

2014 National Workshop for State & Local Transportation Advocates

The workshop was hosted by the Transportation Advocacy Center – The center has created a website that should be a vital resource to us going forward. The site is www.transportationinvestment.org.

This organization was started in June and is managed by the American Road and Transportation Builders Association.

There were 22 states represented at the workshop which was held on Wednesday July 16, in Washington, D.C. There were five people from Mississippi that attended the workshop. Along with myself, attending were Mike Pepper, the executive director for the Mississippi Road Builders' Association, Bob Phillips of Phillips Contracting Company in Columbus, Rick Webster of Key Constructors in Madison, and Charlie Williams of the T1 Coalition. Bob and Rick serve on Mike's board at the Mississippi Road Builders' Association.

The day was structured with an agenda that focused on data-driven research and market research, and individual state efforts to increase funding for transportation.

I have broken down each session and provided highlights of what was discussed. The Advocacy Center provided the PowerPoints that were used and are available at the following link:

<http://www.msmecc.com/images/transportationworkshoppptcombined.pdf>

There are a total of seven PowerPoints on this link and they are referenced accordingly.



2014 National Workshop for State & Local Transportation Advocates

A few of the key takeaways were:

- There is a great deal of research and data on state initiatives already available. The workshop provided access to information and research that already exists, which is vitally important. In addition, I was able to personally visit with Dr. Alison Black, the chief economist for the American Association of Road and Transportation Builders. Dr. Black should be a great resource for us going forward, as she has spent a great deal of time looking at what other states are doing.
- The ability to listen to the process used by other states highlighted the importance of having a plan and following the plan. But more importantly, it made me realize there are several components missing from our initial outline produced two weeks ago. These are all things we are aware of and we would have likely addressed at some point, but these really need to be a part of the process from the beginning. Among them are:
 - Identifying the opposition and addressing their complaints
 - Creating public awareness of the issue
 - Moving it from the hard to understand “engineering, road builders - industry” issue, to an easier to understand “kitchen table” issue
 - Identifying groups that benefit that are normally not part of the process, but would support it because there is a win-win for them as well
- The meeting discussed the value of polling and market research – credibility is the key. If you have external and internal polling that gives you the same results it only adds to the validity of the information. The information derived from the public opinion polls is extremely important in matching what people want to what the needs actually are. Another reason adding credibility is important, and our Blueprint polling bears this out, is that typically transportation is a “down-the-list” issue, behind education, economic development, workforce, business climate, etc. We need to tie transportation to these items in order to make this a “kitchen table” issue.

**The first session was National Overview:
Trends in State Transportation Initiatives
Presenter Dr. Alison Black, Senior Vice President & Chief Economist, American
Road and Transportation Builders' Association. (ARTBA)**

ARTBA has tracked 86 initiatives (both on the state and local level) since 1997 – 28 of those have resulted in an increase in sales taxes to support transportation. 23 resulted in an increase in the motor fuel tax, 7 resulted in a change to the indexing of fuel taxes.

In all there have been over 500 proposed initiatives to support transportation since 2000.

Statewide efforts have resulted in an index increase in Kentucky, Georgia, Florida and South Carolina. Three states have added a dedicated portion of the sales tax to support transportation – Arkansas, Arizona and Minnesota.

Trends in these efforts included:

- Governor was the champion
- Bi-partisan support
- Matching Federal Investment (stressing the importance of not being able to match those funds without initiative)
- Having the ability to adjust for inflation
- Strong Business Support
- Going beyond just a gas tax – using sales tax component or something similar

One thing that Black pointed out and this will be shown in the PowerPoint is these efforts weren't spearheaded by one political party or another.

In the PowerPoint "National Overview" you will see that the number of democrat and republican governors is about equal and most were either re-elected or term limited. The PowerPoint show similar numbers in the make up of state legislatures.

Successful Campaigns: How We Did It

Session I Ballot Initiatives

“Moving Arkansas Forward.”

Presenter Craig Douglass, president of Douglass Communications.

Arkansas passed a statewide ballot initiative that raised the state sales tax by ½ cent sales tax increase to fund a \$1.8 billion road program.

The key to making the ballot initiative successful was paying attention to the extremely important question of “What’s in it for me?”

The first thing was to ensure there was credibility of the process. Arkansas established a Blue Ribbon committee. The committee spent 18 months and looked at a number of recommendations.

The first thing they decided to do was an initiative to reauthorize the GARVEE bonds. They determined this would be an easy way to test the water and start building support for transportation since it was a referendum that did involve a tax increase.

