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2035 Plan Post-Referendum Analysis Interagency Working Group

Friday, September 21, 2012

1:30 pm

18th Floor, Hillsborough County Center, 601 E. Kennedy Blvd.

I. Introductions & Welcome

Ray Chiamonte, MPO Director

II. Best Practices Summary

Jennifer Straw, Jacobs/ MPO Consultant

III. Public Opinion Survey Results

Ben Kelly, The Kenney Group/ MPO Consultant

IV. "Hybrid Rail" Sketch Plan

Jennifer Straw, Jacobs/ MPO Consultant

V. Round Robin

VI. Next Steps

Beth Alden, MPO Staff

VII. Adjournment

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What The Georgia Vote Means for the Future of Transportation

BY: [Ryan Holeywell](#) | August 1, 2012

In a race closely watched by transportation advocates and stakeholders across the country, Atlanta-area voters Tuesday overwhelmingly rejected a plan for a 10-year, 1 percent sales tax that would have supported nearly \$7.2 billion in transportation investments in a 10-county area surrounding the city.

The vote was part of an innovative plan known as Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (T-SPLOST) in which the state was divided into a dozen multi-county regions, and residents of each voted on whether to increase sales taxes in order to fund transportation projects specific to their region.

The thinking among transportation advocates was that if voters could see exactly what they'd get for their money – and they were only being asked to pay for projects in their region– then they'd be more likely to fund the work.

In retrospect, that wasn't the case. In the Atlanta region, the proposal failed spectacularly by a 37 percent to 63 percent vote. It's only poised to be successful in three of the state's 12 special districts.

The vote had been followed by members of the transportation community across the country, largely because of its timing, just a few weeks after Congress passed its surface transportation legislation known as MAP-21. Most transportation observers didn't consider that legislation to be particularly ambitious, since it didn't boost transportation funding, despite calls from many advocates decrying the condition of America's infrastructure. It also didn't tackle the big questions about the growing insolvency of the Highway Trust Fund or how to provide future revenue for transportation.

But many viewed the Georgia vote with some hope. If Congress wasn't willing to make a serious commitment to transportation, would voters at the local level step up?

In the Atlanta region -- the first major metro to face that question in the MAP-21 era -- the answer was no. Tea Party supporters have [characterized](#) their defeat of T-SPLOST as a big win. Their success is especially impressive, given what they were up against. Campaign finance reports indicate that Tea Party groups and other opponents of the tax hike raised about \$15,000 for their cause, compared to \$8 million raised by supporters, according to the [Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#). The tax increase was supported by Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed as well as the business community.

The takeaway from the vote? Support for local transportation projects "is not a given," says David Goldberg, a former *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reporter who's now the communications director at Transportation for America. "Don't take that for granted at all."

Goldberg's organization has advocated for strategic transportation investment and accountability for transportation spending. He says the vote in Atlanta is indicative of the challenges that come with putting regional transportation planning issues to a vote in an area that doesn't have much experience with that approach.

In particular, he cited the list of more than 150 projects that the tax hike would fund in the Atlanta region. The list was the result of negotiations among local officials in the area and ultimately came to resemble a "goodie bag" lacking cohesion, rather than a focused plan that was easy to explain, he says.

Atlanta-area voters also may have been skeptical of the types of projects on the list. Joshua Schank, president of the Eno Center for Transportation think tank, says the list of projects included many capital improvements but fewer improvements to operations, which is where residents would likely see impact on

their commutes.

He says supporters of the tax also might have gotten more buy-in if their plan came with clear performance metrics that indicated exactly how the projects would improve traffic in the area, and what would happen if they didn't.

Even Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed, one of the biggest advocates for the tax-hike, acknowledged those criticisms in something of a [concession speech](#) Tuesday night. "We lost the 'confidence in government' argument," he said. "And the argument around whether our projects are transformational."

Schank also says voters have likely become jaded at this point after hearing for years promises from Atlanta politicians about congestion relief. "They've probably said 'let's spend money to fix this' many times, and it hasn't been fixed," Schank says.

