The
Metro Detroit
Transit Workshop
FINAL REPORT
September, 2013

UNPACK THE CHALLENGE

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Thank you to our Sponsors and Funders!
You made the Metro Detroit Transit Workshop possible

A message from Dr. Antoine Garibaldi—President UDM
Over last 60 years Metro Detroit’s transit systems have not been best in class. It’s remarkable to see the impact that improved transit has on the environmental and livability of our cities in ways that attract and keep young talent in these regions.

More than 30 UDM faculty and students have been studying what will enable more effective transit in Southeast Michigan, studying and influencing public policy and public opinion and running a summer transit camps for k 12 students. But it will take more than just educators – I’m confident that today we will have the beginning of a successful long term partnership and collaboration.

Acknowledgements
We would like to thank Michael Jayson, UDM Audio Engineer and David Crawford, UDM Video Engineer, for making us sound and look good; Grace Patti, Event Planner; Chelsea Bates, Student Assistant; Sodexo Food Service; Giffels Webster for Happy Hour; Nicole DuPuis from the American Public Transit Association and Allison Leach from the Center for Transportation Excellence for their help; the students who greeted our guests; Carrie Wakalut at McKenna Associates for the wonderful graphics; Real Green Printing for the programs and invitations, and especially Chris Webb, Executive Director of the Engineering Society of Detroit Institute, who joined us near the end of the journey to get us across the finish line.
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Executive Summary

“What we do with our transportation systems has a huge impact on our economic and social destiny, especially for you who I hope will be the core of the advocacy for a more robust and coordinated transit system in Metro Detroit.”

Paul Hillegonds, Chair, Regional Transit Authority

This statement by Paul Hillegonds sums up the urgent need to develop and build a regional transit system in Metro Detroit that is supported by a robust advocacy effort that ensures voters support to fund it.

After many years of trying, Metro Detroit is in a position to rebuild the transit system that was dismantled nearly 50 years ago. Like other metropolitan regions, the automobile dominated our transportation planning; however, the recently appointed Regional Transit Authority has a mandate to develop a regional Master Plan for enhanced transit, to improve coordination between local bus providers with a focus on serving customer and riders, and is authorized to put an initiative or referendum on the ballot to ask voters to fund it as early as November, 2014.

Bus measures routinely pass in Metro Detroit communities where the issue is on the ballot and, in 2012, 79% of the time, transit measures won at the ballot box nationwide. The challenge for Metro Detroit, however, is that nearly half of the people who live in the region have never voted on a transit issue because their communities ‘opt out’ of transit, or they live in the city of Detroit, where transit is supported by the general fund.

There are 4 million people in Metro Detroit who need better transit yet there were only 150 potential coalition members at the Workshop. How do we grow that number exponentially and how do we build consensus for a regional transit system in Metro Detroit?

Nationwide transit is a 57 billion business; 36 million board transit every day; Transit is a big deal.

Art Guzzetti, American Public Transit Association

The goal of the Metro Detroit Transit Workshop was to answer those questions by bringing people from Metro Detroit together with transit professionals and advocates from St. Louis, Atlanta, Los Angeles, San Francisco; from Benzie County and Grand Rapids, and from national organizations to learn the latest trends in transit planning, funding and advocacy and how these regions built their transit systems, and succeeded or failed at the ballot box.

Workshop participants learned that $9 million doesn’t guarantee success without a good plan; that local context matters; that social media works; that we need champions and powerful messages that define the benefits for the region, and that there are at least seven lessons of transit success.

We also learned that we need to let the people make the case for better transit; that we should hire consultants with transit experience; that we must engage citizens and our youth; that we need short term deliverables, a transit agency with a vision, and to be prepared for the opposition. We know we have to increase the public’s Transit IQ; provide transparency and accountability; ride the bus more often, and talk to everyday people, every day.

