations to build awareness and elicit financial support.

In the majority of the case study examples, presentations were used in the early stages of formulating a funding initiative. This is in contrast with polling and focus groups.
that were generally used during the more mature stages of an initiative’s campaign to help focus on specific issues or refine strategies and plans of attack. Presentations tend to act as an “early days” outreach tool with broad application. Information dissemination, initial education and messaging, and solicitation of stakeholder input or financial support are all good reasons for employing this readily available tool.

Presentations can set the tone and direction for a revenue increase initiative and accordingly should be implemented strategically—each one potentially shaped by a balanced combination of a broad-based, core theme, as well as more customized messaging tailored to specific interests and circumstances.

Logos
Many of the transportation initiatives were associated with logos (Example 12). In Minnesota in 2005, a logo was identified that capitalized upon the strong bond Minnesotans have with the state license plate while whimsically incorporating the vanity plate legend VOTE YES with the tag line “Minnesota’s Transportation Amendment.” All of these logos were included on print and television advertisements, brochures, and websites.

Example 12. Sample Logos

Websites
Two types of websites may be used as an educational tool in communicating transportation revenue needs—DOT or other sponsoring agency websites and initiative-specific websites, which are often temporary in nature. Both types played significant roles in the various case studies.

Effective agency websites often contain timely and accessible information on system condition, performance, and needs. Reporting frequently on system performance serves to educate the interested public, and perhaps more importantly, key stakeholders and potential partners in
championing the need for increased funding. Armed with facts and statistics on performance metrics such as safety, structural condition, and service levels, the average website viewer can become better informed and the engaged stakeholder can leverage the information to help build the case behind the need for greater funding.

Producing and disseminating relevant and reliable information through a website also serves to greatly enhance the credibility of a department by showing that it is acting transparently and accountably. Agency credibility was identified as a particularly significant precursor to moving initiatives forward in California, Maricopa County, Ohio, and Washington State where in all four cases, the state DOTs had suffered setbacks in perception of project delivery some years prior to their respective funding initiatives. However, all four agencies engaged in significant efforts and practices to enhance their capability, and in turn, their credibility, in terms of delivering on promised projects consistent with established goals for scope, schedule and budget. In California and Ohio, initially skeptical Legislatures began to believe that the Department could handle the increased project responsibilities associated with an influx of funding, and in Arizona, concerned Maricopa County residents were assured that a full program of projects promised under an extension of its transportation sales tax would be delivered. In Washington State, the DOT’s strong initial performance in delivering the 2003 program built credibility for the 2005 program.

WSDOT’s Departmental website was particularly notable (Example 13). The Department created a website for all of their projects. These sites described the project, which entities were doing the work, and the status—a report card complete with budget, schedule, and other relevant data. A key challenge in
communicating such detailed information is keeping the data current and WSDOT devoted considerable resources to this arduous task.

The second type of website is one that focuses exclusively on a particular transportation revenue initiative and is therefore usually temporary. Websites dedicated to and focused on these initiatives are often sponsored by not-for-profit industry groups, and not necessarily the Department of Transportation, even though quite often much of the available information they contain comes from the agency. Transportation agencies may sponsor their own sites for an initiative as well, but typically, the content reflects less of an advocacy orientation, reporting on the factual or technical aspects of a proposed initiative, the likely effects on the Department’s plans and programs if it passes or if it falls short, and official reports and press information, released as the campaign for the initiative unfolds. Lobbying, advocacy, or marketing-oriented materials are typically left to initiative-specific websites sponsored by pro-transportation interests.

Several examples of initiative websites can be found in the case studies. In Maricopa County, a website to promote Proposition 400 sponsored by the Associated General Contractors of Arizona and its political consultant was a critical public campaign education tool. The website featured an interactive map allowing users to view and zoom in on their region or neighborhood and layer on specific improvements programmed into the plan.

