Executive Summary

The headlines are daunting:

- In Ohio, “Official warned of possible bridge failure”
- “Los Angeles beats New York—in Traffic Congestion”
- In Michigan, “As Maintenance Needs go Unfunded, Drivers Pay”

In this era of decaying transportation infrastructure and spiraling costs, agencies find that their limited resources are not meeting the growing needs. Chief executive officers (CEOs) and management teams of nearly every transportation agency across the nation are seeking additional funding. (Any management team not doing so might well be asking themselves why not.) With this in mind, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Board of Directors requested this NCHRP research project with a title of Identification of Marketing Tools that Resonate with Lawmakers and Key Stakeholders to Support and Increase Funding and Revenue for the Nation’s Transportation System. In keeping with the recommendations contained herein, the title has been shortened to Making the Case for Transportation Investment and Revenue.

To meet the needs of this project, researchers investigated 11 case studies to identify common themes and lessons learned on this crucial topic. Researchers investigated cases where agencies were successful in their funding initiatives, cases where they were not, and cases where agencies made multiple attempts with mixed results.

This document is arranged into three chapters and one appendix:

**Chapter 1—The Essential Guide for Senior Staff** helps you determine whether your agency is ready to ask for...
additional funding, provides steps you might take to get on the road to success, and identifies potential pitfalls to avoid.

Chapter 2—The Tactical Toolkit gives you examples of winning messages, describes the pros and cons to engaging in outreach, education, and marketing, and describes tools commonly used to engage audiences.

Chapter 3—Case Studies: Summarizing Lessons Learned briefly describes the context and lessons learned from each of the cases researched. Unique factors the researchers found are also described.

Appendix—Full Case Studies. For a more in-depth understanding of what each agency faced, how they dealt with difficulties, and how they won (or lost) their battles, we have included full case studies. You may find that other states have had to overcome hurdles that you now face.

Are you ready to ask for additional funding?
The first step when considering whether you are ready to pursue a transportation funding initiative is to do a candid and critical appraisal of your agency. Are you ready and able to support a successful effort? Chapter 1—Essential Guide for Senior Staff identifies 10 steps to help you determine if you are ready to ask for additional funding and helps prepare you for success. The 10 steps are outlined below:

- Step 1—Determine your program needs
- Step 2—Determine the costs, priorities, and benefits of your program
- Step 3—Design your case for the public, political leaders, and the media
- Step 4—Address your weaknesses
- Step 5—Find a champion
- Step 6—Secure support from your governor
- Step 7—Analyze your program’s acceptance with the public, political leaders, and the media
- Step 8—Know your opposition

Credibility is key.
Some agencies enjoy a longstanding tradition of credibility, project delivery prowess and strong relationships with state legislators and other key decision-makers. This credibility worked to their advantage when requesting funding increases. In other states, when past difficulties with credibility and program performance (real or perceived) were improved, their turnaround was seen as a key to their success.

Do you have the right funding priorities?
Conventional wisdom has held that major new capacity projects are necessary in order to secure new funds. However, in Maryland, the agency sponsor successfully made the case that the Department’s longstanding “preservation first” philosophy should apply to funding initiatives in 2004 and 2007.
• Step 9—Determine your resources
• Step 10—Create a winning strategy

A checklist with searching questions is provided in Chapter 1. The checklist can be used to engage you and your leadership team as well as potential champions and supporters in discussions about the array of issues and opportunities that should be addressed in deciding on how or whether to undertake a transportation funding initiative. You should tackle these questions with complete candor before deciding whether you are ready to move ahead or have more homework to do.

**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. 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 statement of needs. The needs will have to be well communicated, comprehensive, and balanced.

**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 demonstrated history of effective use of allocated funds using a clear prioritization process and efficient project delivery. The three subcategories of credibility include fiscal responsibility, demonstrated delivery, and credible leadership.

**Do you have a coalition of support?**
In Washington State, Boeing specifically linked transportation conditions to its pending decision on where to assemble the 787 Dreamliner.
Creating a winning strategy
Before finalizing your decision to proceed with an initiative, you should define and gain confidence in the winning strategies that will work for the case at hand. In our research, we found that there is no silver-bullet formula for successful strategies. As would be expected, there were significant variations in the approaches taken depending upon, among other factors, (a) whether legislation or a public referendum was the mechanism to secure funding, (b) what the proposed uses of funding and the degree of specificity required to win support were, and (c) who the key supporters and likely opponents were. However, even across these divides, the research team identified several common themes, including the need to:

- Consider how much new budget to request
- Determine the revenue mix (taxes and bonding authority)
- Determine how to use the funds (what programs or projects to fund; modal composition)
- Determine how to apply the funding (merit based or other strategy)
- Address geographic and social equity issues (urban vs. rural; county/city distribution)
- Agree to the degree of project specificity (flexibility vs. specific support)
- Ensure there is an active and supportive stakeholder coalition
- Create a captivating message that is consistently presented throughout the initiative

Tactical Toolkit
Effective communication with political leaders, the press, and the public is at the heart of a successful funding initiative. Effectiveness means resonating with the listener or reader, imparting a high level of understanding, and evoking a supportive response that will lead to positive action. Key components of a timely, well-managed communications program are in the messages communicated and the tools utilized.
**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 your audience, it will not matter what tool you have used to impart the information. The message must be simple 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. At the same time, it will be important to augment the core message in ways that reflect the particular interests of diverse stakeholders. The following five themes were identified in the cases researchers studied.