The following pages and linked videos contain a treasure trove of knowledge and information about transit planning and campaigns, from millage renewals to sales taxes for light rail, shared by seasoned veterans who have succeeded in moving their regions forward. Success sometimes comes after heartbreaking failure, but as Kyle Curtis said, “Every referendum is unique - there are things that work and things that if you don’t do you can be pretty sure your referendum are not going to work.” All those things are in this document. The seasoned veterans who shared them are waiting for us to call. We would be smart to follow their lead as we work together to build consensus for a regional transit system in Metro Detroit.
A Note from the Organizer

Marie Donigan
mariedonigan@yahoo.com

In 2009, in my last term in the State House, it became clear that legislation to form a Regional Transit Authority would not be signed into law, again. The region’s leaders could not agree on key provisions, and transit planning was tangled in politics and confusion. The bill was finally signed into law in 2012, which set the stage for the Metro Detroit Transit Workshop and the transformation of transit in Metro Detroit after nearly 50 years of trying.

Our region’s economy will falter if we do not build a better public transit system. We are now on the right track but the development of the system people want and are willing to pay will require good governance, the coordination and improvement of our existing systems, an inclusive process for planning new systems, and an educational program that builds a strong coalition of support – something we don’t do well in Metro Detroit.

In July, 2009 I attended the Transit Initiatives and Community Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. The conference, sponsored by the Center for Transportation Excellence, featured transportation experts, transit professionals, advocates and seasoned transit campaign veterans who told us what worked and what didn’t work in their region’s campaign to build better transit. That conference inspired me to organize the Metro Detroit Transit Workshop to ensure that we had the best possible chance to succeed. The timing couldn’t have been better, coming on the heels of the appointment of the Regional Transit Authority just a few months ago.

I want to thank all the people who liked my idea enough to invest in it; my co-organizers and the Program Committee who were key to the Workshop’s success, the presenters who inspired us all, and my friends in transit who encouraged me to never give up the fight. To steal a quote from Paul Hillegonds, “What we do with our transportation system has a huge impact on our economic and social destiny.” It’s always been true and I hope the Metro Detroit Transit Workshop, this report and the related videos will inspire people enough to make a real difference.

August, 2013

Scott Benson
Trivium Partners

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University of Detroit Mercy

Megan Owens
Transportation Riders United

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Chris McCarus
Michigannow

Dave Woodward
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Neil Greenberg
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State Representative

Cory Johnston
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Chris Webb
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Engineering Society of Detroit Institute
Thoughts from the Co-Organizers

Dr. Leo Hanifin
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The Metro Detroit Transit Workshop was a perfect companion to the research we've been doing at UDM in partnership with the Mineta Transportation Institute. As Dr. Garibaldi, President of UDM said, “It’s remarkable to see the impact that improved transit has on the environmental and livability of our cities in ways that attract and keep young talent in these regions.” To find out how to make that happen in Metro Detroit we needed to look at the factors that enabled and inhibited regional transit in the region but wanted to first look at similar regions around the country.

My team studied transit in Atlanta, Cleveland, and St. Louis – some of the regions featured in the today’s Workshop. We thought these regions had similar challenges but we also saw that these cities moved ahead faster than we did so we wanted to find out why. We examined transit development but we also focused on the media, public opinion, leadership, politics, funding, legal issues, Transit Oriented Development, equity and access.

We were thrilled to be able to sponsor the Metro Detroit Transit Workshop at UDM. UDM is an urban university that is proud to be a contributing partner in Detroit’s transformation. It will take more than just educators to bring about this transformation, however – the Metro Detroit Transit Workshop can be the beginning of a successful long term partnership and collaboration.

Dr. Leo Hanifin, Ph.D. is the former Dean of the College of Engineering and Science at the University of Detroit Mercy and is also the director of the Michigan Ohio (MIOH) University Transportation Center.

Megan Owens
MOwens@DetroitTransit.org

Metro Detroit has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve our transit system with a new Regional Transit Authority. The RTA is tasked with coordinating existing transit and the development of a coordinated regional transit plan. A great transit system requires a major investment, which we’ve never provided. For decades we have sorely underfunded public transit and it shows. Most major metropolitan areas spend over $200 per capita per year; Metro Detroit spends $75.

The RTA has the opportunity to put before the region’s voters new dedicated transit funding next year. It will be up to the region’s voters to decide whether getting more and better transit is worth that extra dime a day. Voters across the county support funding transit improvements if they understand the full value of what they're buying. The Metro Detroit Transit Workshop educated and empowered a diverse coalition of people to work with the RTA and the citizens of Metro Detroit to advocate for the transit system we need and want. The work won’t be quick or easy but with enough people pushing in the same direction, we can succeed. Please join this transit army!