In Ohio, the County Engineers Association was a particularly strong stakeholder in the coalition supporting the transportation revenue program. The County Engineer is an elected official in Ohio and these individuals were able to communicate effectively with legislators and the public to describe the benefits to local road maintenance of the program.
Emerging outreach tools—social networking websites

Besides serving as a forum for passive educational materials called up by the website visitor, department and initiative websites can also serve as a forum for more dynamic, proactive, and leading edge communication tools. Although, the case studies in this research project generally predate the increasingly widespread use of social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter, these avenues of education and outreach must not be overlooked in a comprehensive education or campaign effort. Although not the subject of a case study here, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation is a prime example of an agency that is at the forefront of capitalizing on these emerging tools. On its website’s homepage, up-to-the-minute updates on its most significant project this decade (the I-195 Relocation Project or Iway) are available through no less than four social network website accounts—Facebook, Blogger, MySpace, and Twitter. This multi-pronged outreach and education approach should adapt well to a revenue initiative effort. Additionally, these tools may be especially significant to a public referendum campaign, where significant numbers of these website users fall into the 18-24 demographic, a bracket that traditionally garners the lowest levels of voter registration and election participation.

Radio

Researchers found that radio was one of the most prevalent marketing tools utilized. Radio advertisements and talk radio are two examples of this medium’s use. Radio provides proponents the opportunity to reach a broad, yet targeted group of listeners, often while the listeners are in their motor vehicles facing congestion or other transportation-related issues. Among direct marketing tools radio is also one of the most cost-effective. In Minnesota, limited campaign funds were spent on targeted radio ads rather than television and were found to deliver strong value for money.

The Utah Chamber of Commerce ran advertisements supporting increased transportation funding through multiple media, including radio. With the sound of a heart pumping in the background, the radio announcer stated “That’s the heart of a healthy economy…the life blood of that economy is efficient transportation. Yet, everyday our traffic arteries are clogged sacrificed to lost productivity and wasted gas. Imagine the strain on our roads in the next 20 years…the long-term risk to our economy could be fatal!”

Talk radio offers a unique dimension to this medium, one that can be persuasive in unpredictable ways. Perhaps the
best example is in the Washington State referendum to repeal the recently enacted 9.5-cent-per-gallon motor fuel tax increase for transportation. In the summer of that year, polls showed that a constant barrage in support of the repeal on the part of anti-tax talk radio hosts was taking its toll. The conventional wisdom was that repeal had become a foregone conclusion.

While Transportation Secretary MacDonald was precluded from participating in campaigning or lobbying, he was also expected to be responsive to requests by the media. Prior to a fall vote, the Secretary became a frequent talk radio guest, engaging in spirited debate about the repeal and the consequences it would have, all the while walking a fine line between responsiveness and advocacy. As it turned out he had a good story to tell. The Secretary as able to report WSDOT’s positive deliver record, showing on time and within budget projects that had been committed to in connection with a prior 5 cents-per-gallon revenue measure. In addition, the Secretary’s ability to describe the adverse effects on transportation system performance, which his agency had been studiously tracking and reporting over several years, provided him with a strong and clear message that was repeated on talk radio for several months prior to the vote. Knowledgeable observers have credited the Secretary’s constructive use of talk radio—the very medium that nearly caused the repeal—as the major reason for defeating the repeal and preserving a very large source of transportation revenue that pundits had been sure was about to be lost.

**Television advertisements**

Television was a frequent, although somewhat less commonly referenced, marketing tool in the case studies. Despite generally high costs, television has long been relied upon as one of the most direct and effective tools for delivering a campaign message. For nearly 50 years, since the famous televised debates between Nixon and Kennedy, television has been an inextricable part of important public campaigns, with respect to both broadcast news and as a medium of advertising. The
combination of reaching an individual in the comfort of his or her home, the opportunity to combine a visual and auditory experience, and the ability to instantly spread a message with little in the way of physical or logistical barriers is compelling. Some question television’s continued impact in reaching and influencing target audiences given the advancing enterprise of competing media, such as internet-based news and entertainment outlets, or technological advances, such as the commercial-skipping features of DVR. The fact remains, however, that television remains too significant and an imbedded part of our culture and daily lives to eliminate from consideration, even given its considerable expense.

In one example, the Utah Chamber of Commerce ran a television advertisement showing a child being buried by Legos as the commentator said “The longer we wait... congestion will bury us.” A highly visible and well-visited booth at the Minnesota State Fair with a “worst roads” competition generated several radio and TV interviews during the precursor initiative to the 2008 funding increase, the 2005 dedication of the motor vehicle sales tax to transportation by constitutional amendment. And in Maricopa County, television ads capitalized on the opposition’s factual errors with respect to the sales tax initiative’s spending plan by creatively re-broadcasting these statements, simultaneously setting the record straight and touting the benefits of the plan.