Because citizens were voting as a cobbled-together, 10-county unit, there was no single agency that had to take charge for the accountability of the billions of dollars in projects. Instead, authority was split between Georgia Department of Transportation, Georgia Regional Transportation Authority and the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority. That prompted questions among the electorate about who would be accountable for the spending, Goldberg says.

"People are used to having these votes at the county or city level," he explains. "They know who the officials are. They know who to go to if the project list doesn't get built. In this case, one of the big issues was you're asking people to trust government generally, and not specific government officials." Goldberg, for his part, believes that the state legislature designed the T-SPLOST with the expectation that it would fail.

He and others have highlighted several recent cases in which voters approved big transportation investments, suggesting that with the right approach, local referenda can be successful.

In 2008, Los Angeles County voters approved Measure R, which raised the sales tax to pay for transit and road improvements. That same year, Seattle-area voters approved a sales tax increase for transit expansion, and Denver-area voters did the same in 2003. In all of those cases, Goldberg notes, responsibility for spending was tightly concentrated rather than spread among a disparate group of jurisdictions and agencies, which may have given voters more confidence.

But Kerry O'Hare director of policy at Building America's Future, is skeptical of Atlanta-area voters who raised questions about accountability. She says it would be difficult to imagine getting a more detailed list of projects than what was released by the regional districts. "For people to say 'we don't know what the money going to go to,'" O'Hare says, "is not a real argument."

She says the Atlanta situation could impact the national debate. One school of thought that has gained traction in conservative circles is the idea that the federal government should scale back on its transportation investment and instead rely on states and localities to take on more responsibility.

In this case, voters rejected that role, raising the obvious question: if Congress has punted on transportation, and local voters have too, who will ultimately foot the bill? "What are people waiting for?" O'Hare says. "You wonder what the breaking point is."

This article was printed from: <http://www.governing.com/What-The-Georgia-Vote-Means-for-the-Future-of-Transportation.html>

9/13/2012

Election 2012: Florida communities to decide on transportation questions

By [Keith Goble](#), Land Line state legislative editor

Voters in two Florida communities will decide Nov. 6 whether to boost transportation funding. Another Florida locale will decide the fate of certain pickup trucks.

A lengthy list of ballot questions in Pasco County will include a sales tax question. Voters in the area north of Tampa will be asked whether they want to renew the current penny sales tax in the county for another 10 years.

[Translate](#)

The tax revenue benefits schools, public safety and transportation projects throughout the county. An extension is projected to raise about \$502 million during the next decade.

The county and school district would split 90 percent of the revenue. Pasco's six municipalities would divvy the rest based on population.

A two-hour drive north on Interstate 75 is the location of another local ballot question that covers transportation.

Ballots in Alachua County will include a question about whether to pass a three-quarter percent sales tax for roads. The tax, which would be in effect for 15 years, is estimated to generate \$22.5 million annually.

All money would pay for road maintaining, paving and reconstruction throughout the county, including all municipalities.

The city of Gainesville would claim about \$5.5 million – or 24 percent – of the annual revenue.

Supporters say discretionary sales surtaxes are common in the state. All but one of Alachua County's surrounding eight counties levy the surtaxes.

A community in Miami-Dade County will cast ballots on whether to modify a ban on parking pickup trucks overnight in the city.

Currently, a city ordinance in Coral Gables prohibits pickups from being parked overnight on city streets or in residential driveways.

The ballot question will ask voters whether to allow residents to have one non-commercial pickup per residence. Pickups would be required to have a fully covered bed and no more than four wheels.

For more 2012 election coverage from *Land Line*, click [here](#).

Editor's Note: Please share your thoughts with us about the story topic. Comments may be sent to state_legislative_editor@ooida.com.