Megan Owens is the executive director of Transportation Riders United (TRU). TRU is Detroit’s non-profit transit advocate, dedicated to improving and promoting public transit throughout greater Detroit.
Workshop aims to help put Regional Transit Authority on track
April 24, 2013

A workshop for potential stakeholders in a regional transit system is scheduled for next month.

The two-day Metro Detroit Transit Workshop will bring together officials from the recently formed Regional Transit Authority, transit professionals from around the country and business owners to discuss planning for a system and gathering necessary funding.

"The genesis (for the workshop) was the Regional Transit Authority being formed," said Kevin McLogan, president of Royal Oak-based Donigan McLogan Consultants LLC, which is spearheading the event. "There were a group of us that wanted to get a plan together to make sure the voices of all the stakeholders were being heard when the RTA starts making plans."

McLogan said he is expecting 200 people to attend.

"We’re bringing people in who have experienced … the beginning stages of a regional transit plan," he said.

Conversation at the workshop will touch on the announcement that the M1 streetcar rail system was given the green-light by the federal government to start construction, McLogan said, but a larger conversation about a regional transit system will be the main focal point.

Speakers include Toby Barlow, creative director of Team Detroit; Paul Hillegonds, chairman of the Regional Transit Authority; and Art Guzetti, vice president of policy, American Public Transit Association.

Some topics that will be focused on include: dispelling myths, the lay of the land; successes, failures and lessons; and engaging essential stakeholders.

The workshop will be at the University of Detroit Mercy May 17-18 and costs $75 to attend. The workshop is supported by The Kresge Foundation, the American Public Transit Association, Transportation for Michigan, the U.S. Department of Transportation (through the Mineta National Transit Research Consortium affiliate at the University of Detroit
Graphic facilitator Brandy Agerbeck created conceptual maps, using words and images, of our day-long conversation. The four pages of graphics she produced captured the mood in the room perfectly; she illustrated the stories that were told, she laid out, in pictures and words, the next steps for transit development in Metro Detroit.

Graphic facilitation is a process and product. Watching Brandy create the images as the group spoke and interacted was highly experiential and immediate. It focused the participants as they exchanged ideas, energized the group to think about transit in a way they had not thought of it before, and aided concentration by capturing and organizing the group’s ideas as they took shape.

Brandy’s dynamic images produced a valuable record - evidence of the meeting’s progress - that will guide transit planning, empower a large team of advocates, and provide a roadmap for achieving success from transit planning to the ballot box.

**Workshop Presenters**

**Paul Hillegonds**  
Chair, Regional Transit Authority  
Metro Detroit

**Toby Barlow**  
Creative Director, Team Detroit  
Detroit, MI

**Jason Jordan**  
Center for Transportation Excellence  
Washington, DC

**Denny Zane**  
MoveLA  
Los Angeles CA

**Dr. Leo Hanifin**  
University of Detroit Mercy  
Detroit, MI

**Tom Shroot**  
Avvant Partners  
St. Louis, MO

**Randy Rentcher**  
Metropolitan Transportation Commission  
San Francisco, CA

**Che Watkins**  
Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce  
Atlanta, GA

**Art Guzzetti**  
American Public Transit Association  
Washington, DC

**Kyle Curtis**  
R & R Partners  
St. Lake City, UT

**Bill Kirk**  
The Rapids  
Grand Rapids, MI

**Jon Maue**  
Benzie Bus Yes  
Benzonia, MI

*Pictures from right to left, top to bottom, in the order of presentation*
**Who was in the Room**

**Toby Barlow, Team Detroit**

toby.barlow@teamdetroit.com

“Think about consensus. Nothing captures consensus better than a strong story.”

“My feeling is that everyone in the region kind of wants transit they just don’t see how we’re going to get it without a lot of pain. ‘We’re broke’ or ‘It’s too hard to get Oakland County and Wayne County to work together’. Replacing those narratives with a new story is what we should focus on.”

“Don’t let perceived reality get in the way of progress. There is mythology that the Big Three don’t want a public transit system. That may have been the case back in the days of Roger Rabbit but I think you’ll find that they want to support public transit both here and around the world.”