This set the stage for the ½ cent sales tax increase referendum. They started holding focus groups that looked at the different interests. The goal was to research what could be passed. What they learned:

1. Any new highway program must create new jobs
2. Funding would be tied to the plan – meaning there had to be a plan
3. Highway plan had to connect all areas
4. With a new source of revenue there had to be a trade off.
5. Funding grows as highway needs grow
6. Involve the public
7. Use of revenue had to have both local and state impact
8. Results needed to be immediate and visible – voters wanted to be able to see what was happening
9. Any efforts should be branded to relate to the voters.

When they decided to move ahead with the special election for the GARVEE Bonds, they branded the overall campaign as “Move Arkansas Forward.”

After this election they decided to move forward with the constitutional amendment for the sales tax increase. They made sure the talking points they gave the legislature would be the same talking points given to voters and all would center on highway investment.

One key is to make sure it was a non-partisan issue. They determined the industry should be out front, promoting the fact this would create jobs – explain these are visible jobs.

They raised money and did the research on the issue since never before had any sales tax been used to help fund transportation.

Move Arkansas Forward hired the governor's pollster to do the research.

Tested several messages – Crafted the issues based on research to give it credibility. Some included: It would create 40,000 jobs; this would improve economic development and have a local impact; would create jobs without raising taxes on groceries, medicine or gasoline.

Found ways to neutralize the opposition. They got those that would have normally been opposition groups, such as education, to sit out by focusing on the fact this wasn't taking anything from the general fund. By focusing on it being a jobs issue, they were able to ask those that were against it "if you can't be for it can you be quiet?"

Voters wanted to see where the money would go; they wanted to see a map.

Important element was that the plan dedicated money for the city and the county.

They are highlighting the work as it is happening. Instead of saying "your tax dollars at work," using the phrase "Another voter approved project."

Note: There was no PowerPoint with this presentation

Using Research to Build Coalitions & Persuasively Make the Case Economic Analysis Tools/Preview

Presenter Dr. Alison Black, Senior Vice President & Chief Economist, ARTBA

The ARTBA has set up case studies using examples from states to compare funding scenarios. This allowed them to set up a baseline to quantify investment and show those investment benefits as they relate to 19 major industry sectors – looking at jobs supported and impact on GDP.

Key economic indicators were used – jobs supported, wages earned, business savings, passage saving and gains to Gross State Product.

The PowerPoint slides explain this, as Dr. Black used Pennsylvania as the example.

Note: The PowerPoint Presentation is entitled “Economic Analysis Tools for Transportation Funding Initiatives”

Bringing the Discussion to the “Kitchen Table” Level

Presenters, Matt Jeanneret, Senior Vice President of Communications & Marketing ARTBA, Beth McGinn, Director of Public Affairs & Social Media, ARTBA

This session discussed the organization’s “Transportation Makes America Work” campaign.

The Transportation Makes America Work (TMAW) program is the industry’s only comprehensive communications advocacy and grassroots lobbying program aimed at building public and political support for increased federal surface transportation investments. Much of the work is focused inside the beltway.

The campaign can be found at www.tmaw.com.

The campaign focuses on:

- Health and Safety – The undertreated U.S. Public Health Disaster
- Emergency Response – Good roads are a matter of life and death
- The Economy – Transportation infrastructure supports people, communities & industries
- Commerce – America’s transportation network is the unsung workhorse of our economy. It moves America
- What We Pay – Good roads cost money, bad roads cost more
- What’s Happening On America’s Bridges

- How Much It Costs – What building & maintaining our transportation infrastructure costs
- Cost of Inaction – Increasing congestion threatens our personal mobility & economic stability.

TMAW is run like a political campaign.

- Print, radio and internet ads
- Media Relations – Op Eds
- Coalition Support
- Political Consultants
- Grassroots
- Social Media
- Polling
- Creditable Third Party Research

The group has received a great deal of earned media with the reports it has produced. An example is the report on America's Structurally Deficient Bridges

This report used publicly available data, was localized and provided visual support.

The use of publicly available data can be very beneficial, because it dumbed it down so the average person can understand it, also use story telling through visuals and other means. Don't be afraid of paid advertising to tell the story. When using big numbers bring them down to a level so that everyone can relate.