- Investment in transportation will save time and money, improve safety, and decrease congestion
- Investment in transportation will support economic development and growth in jobs
- The transportation agency spends its funds efficiently
- The transportation system has deteriorated to an unacceptable level, and current funding will not meet the needs
- Increased funding will be used to deliver specific projects

**Methods**
When building 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

Most communication plans use a blend of these methods. The form and substance of your communications will change depending on the method you employ. Your audience will be different in these various forums as well.

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**An effective message**
Simple and clear
Consistent—regardless of the medium
Causes a reaction

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**Where do your political leaders stand?**
Five months after the failure of the I-35W bridge over the Mississippi River, the Governor’s veto of a transportation revenue program was overridden by the Minnesota legislature, reversing the previous record of two unsuccessful override attempts in 2005 and 2007.

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**How specific are your project commitments?**
In one state, senior legislators referred to “the list that didn’t exist,” a list of projects that was nowhere publicly described. However, insiders understood that the list described projects that would be funded by the revenue program.
Therefore, the complexity of the information will have to be tailored to those audiences.

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
- Focus groups
- Reports
- Presentations
- Logos
- Websites
- Radio
- Television advertisements
- Print advertisements
- Roadside signs
- Editorial boards

Case Summaries: Summarizing Lessons Learned
Throughout this report, we have identified themes common to the 11 case studies and their initiatives. In the studies, we found common factors that, when present, are most likely to be associated with success. At the same time, our research uncovered a number of unique facts that became important in the individual initiatives. The table below briefly describes the cases studied, whether they were successful, and the unique situations each of the proponents faced. Taken together with the more common themes, a complete picture emerges about the factors that help make the case in building support for increased transportation funding.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Unique Factor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California Proposition 1B General Obligation Bond</td>
<td>$20 billion general obligation bond issue approved in 2006 voter referendum</td>
<td>The leadership of Governor Schwarzenegger drove a successful campaign to increase transportation funding by $20 billion. He staked his reelection on its passage</td>
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<td>Maricopa County Sales Tax Referendum</td>
<td>½-cent local sales tax extension approved in 2004 voter referendum</td>
<td>Business leaders worked with elected officials through an appointed committee to create a successful transportation funding program</td>
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<td>Maryland Transportation Revenue Programs</td>
<td>Vehicle revenue measures approved by legislature in 2004 and 2007 with system preservation emphasis</td>
<td>The focus in both of Maryland’s revenue programs was system preservation, in contrast to the conventional wisdom that major capacity projects are necessary to win revenue increases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minnesota Transportation Revenue Program</td>
<td>Revenue measures approved by the legislature in 2008 including override of Governor’s veto</td>
<td>Initiative success in spite of active opposition by the Governor</td>
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<td>New York City Congestion Pricing Program</td>
<td>Congestion pricing program that failed to secure legislative approval in 2008</td>
<td>The first to attempt cordon congestion pricing in the United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ohio Transportation Revenue Program</td>
<td>Largest transportation revenue increase in Ohio history approved by legislature in 2003</td>
<td>The lack of significant controversy or opposition was the hallmark of the Ohio funding program</td>
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<td>Trans Texas Corridor</td>
<td>Visionary transportation program based on public-private partnerships (PPPs) and tolling proposed in 2002 and abandoned in 2009</td>
<td>Texas combined a very ambitious program, the Trans Texas Corridor, with a wide array of innovative financing methods</td>
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<td>Utah Transportation Funding</td>
<td>Series of successful state funding measures from 2006 to 2009</td>
<td>Addition of urban freeways to avoid congestion while funding a successful light rail transit system</td>
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<td>Virginia Transportation Revenue Initiatives</td>
<td>Successful initiative in 1986 followed by lack of success in recent years</td>
<td>The Virginia case study analyzes why, in seemingly similar circumstances, a program in 1986 was successful while recent efforts have not been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington State Nickel Package and Transportation Partnership Program</td>
<td>Major revenue increases approved by the legislature in 2003 and 2005 and subsequent defeat of repeal referendum</td>
<td>The scale of Washington’s revenue increase—a total of 13.5 cents per gallon in a three-year period—is unique in the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Fuel Tax History</td>
<td>Increases in federal fuel taxes for both transportation and non-transportation purposes, 1956-present</td>
<td>The politicization of the fuel tax at the federal level has created a barrier to proposed increases</td>
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