**The meeting we convened**

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<td>President of the United States</td>
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<td>Transportation Riders United</td>
<td>Dave Potts, J.D.</td>
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<td>Urban Neighborhood Community</td>
<td>Michigan Dept of Management &amp; Budget</td>
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Link to MDTW Video

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=4Zl9KLaeXbK#action=share
The Program

The Mega-Question – How do we Build Consensus for Regional Transit?

To jump-start thought and creativity among workshop participants, we gave the group a Mega-Question to work with and to consider throughout the day.

The Regional Transit Authority

We began the day by hearing from Paul Hillegonds, Chair of The Regional Transit Authority. His vision for transit in Metro Detroit, and the goals and objectives of the newly appointed authority provided the inspiration the participants needed to stimulate conversation and provide the momentum for the decisions that have to be made and the meaningful actions that must occur.

The Importance of Diversity

To encourage consideration of the Mega-Question and to invigorate the group, we started with a session that demonstrated the diversity of the people in the room – the variety of people and viewpoints that will be needed for a new Metro Detroit transit advocacy coalition to succeed.

Dispelling Myths and Taboos: Separating Fact from Fiction

We continued with a facilitated exercise to create and build a foundation of knowledge about transit; dispel common myths and taboos, and examine the facts about transit in Metro Detroit - past, present and future - as the attendees know them.

Transit Campaigns and Transit Trends around the County

We heard from transit professionals and advocates from Los Angeles, St. Louis, Atlanta and San Francisco who described and illustrated their region’s transit systems and their reasons for success or failure at the ballot box. Our colleagues from the Center for Transportation Excellence and the American Public Transit Association shared trends in transit and valuable insights about transit advocacy, from the air game to the ground game and everything in between.

Breakout Groups

In the afternoon, attendees participated in one of five breakout sessions. They wrestled with the Mega-Question and suggested the ‘What’, ‘Who’ and ‘How’ of regional consensus, concluding with the development of the Next Steps for The Regional Transit Authority and transit development in Metro Detroit.

The Next Steps

The workshop wrapped up the narrative with series of Next Steps that can:

- Guide the Regional Transit Authority as it begins its work as a deliberative public body
- Become a roadmap for transit planning
- Provide the basis for coalition building
- Assist with the recruitment of Champions
- Ensure that Metro Detroit gets the transit system it needs and is willing to pay for
- Give people confidence in their ability to lead and advocacy campaign, from transit planning to the ballot box

The Nuts and Bolts of a Transit Campaigns

Day Two presenters drilled down into transit campaigns around the county and in Michigan, focusing on the basics that every campaign needs including messaging, advertising and coalition building. We learned about techniques that worked and some that didn’t; and techniques for low budget campaigns, and campaigns that can afford all the bells and whistles.
The Regional Transit Authority

Paul Hillegonds, Chair

"What we do with our transportation system has a huge impact on our economic and social destiny, especially for you who I hope will be the core of the advocacy for a more robust and coordinated transit system in Metro Detroit."

"The RTA is a litmus test for our region. We have failed in so many ways to work as a regional economy, to work as a people, regionally. If we fail at this it is just another setback to succeeding politically, and that’s why I have taken this job...because I believe this is not only about the importance of public transit - it’s about reaching our full human and economic potential in Metro Detroit."

"Early wins will give us a better chance of building voter support to enhance our transportation systems."

Their mandate

- Improve coordination between local bus providers with a focus on serving customer and riders as seamlessly as possible.

- Develop a regional Master Plan for enhanced transit. "Rail might be part of the adopted plan however it requires a unanimous vote. That’s a high threshold so we’re going to have to learn consensus building in a hurry to get the kind of comprehensive transit system people are interested in."

"In the end, the challenge will be to reach a bipartisan legislative agreement on a comprehensive transportation funding plan for the state – if more state resources are not available to match federal dollars and to support local bus operators; if the political issue of raising transportation taxes remains unresolved, it’s honestly going to be more difficult for us to build regional support for the funding necessary for rapid transit."

Link to Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouUURURQFrY
What the people were saying

“The Metro Detroit Transit Workshop was a great way to get our metro area started on the road to an effective regional transportation system. Not only did we hear from people with experience in getting campaigns started, we were able to meet new friends and people with similar goals and concerns. The emphasis on practical solutions to widespread issues was a breath of fresh air, and provided a great start for our own transit efforts.”