Note: The PowerPoint Presentation for this session is entitled: "Bringing the Discussion to the Kitchen Table Level"

Successful Campaigns: How We Did It

Session II – In the State Legislature

Pennsylvania 2013 Panel Discussion

Panelists: James Van Buren, President/Owner JVB Enterprises, Dennis M. Powell, Founder/President, Massey Powell, Jason W. Wagner, Managing Director, Pennsylvania Highway Information Association

Pennsylvania passed comprehensive changes that are estimated to generate an additional \$2.3 billion annually by 2018. It will create \$1.65 billion for state highways and bridges and \$265 million annually for local roads and bridges. Other revenue will be used to fund public transit, and a Multimodal Transportation Fund for aviation, freight and passenger rail, ports and waterways, bicycle and pedestrian projects. They eliminated the 12-cent gas tax and increased the millage rate on the Oil Company Franchise Tax. It also included an increase in fees for vehicle registration, drivers' licenses and made changes to Traffic Violation Fines, Surcharges and Permits. Source www.pahighwayinfo.org

Pennsylvania had a five-year process that ultimately led to a “*Long-Term Comprehensive Transportation Funding Solution.*”

When the process started, it was ultimately every contractors dream to raise the gas tax. Everyone wanted it, but no one knew how to do it. They chose this as the goal simply because everyone knew roads and bridges needed more work.

During his presentation Van Buren, used an example of a brick wall. The goal was getting through the wall to get a funding bill. He said they finally took a step back because they had been running head first into the same wall and getting the same headache.

So they asked:

- What are we doing this for?
- What are the other ways to get to the other side of the wall?

Since the goal was to really come up with a comprehensive solution, and there are many needs, they begin to ask, who else needs to be with us in order to get to the other side?

The Brown Bat & the Soccer Mom

The key was to involve emotionally charged groups, environmentalist, moms and others. He said he has seen the emotion over the brown bat. They understood the

power of groups like soccer moms. The key was to figure out what the emotional argument was going to be. They didn't need people to be angry, just passionate.

The next step was to determine what they wanted to accomplish – dream big and work to achieve the goal. Find a solution that solves everyone's problems.

Once this is done, then it must be localized to the groups involved. It must be meaningful to their circumstances.

Doing this had created a different way to get around the wall. There was now a large group, with varied interests to take them around the wall. But in order for this to happen, it was vital to keep everyone aligned, focused and on message.

Alignment was the key in Pennsylvania. The analogy used was "They all paddled when the coxswain made the call."

Another thing that was beneficial in Pennsylvania was that the approach was: funding was not the problem, instead funding was the goal.

Use a macro approach to funding, because the micro is so much harder to understand.

Micro is engineering, industry, environmental. These are issues that are difficult to sell. They are not a campaign issue and not going to get you very far. Again this is why it is important to go beyond the usual groups. An example of a group that might not be considered someone that cares about transportation infrastructure is the American Heart Association. However, when the addition of sidewalks was made part of the plan, the AHA saw the health benefits and became an ally.

The Strategy for building the plan included public relations, outreach and lobbying.

- Organize information, own the information and put it in a format that people can use
- Determine your ask (don't fight to get to the other side of the wall and get very little for your efforts)
- Understand the public... Do survey research, do market research, make the issue real to the people – the voters
- Position the brand
- Frame the Issues - Frame the Questions
 - An example is safety. Make it local. Talk about improvement in specific locations (the intersection everyone is familiar with). Not a general "this will improve safety approach."
- Manage resources and expectations carefully

- Prepare for Victory... (Know what will happen when you win)
- Look at a phase in, otherwise a big plan may be too much of a shock to the system – that is why they chose the adjusted taxes method
- Give politicians cover
- Focus on projects outside of roads (Sidewalks, recreation trails, ports, airports, multi-modal)
- Make sure local government is a component... This will help legislature, because they are helping things happen locally
- Always was a comprehensive approach... Pennsylvania kept focus on what the answer was: The studies supported \$3.5 billion and that became the benchmark

Note: The PowerPoint Presentation for this session is entitled: “Pennsylvania 2013”

Successful Campaigns: How We Did It
Session III – In the State Legislature
Virginia 2013 Panel

Panelist: Jeffrey C. Southard, Executive Vice President, Virginia Transportation Construction Alliance, Tucker Martin, J. Tucker Martin LLC, Whittington Clement, partner, Hunton & Williams

Virginia passed a multi-pronged approach that included an adjustment to the gas tax, an increase in sales tax at the state and local level that was to be dedicated to transportation, an increase in vehicle fees for hybrids and earmarked possible future tax revenue based on the congressional action on the marketplace fairness act.