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Pinellas transit officials want to brand improvements before asking residents to pay for them [listen](#)

09/11/12 Janelle Irwin

[WMNF Drive-Time News Tuesday](#) | [Listen to this entire show:](#)

Tags: [PSTA](#), [transit](#), [light rail](#), [transportation](#), [Ken Welch](#), [Brad Miller](#), [SunRail](#)

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Pinellas County is slowly moving forward with plans to ask voters to pay for a major transit overhaul. A study



released this year lays the groundwork for both light rail and increased bus service to support it. At a transit meeting yesterday, Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority CEO [Brad Miller](#) said the ideas need to be discussed with possible riders.

“To help us digest all of these plans that are going on whether they’re long term or short term or about bus or rail or land use and put that together in a brand or message to help folks understand that it’s all one conversation about what kind of transportation we want for Pinellas County.”

Orlando MPO director Harry Barley talked to Pinellas officials about how SunRail came to fruition.

photo by Janelle IrwinThe so-called Locally Preferred [Alternatives Analysis](#) puts a light rail line connecting downtown St. Petersburg to the mid-Pinellas Carillon area and all the way up to Clearwater. There are also long-term plans to connect the rail to Tampa via the Howard Franklin Bridge. That study was released in January and it’s expected to cost \$1.5 billion. Pinellas would need to pass a penny sales tax to cover the cost through 2030. Preliminary estimates had the measure on ballots as early as 2013. Scott Pringle, project manager for the analysis, said that time frame may take longer than expected.

“The thing is, is that we’re still really at the beginning of the starting blocks here. The gun just went off. We’ve still got years of planning and engineering and design to go. We’ll continue to have that conversation leading to any future conversations about how this gets paid for.”

Part of the reason for the delay is that officials in Pinellas don’t want to see a repeat of what happened in Hillsborough where voters rejected a transit referendum. Pinellas County Commissioner Ken Welch sits on Pinellas County’s transit board. He said there were a lot of oversights that made the initiative fail across the Bay.

“I think not having a completed map, a completed plan - where this would go.”

But with due diligence, Welch doesn’t foresee failure on the Pinellas initiative.

“We’ve got a track record of success with the Penny for Pinellas by showing folks, here are the projects you’ll get - a park, a police station, a bridge. We need to do the same thing with this penny sales tax for transit showing where their improvements will be and a time table. I think when you do that in Pinellas County, we’ve got a history of folks supporting those investments.”

So the county is using the Orlando market as a model where SunRail is already under construction. Once completed there will be more than 60 miles of commuter rail running from DeLand to Poinciana near Kissimmee. Pinellas’s plan incorporates light rail which typically uses electrically powered rail cars instead of diesel and spans a shorter distance than commuter rail. Also unlike the Pinellas plan, Orlando and the partnering localities didn’t have to ask voters to approve a tax. Instead, each government body found the money in their existing budgets to fund the rail. Without that option, Harry Barley, executive director of the Orlando Metropolitan Planning Organization said Pinellas should use their limitations as a bargaining tool.

“I’m not an expert on Pinellas County, but I think you’re probably running out of land also for wider roads, new roads. I’ve seen some of the investments that are being made on [U.S. Hwy] 19 and there’s only so much you can do on places like 19 which forces you to look at better ways of

doing it.”

PSTA board member [Ken Welch](#) thinks the light rail plan is the better way and said the transit authority is continuing to take cues from the [SunRail](#) project.

“They had a three-county area plus the city of Orlando who all, it was a unanimous vote to move forward with this. We need to try to move towards that kind of regional approach for Tampa Bay, but looking at Pinellas County specifically, I think we’ve achieved a lot of that just by achieving this AA [Alternatives Analysis] and having all the cities on board as well as FDOT and TBARTA and the MPO and PSTA. So, I’m real positive about where we are right now.”

But not everyone is on board. All over Pinellas, especially in areas where rail stations are proposed, there are anti-rail signs. They say “[no tax for tracks](#)” and Pinellas transit CEO Brad Miller said it’s important to make sure those who are less informed, get informed.