Laurence J. Krieg, PhD
Vice-Chair, Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers
Principal, Wake Up Washtenaw

“We must have clear shared vision of what our region should look like. We have a good example with Detroit Future City but we don’t have anything like that on a regional level...but we should.”

Deena Fox
Rossetti Associates

“I’m here to find out where we plug in. What part of the process can we accelerate, generate and drive? We provide transportation to 13,000 riders per day – it is in that capacity we have the ability to get the message out.”

Brian Miller, Amalgamated Transit Union
Local 26 AFL-CIO DDOT

“We really don’t know what it would be like in our region if we could create a regional transit system that would deliver the kind of transportation system that’s so important for a successful metropolitan region.”

Jim Townsend
State Representative, 26th District

“I rode the Soviet-built subway in Moscow; I did not expect it to be as wonderful as it was. Their subway was built during WWII – while they were being bombed they kept digging and working on their transit system so Michigan has no excuse.”

Toby Barlow
Team Detroit

The workshop brought together transit agencies, supporters, seasoned and new advocates, elected officials, non-profits, environmental organizations, planners, architects, developers, business groups, landscape architects, union members, the business community, and campaign professionals to learn from transit professionals and activists from the around the country the process they followed to build their transit systems - what worked and what didn’t. Failure is as important as success.
Transit in Metro Detroit – Myths and Taboos

We wanted to start the workshop by putting it all on the table. What are the myths and taboos surrounding transit in Metro Detroit? Are they true? Can they stand in the way of progress? Separating fact from fiction will be an important task over the next several years. **This seemed like a good place to start!**

**PEOPLE WILL NOT GET OUT OF THEIR CARS TO RIDE TRANSIT - PEOPLE LOVE THEIR CARS TOO MUCH**

**It’s too expensive!**

**It would be cheaper to buy everyone a car!**

**Transit will bring crime into our neighborhoods!**

**Metro Detroit is too spread out for a transit system that works for enough people to make it worth the money**

**The buses are empty – transit’s a waste of money!**

**The car companies will Never. Let. It. Happen.**

**People won’t ride buses! Only Light Rail works!**

This lively icebreaker uncovered myths, anecdotes, taboos, truths and untruths about past, current and future transit planning in Metro Detroit; we discovered what people know, think they know, or want to know. The exercise set the stage for the day’s exchange of information and for what was to be learned from the advocates who have been where we are today.
There is one core message – today is a moment of transformation in public transit development. It is vital that transit is seen as an economic driver for everybody in the region; if people understand that core principal then it becomes less about whether it’s a train or a bus or where the train or bus goes because people understand that if we’re going to win in Detroit - if we’re going to be the competitive center of innovation again - this is an investment we have to make so people will say, “I’m with you whether I ever intend to ride it or not.”

“In Michigan, communities adopted property tax increases or renewals to support the transit they already have. We have a rich tradition in Michigan to build upon.”

“How can we pay for it, organize ourselves to do it, and galvanize public support to move these projects from the planning process to implementation? Given the tremendous vitality about public transit investment it’s still not an easy thing to do...it takes a long time for projects to move from a room like this to riders boarding trains and buses.”

The Hallmarks of Success

- Answer the value proposition - what’s in it for me? Define benefits not in wonky terms but what the real benefits for this region are.
- Use powerful messaging “Some of us ride it all of us need it.”
- Recruit Champions who have credibility with core constituencies
- Have a good ground game and start early.
- It’s not the national story that’s going to move voters; integrate the story into the local culture. It doesn’t matter if 79% of the country supports public transit investments - it matters what happens in your region.
- It is about the economy. The economy remains the single most compelling source of anxiety so we have to put our discussion about public transit investment in the context of jobs, and protecting neighborhoods - polling shows these bubbling to the top.
- Define what the real benefits for this region are so that voters and supporters know, understand and believe that what you’ve promised at the front end will come out the back end - that stakeholders will continue to be heard. Have these principles fully integrated into the process.

In 2012, 79% of the time, transit measures won at the ballot box.
Los Angeles Metro
Denny Zane, MoveLA
dennyzane@aol.com

LA Has New Mojo

We have parallel histories. Like Detroit, Los Angeles was noted for a widespread extensive rail transit system that was un-built, famously, in the 1950s. LA spent the next decades creating the market for Detroit’s product – the automobile.