1. Be Patient
 - a. Have a plan, but the plan should be written in pencil
2. Build Network for public awareness
 - a. The issue will never be dealt with until the public is talking about it
 - b. Create a network of speakers to talk about the issues
 - c. Work unpaid (earned) media opportunities like op-eds
 - d. Talk about it
3. Get all your data
 - a. Make sure you include everything you can think of
 - b. Make data public
 - c. Provide it to legislature
 - d. Make sure it includes short comings, environmental impact
 - e. Have to have the data
4. Exhaust Department of Transportation (DOT) fixes
 - a. Get rid of reasons why DOT is not doing the job... It's easy for people to point to DOT not being efficient. Take those arguments off the table
5. Build Business Coalition
 - a. AAA, Hospital Association, Firefighters, etc.
 - b. Reach out to other groups that have a vested interest
 - c. Remove the argument of this is the Road Builders' with their hand out
 - d. Show it is about the system, which is vital to everyone
6. Build partnership with DOT
 - a. Have common message and plan
 - b. Got to have DOT involved in the strategy
 - c. You need the info that DOT has
 - d. DOT could use the political clout you have
7. Build your political coalition
 - a. Need governor as a champion
 - b. Needs to be a common vision among political leaders

8. Find political strategy that works
 - a. Be flexible
 - b. Governor wouldn't likely lead huge spending bill, but it's something that can be built up to
9. Be ready with the PR
 - a. This has to be done in advance, don't wait until the final push
10. Political Polling
 - a. Manage the process
 - b. Get both Republican and Democrat pollster
 - c. Work together on questions to show the results coincide

In Virginia the House and Senate started with very different bills and the bill that came out of conference ended up being stronger than both.

1. Statewide repeal of gas tax, put tax on wholesale – with floor so if prices drop there won't be a drop in revenue
2. General statewide sales tax – part of increase was for public education.
3. Earmarked future revenues with market place fairness act... federal bill that if not implemented wholes would increase
4. Agreement to use more of statewide sales tax on transportation & and tax on automobiles would increase using phase in from 3 to 4.5
5. Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads areas, which are more congested, there were additional taxes

Once passed, the group must be ready to defend it if someone tries to come in and divert the sales tax for another purpose.

Internal polling was essential to make sure you had the public support. Key is to make sure you have the right pollster.

Phrase the questions the right way and the results will be true to the core. Focus on growing jobs and the economy.

Voters are willing to put money into transportation if the plan is credible.

Note: There is no PowerPoint presentation available for this session.

What Went Wrong & Lessons Learned: The Atlanta Special District Transportation Sales and Use Tax Ballot Initiative (2013)
Seth Millican, Director, Georgia Transportation Alliance

Georgia used a ballot initiative approach that divided the state into regions, and each region had the opportunity to vote on if they wanted to raise the sales tax. The approach was considered unsuccessful because it passed in only three of the 12 regions, and failed in the Atlanta metro regions, as well as in areas near Atlanta.

The process started in 2007 and in 2008 the Get Georgia Moving Coalition was formed.

Some of the key things that led to very limited success:

- From the beginning the plan faced a great deal of opposition
 - Tea party
 - Sierra Club
 - NAACP
- It also became a city vs. rural issue
- One of the early problems was vagueness as it breeds mistrust
- Bi-partisan communication during the process is critical
- Study groups need to be controlled. Need to know where you are going and what the goal is
- Must keep the ability to frame the public discussion
- The Transportation Investment act was very complicated
- The sub-statewide approach added more complications
- The Georgia plan failed in part because it tried to make everyone happy, especially in the Atlanta area – In many cases the opposition wasn't upset because of what they weren't getting, but instead because of so many projects

Lessons learned during the process

- Begin with the end in mind
- There is no silver bullet – variety is key
- Regions were not based on communities of interest
- Think globally but act locally – projects must be something voters can relate to
- Being able to demonstrate return on investment is critical
- The coalition needs to be broad but not diluted
- The trust and perception of the key leaders is important
- Do not ignore the ideological war that might exist
- Find a slogan that sells, but make sure the slogan is based on facts

Note: The PowerPoint for this session is entitled: "Georgia Transportation Alliance

Breaking Through the Media Clutter & Using Opinion Research to Shape your campaign & Messaging – Including Current Techniques, Trends & Cost
Panelist: John Underland, Senior Vice President & Partner, Stratacomm, Tim Amsbary, Vice President, Ipsos Public Affairs, Margie Omero, Managing Director, Purple Strategies

Why use Market Research?

- It helps understand public attitudes and shows what people want.
- Helps identify the context of key issues, the message and messengers

Develop a plan that takes the following into consideration

- Budget realities
- Who to interview
- What is it you want to know
- How to conduct the interviews
- How many interviews do you need to do

Develop a questionnaire guide

- Screening
- Voter status
- Issue importance
- Consider Demographics

Message must be clear

- A consistent powerful message people understand
- Make sure it has an emotional connection... otherwise they will have other things they will place more importance on
- Create a personal connection
- Determine what the opponents will say... This allows you to meet head on the objections and allow you to frame the discussion
- Be proactive with the message

Cultivate relationship

- Make friends before you need them
- Determine what is the most valued benefit to each group
- Know what it is that is important to each group

Note: There are PowerPoint Presentations for this session “Driving Home Key Values” & “Why Use Market Research”