“There are those who are specifically against further investment, but the polls that we have done show that a well thought out transportation investment in our county is what is needed to move Pinellas forward.”

Pinellas’s proposed transit overhaul doesn’t just emphasize light rail. Miller said integrating rail with improved bus service is key because the transit authority needs to be able to get people to and from the train stations.

“The bus system improvements could be implemented almost on day one. The light rail, if it were to be approved, would take several more years to bring it online, but the bus improvements could be brought on much quicker and that’s why we’re doing a study of all the - how a bus system can compliment a fixed guide way system in Pinellas County.”

The [PSTA board](#) meets again on December 10th to take yet another baby step in their long and meticulous plan to improve transit in Pinellas County.

Comments

improving cross-bay bus system

-

David about 5 days ago

I think it's great that PSTA is looking into modernizing its mass transit system, and I think their methodical attempts to survey riders and get community input is the right way to go. I find it odd that our cross-bay bus system is so incredibly limited. The PSTA buses (100 X and 300 X) are pretty good and will get you to downtown with an hourly and sometimes half hourly frequency on weekdays, but not on weekends. They also won't get you to the Tampa airport, which is kind of a ridiculous omission! I also don't understand why HART's 200X bus is so limited... it only has a few pick up times in the morning and evening, but most of the morning and afternoon are not covered at all on weekdays. I actually used to ride the 300X a couple of times a month to get to my work in Clearwater when I worked there in 2010, and it was a great way to get there. I liked the fact that PSTA uses some nicer charter-style buses for their 100X and 300X lines, but HART's 200X is just a crappy city bus, which kind of sucks!



Enviro poll: 66 percent support more public transportation

By Keith Laing - 09/12/12 11:55 AM ET

Sixty-six percent of Americans want Congress to spend more money on public transportation, according a poll commissioned by a prominent environmental group.

The New York-based Natural Resources Defense Council said on Wednesday that its survey of 800 U.S. residents showed more Americans support increased public transportation construction than building more roads and highways.

“Americans hate traffic and love transit,” said Peter Lehner, NRDC’s executive director. “Investing in public transportation eases congestion, but for too long most federal funding has limited people’s choices, leaving them sitting in traffic.”

The NRDC survey found 59 percent of Americans believe the current U.S. public transportation system is “outdated, unreliable and inefficient.” The poll found 55 percent of its respondents said they would prefer to drive their cars less, but 74 percent believed they did not have any other option for mobility.

The poll found 58 percent said they would like to use public transportation more, but said it was not convenient to their work schedules or home locations.

The survey also found that a majority of Americans think that states spend about 16 percent of their transportation budget on public transit, compared to an average the NRDC said was closer to 6.5 percent.

Public transportation advocates like the Amalgamated Transit Union for transit workers said Wednesday that the NRDC poll validates their support for increased funding for railways and bus systems.

“Transit ridership in the U.S. is at an all-time high in decades and even more people would use it if they could,” ATU President Larry Hanley said in a statement. “Many believe Americans are in love with their cars, but most are frustrated with the lack of options for adequate, reliable public transit service.”

Hanley said the NRDC poll “clearly shows that taxpayers are willing to put their money where their mouth is — backing increased spending to make better public transportation a reality.

“Legislators should take note that public transit is not only a wise investment in our economy, but also a winning political position for people regardless of their party affiliation,” he said.

Lawmakers in the House briefly tried to eliminate a dedicated funding source for public transit systems in the

recently approved \$105 billion transportation measure. Supporters argued that the bill included more one-time funding for public transit than a traditional 80-20 percent split in federal gas tax revenue has provided.

But public transit advocates countered that removing the dedicated funding source would leave funding for railways and bus systems at the whims of future lawmakers, and the provision was removed from the final version of the transportation bill.

The full NRDC transportation poll can be read [here](#).

Source:

<http://thehill.com/blogs/transportation-report/public-transit/249013-enviro-poll-66-percent-support-more-public-transportation->

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