“Los Angeles transit started in the 1980s. Kenny Hahn, a member of the LA board of Supervisors, led a charge that resulted in the Blue Line - downtown LA to Long Beach. Today it has 93,000 riders per day and is the busiest light rail in America. It resulted in the Green Line - one line begot another line. It happened in incremental manner - there wasn’t a comprehensive plan. But it provides an important lesson - there is no substitute for leadership!

“Even the biggest metropolises are really a series of small towns and neighborhoods each with its own leadership structure. If you learn how to coalesce the message in that framework with persistence and passion you can get to yes much more quickly. If you appear credible leadership will follow.”

“The story of Measure R is compelling - it was a moment of transformation - it begins incrementally and culminates in victory - a transformational victory like occurred in 2008. As you think about your course forward think, “We’re going to build upon moments of success and head toward our own moment of transformational victory. Two months before the 2008 vote the economy went off the cliff. But on November 8 voters voted 67.8% in favor of a ½¢ sales tax - $40 billion over 30 years. Leadership matters.

Pay attention to The America Fast Forward Program that’s percolating in Washington DC. The program accelerates transit projects - 30 years of projects in 10 years; instead of a $1 billion grant for 1 community we could provide $1 billion loans to 10 communities. When you bring a proposal to a community and they are all fighting about who’s going to be first or last in line, think about how much easier it would be if it’s 10 years instead of 30? It begins to feel real to all the voters.

In 2008, Los Angeles Metro accomplished the unthinkable: amid an economic recession, in a car-enthused region, the public overwhelmingly voted to tax itself for the next 30 years to improve the region’s transportation system. On voting day they had built a bus system they could be proud of, which was significant for the voters to have confidence that the institution could implement the long range plan. “By God, if Los Angeles can do it Detroit can, too.”
Dr. Leo Hanifin  
Professor, University of Detroit Mercy  
leo.hanifin@udmercy.edu

Dr. Hanifin is leading of a team of over 30 faculty members and students engaged in transit activities at UDM as part of the Mineta National Transit Research Coalition. For the past 11 months his team looked at factors that enable and inhibit regional transit in Metro Detroit; they looked first at similar regions around the country. Atlanta, Cleveland and St. Louis are similar to Metro Detroit with weakness in their downtowns and racial and city-suburb divides, but they had moved ahead faster than Metro Detroit and he wanted to find out why.

The team’s research includes media, public opinion, leadership, politics, funding, legal issues, economic development, equity and access. As our lunch speaker, Dr. Hanifin discussed leadership and politics stating, “It’s the heart of where we are today – to understand what it will take for all of us to be transit leaders and what political barriers are going to keep us from moving ahead as fast as we’d like.” He identified the Seven Lessons of Transit Success.

1. **Regional means regional**
   Transit systems need to serve all the people in the region - to get people to jobs, health care, education, and entertainment - and we need preferential treatment for those that are transit dependent. Counties in the St. Louis and Atlanta regions, where jobs are centered, have opted out of transit. “We need to fight opt-outs in Metro Detroit real hard.”

2. **Transit leadership and progress requires tenacity**
   - Transit leadership is not a sprint; it’s a marathon ride on a roller coaster. If you’re in it for the short term don’t bother.
   - Setbacks are going to happen. Good leaders learn to either take smaller steps or they reload for a bigger step. Defeat happens because consensus and collaboration are needed across the system. “We have to be better listeners in Metro Detroit,” said Hanifin. “There are good signs in the support for Cobo Hall, the Zoo, the DIA and the RTA legislation - they are all great signs - let’s keep at it.”

3. **Whoever is leading the transit system has to be a politically astute consensus-builder.**
   Cal Marsalla, CEO of the Denver RTD, opted for a petition drive for the Fast Tracks initiative because it built the ground game and brought supporters into the coalition. Marsalla also got all 30 Metro Mayors to endorse the project, hired CRL Advocates to test messages, and produced ads that were successful because they showed:
   - Where the lines were going to go
   - How much it was going to cost
   - Real people riding it
   - It reached out to the choice rider to broaden the appeal

   Fast Tracks passed and Denver’s currently building 119 miles of combined Light Rail and Bus Rapid Transit.

