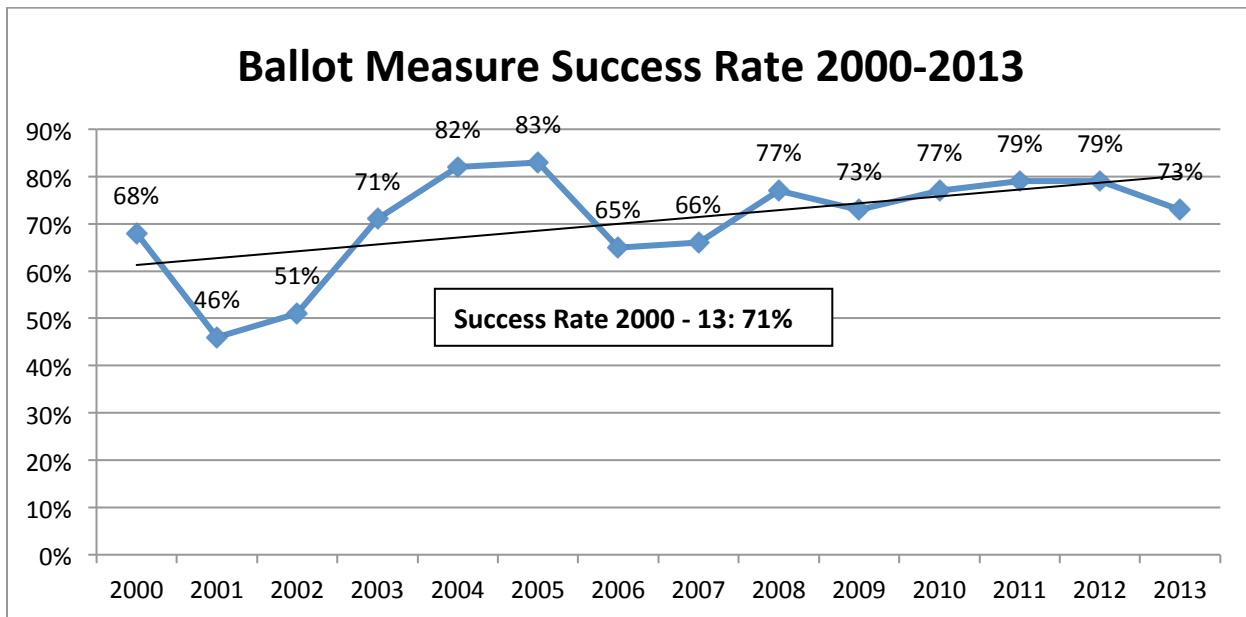




## Hallmarks of Successful Transit Ballot Measure Campaigns

Since 2000, local ballot measures supporting public transportation investments have achieved a success rate of 71 percent. There has been steady growth in the use of local ballot measures to fund transit and transportation options generally. While every campaign is unique, there are some common characteristics that define electoral success for transit.



**Pre-campaign education & outreach:** Campaigning begins before a measure is confirmed on the ballot. Often voters are unaware of the transportation needs in their community, the benefits of transit, and the transportation plans of their region. Strong campaigns conduct early polling, engage the community on the specific benefits of transportation infrastructure and proposed projects, and work to coordinate the agencies, campaign coalition, and advocates in preparation of going to a vote. This work includes research on issues like key messages and project benefits.

**Powerful champions & diverse coalitions:** Crucial to any successful initiative is building a diverse coalition of supporters and advocates. Partners typically include grassroots organizations, business leaders, developers, community leaders and labor. Coalitions that fail to include any one of the varied interests in the success of transportation funding miss part of the puzzle. It is important to start early in reaching out to groups to build your coalition and engage the stakeholders in your community. Many campaigns find it valuable to enlist the support of key champions that can help define the issue, bolster political support, and support outreach and fundraising.

**What’s in it for me?** Specifically define for the voters what their investment will bring. Be clear about both the project and its benefits. Strong campaigns develop specific plans early on which lay out the benefits to each targeted audience. Create specific engagement strategies for each key constituent group and target messaging for those groups.

**It’s all local.** Tailor your strategy to your community. While other communities can provide an outline for your campaign, there is no single key to success at the ballot box. Campaigns must consider the local context and carefully evaluate the local political environment. Research is vital. Know who your voters are and how to reach them. Messages should be value based and customized for specific neighborhoods and constituencies.

**Accountability.** Voters need to feel confident that tax resources will be used well. Providing a sense of accountability and confidence in the performance of the implementing agency is vital. Understand and address any issues with agency or local government reputation. Voters often want accountability and funding transparency built into both the campaign and the ballot measure.

**Economy.** Some of the strongest campaign messages are based on economic value. Be able to relate your initiative to issues like jobs, economic recovery, and a return on investment in the community. Transportation infrastructure is vital to protecting and strengthening local economies and successful campaigns are able to convey this message to voters. Business leaders can be especially effective messengers on the economic benefits of transit.

**Be prepared for critics.** No campaign is able to escape criticism and opposition. Anticipate your critics and prepare for their arguments. Often the same arguments are used across the country in every community. Being able to address critics’ arguments in a timely manner with facts that disprove their claims is another hallmark of a strong campaign.

**Some of us ride it. All of us need it.** Not everyone who votes for a transit measure will personally use the service. But, a strong argument can be made that the proposed investments benefit the entire community. Many campaigns have effectively used this message. Convincing voters of this simple message, while localizing the value and benefits, can be a key to winning at the ballot box.

**If at first you don’t succeed ...** Despite the strong record of success, some measures do fail. There are any number of reasons a measure might fall the first time, but many failed measures return to the ballot box and find success the second time around.

#### **Common reasons for Fail the First Time**

- Public Perception
- Too much money
- Not the right mix of projects
- Consequences aren’t apparent
- Weak Coalition or Campaign Coordination
- Not enough campaign planning and infrastructure

#### **Winning after a loss ...**

- St. Louis—Lost in 2008, won in 2010 with a stronger coalition and new GOTV strategy
- Seattle—Lost in 2007, won in 2008 after cutting “roads” portion of “Roads & Transit” proposition
- Kalamazoo, MI—Countywide measure failed in 2008, two measures won in 2009 (small countywide & additional city-only measure)
- Grand Rapids, MI—Lost millage increase in 2009, won in 2011 with greater urban support
- Mahoning County, OH—Lost in Spring 2008, but won in November 2008 when voters realized entire system was at risk