The construction industry-led campaign in California, which raised significant financial resources, demonstrates how a broad, comprehensive, statewide campaign can be managed on a regional scale. A series of targeted television ads were produced presenting the overall economic benefits of approving the bond funding, but also answering the question “What’s in it for me?” (Example 14-A) by highlighting several local projects per ad (Example 14-B), depending on the market in which it aired and inviting the viewer to learn more on the campaign’s website (Example 14-C). Each ad then concluded with the same consistent, simple message and
logo (Example 14-D) after citing these specific projects. The California case study findings concluded that the public campaign was highly successful, with television ads cited as a key component.

**Print advertisements**

Print advertisements, including brochures or leaflets, were used in most of the marketing campaigns in the case studies. Designed with powerful messages and graphics, brochures were used as mailers and “leave beind”s. For example, in Minnesota, leaflet drops were focused around major traffic generating events like Minnesota Twins and Vikings games. However, as the world becomes more “electronic,” printed matter, especially direct mail, must be increasingly targeted to maximize relevancy. Knowing and communicating directly to your audience becomes the key factor to achieving success from this tool. Prior research, polling, or focus group studies can yield valuable insights into producing effective printed advertisements, helping to increase audience penetration and absorption where many other—often “tech” or “e-oriented”—media compete for individuals’ attention. For example in Maricopa County, polling results were used to identify the key points of the proposed funding plan that resonated with the target audience. These key points, in turn, were featured on the first page of an eight-panel “french-fold” brochure as shown in Example 15 (top left). Also illustrated in Example 15 (clockwise from top right) are covers of brochures and one-pagers from California, Utah, and Ohio.

Sources (clockwise from top left): AGC Arizona, California Alliance for Jobs, Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce, Ohio Construction Information Association

**Example 14. California Bond Initiative Television Ad Screenshots**

**Example 15. Sample Print Advertisements from Maricopa County, California, Utah, and Ohio**
Roadside signs

Roadside signs, including billboards, pickets, and variable message signs (VMS), were also utilized in some of the marketing campaigns, mainly because their audience was so targeted to the actual road users. Agencies that used roadside signs were very strategic in their message and their locations. However, caution should be exercised in their use since roadside signs sometimes can be considered a safety hazard or even harmful to a campaign if placed in a poor location, for example, where it may have a negative impact on the visual environment in a residential community or an otherwise scenic area.

Effective examples include the Let’s Rebuild California campaign for the infrastructure bond initiatives, where 13 billboard signs were placed along a 140-mile stretch of the southern half of Highway 99, a well-traveled route that was to receive critical upgrades with the increased funding. During the 2005 motor vehicle sales tax constitutional amendment initiative in Minnesota, the campaign utilized more than 20,000 lawn signs and, in the final days of the campaign, visibility tactics intensified through the deployment of street corner and highway overpass “pickets” and 50 VMS along heavily traveled and congested roadways. The electronic sign tactic generated much television and radio media coverage during the crucial final weekend of the campaign. Later in 2008, during the legislative campaign to pass a comprehensive revenue package anchored by a motor fuel tax increase, a billboard designed to look like a VMS was strategically placed along the detour route for the I-35W Bridge following its collapse in Minneapolis. Its clever wording made the point rather acutely (Example 16).

Editorial boards

Editorial boards were also utilized whenever possible. For example, Secretary MacDonald of the State of Washington and other WSDOT executives went to editorial boards...
frequently. They made a point of creating events when a project was going to construction, giving them a chance to assert publicly when the project was on time, and on budget. They also looked for opportunities to showcase interesting or innovative construction activities, and worked to get the media out to look at them. Similarly, Ohio DOT Director Gordon Proctor, himself a former journalist, frequently met with newspaper boards and spoke on television and radio shows whenever an opportunity arose. He also educated his District deputy directors so that his message was communicated consistently to the media. Proctor believed that the media was consistently helpful for the Ohio funding initiative. In Minnesota, a consultant and lobbyist was hired to, among other things, draft letters to the editor focused on swaying legislative members on the opposing side.

In conclusion, the tools and messages used in conjunction with transportation funding initiatives are essential to communicate a story to stakeholders. As with any public relations campaign, it is vital to understand your audience and create a targeted, powerful message that resonates and evokes a positive response. The Tactical Toolkit describes a wide range of tools. As with any other toolkit, in the hands of serious and well-versed professionals, the tools will prove to be effective when used judiciously and with skill.