4. **Don’t let the perfect be the enemy of progress.**
   We are not all going to get the system we want. This is so critical – so many people want to draw a line in the sand and some people just like to fight. If you can bring people into the tent early contention can be kept to a minimum.
5. **Successful funding referenda have to have a good ground game.**

St. Louis had a great combination – good synergy. Metro [transit] couldn’t advocate, but Citizens for Modern Transit (CMT) could so they coordinated their programs, with Metro doing education and CMT doing advocacy. They sliced the community into 12 dimensions (business, labor, education, health care,) that grouped 200 organizations or entities. They rated each organization: - Are they actively against the referendum? Do they need to understand the proposal better? Are they ‘for’ it, but are not vocal? Are they vocal, but not endorsing it? People were assigned to each organization to help move them along. It’s a lot of work - it’s like a political campaign.

6. **Transit planning is not simple or easy.**

Transit planning needs to be led by transit professionals, but all stakeholders need to be involved. The RTA’s Citizens Advisory Council and all the Metro Detroit Transit Workshop attendees are the start of a movement that’s dedicated to the engagement of stakeholders.

The unsuccessful referendum in Atlanta took four years. They started with regional planners and transit professionals working together to develop the 2008 Concept Three Regional Transit Vision. They pitched it to the legislature who came out with the Transportation Improvement Act; they went to the community to ask what people wanted; they built a big book of requests then took them away because it was too expensive. That process created a lot of bad feelings.

The T.V. ad, ‘Let’s Untie the Knot’, had some problems.
- There were no real people in it
- The messages were vague
- The referenced improvements to MARTA had no specifics costs
- They suggested only general ways people’s lives might be better

An opposition ad, ‘Heads up Georgia’ produced by the Tea Party, projected fear and suggested that the referendum was a vote for something that would never go away.

We need to be prepared for, and ahead of, this kind of negative message.

7. **Transit leaders come from everywhere.**

Every citizen is a potential transit leader. The CEO of the Cleveland Clinic and a heart surgeon made a commercial that said, “I am pleased to report that the Euclid Avenue artery is well on its way to recovery – it’s great for the heart of the city.” Cleveland turned a street like our Woodward Avenue into a thriving asset with BRT and by co-branding it the Health Line with the slogan - “It’s not a bus, it’s not a train, it’s our future.”

Where does that leave Metro Detroit? Back to consensus - we need communication and cooperation or the region is going to be hindered.”

“...the Euclid Avenue artery is well on its way to recovery – it’s great for the heart of the city”. 
Successes, Failures and Lessons Learned

Tom Shrout, Avvantt Partners, St. Louis, MO

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Metro Transit
- The City of St. Louis MO (its own county)
- St. Louis County, MO
- St. Clair County, IL

Voters passed a sales tax increase to support transit in 1974, in 1993 (for Metrolink), in 1994 (on the heels of Metrolink, which was wildly successful), and in 1997. But an increase would not to be seen again for more than 10 years. The tax to expand Metrolink in 2008 failed…but it came back in 2010. There were many challenges to overcome!

- There were service cuts and perceived trouble at Metro.
- It was a tough climate to raise money.
- The issue was polling at 53%. Advisors want 60%.
- The business community said this wasn’t the time.

Citizens for Modern Transit recruited Good Champions
- John Nations, Chair
  Mayor of a local community and a Republican
- Don Suggs
  Publisher of St. Louis leading African American newspaper
- Mark Wrighton
  Chancellor of Washington University

“We figured some people would do a lot, some people would do some things, and some people would fall down on the job. But I took the view that, as long as they stayed on message, whatever got done was more than I was going to be able to accomplish on my own.”

Lessons Learned
- Hire consultants with transit experience.
- Involve those who care most about transit.
- Let the people in the community make the case, not the transit agency.
- Involve all groups early to foster buy-in and commitment - don’t assume a group has been asked.
- Not-for-profit funding of an education campaign can make the difference.

One woman came to some of the coalition meetings - she was involved in children’s issues; she didn’t want to knock on doors, she didn’t want to phone bank, but one day she asked me to talk to her group. In the room were the leaders of 50 social service child advocacy organizations – I walked out of the room with 50 endorsements – so she did her thing. She knew what she could do and she did it. That happened over and over again, volunteers coming through with simple assignments.
Successes, Failures and Lessons Learned, cont’d
Che Watkins, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, Atlanta, GA
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The Referendum
- Led by the business community
- 1 cent sales tax for a 10 year term
- Took 4 years to get a bill passed to allow it
- Sales tax excluded motor rule, energy, groceries
- Governor finally created a plan to do it
- Elected officials picked the projects
- 1st regional tax in Georgia
- State divided into 12 regions
- 46% of state’s population lives in Atlanta region.
- They had to get to 5 million people

The Project Selection Process
- Started with $32 billion in projects
- Elected officials from 10 counties whittled it down
- Went from $32 - $8 million (half transit/half roads)
- ‘Whittling’ took from summer to fall 2011
- Projects taken off, projects put on
- 157 projects - $6.1 billion. 52% transit/48% roads
  - $1.1 billion to local governments
  - $600m to MARTA
  - $600 to the Beltline project
  - New light rail + 2 major BRT corridors.

The First Friday Coalition
- Started meeting in August 2012
- 150 members – some advocates, some educators
- 300 companies assigned a person to the project
- They had a big coalition and a diverse network
- Baseline polling showed they had a huge challenge
- Message was the economic impact and jobs.
- Raised $9 million dollars
- Did targeted mailing, social media, broadcast TV

The Perfect Storm
- NAACP, Sierra Club and Tea Party opposition
- Huge lack of trust in government
- Can’t trust were money will go
- Can’t trust it will end in 10 years
- Can’t trust who’s going to dole out the money
- Lack of trust in government and institutions
- Large diverse region
- 157 projects to explain to people
- Very divergent needs and wants
- No obvious champions for entire region

We lost 63% - 37% - The Reflection
- 10 county regions way to big
- Project too complicated to distill into sound bites
- Too many divergent needs
- Tax too expensive? 1¢ was a lot to swallow
- Election Day - July 31 in the middle of the summer

When Metro Detroit goes through this...
- Research the best time for our area.
- Look at who are voters are going to be.
- Engage citizens – invite everyone to the table!

“In Atlanta everyone’s lives are organized around traffic – every day, every week – what time do I need to leave the house? What time do I have to leave to get my kids to the soccer game? It’s not natural – that’s what they were trying to get across to people!”
Successes, Failures and Lessons Learned, cont’d

Randy Rentschler, Director Metropolitan Transportation Commission
rrentschler@mtc.ca.gov

“Public Transit forces us to tame the car. The car is a great thing – you want to have one. It’s like beer - I like to have a beer, too, but seven is too many - if you have too many drinks the party gets ugly real fast. The car is like that. You have to figure out how to live in harmony with this great thing but you can’t let it get out of control - if it gets out of control you can’t have a community that’s livable.”

The Bay Area has 7 million people, is 7000 square miles, includes 9 counties and 101 cities—the Bay Area is really a group of homeowners associations with mayors.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission started on the path we’re on in 1970’s but they had great advantage – they had dedicated funding source and a strong sense of independence. “We started there”, said Rentschler, “you need to get there.”

Winston Churchill said, “The Yanks will show up and they will do the right thing but only after they’ve exhausted all the other alternatives. That describes my home state of Michigan.”

One Bay Area

“One Bay Area – it’s a place in which to rally with a sense of joint identity.

Metro Detroit needs to get past the history I remember – it can be achieved.”

“Metropolitan regions are the fundamental drivers of the economy with 12% of the land. That’s what Southeast Michigan is. His board comes to the table from small towns knowing that they are part of a metro region. You are part of Metro America. Cities need the suburbs – suburbs are incomplete without the city. That’s our biggest challenge.”
Next Steps for Transit in Metro Detroit
Art Guzzetti, American Public Transit Association
aguzzetti@apta.com

The question most frequently asked of the American Public Transit Association is, “How can we organize transit in a regional way?” They are right to ask that very important question - that’s the way economies work and that’s the way transit should work – regionally.

“A report will be released on June 13, 2013 by the Free Congress Foundation, a conservative Washington DC think tank, which will say that any American region that wants to be appealing to businesses and to grow and prosper has to do it around transit. There’s no way looking forward that it can be done otherwise.

The public is voting with its feet and with its wallets – the public’s been doing that for the last 17 years.

The last 49 out of 62 times people went to the ballot box they said ‘YES’ we want transit in our community and we’re willing to pay more for it. All of these efforts started with self-help.

Nationwide transit is a 57 billion business. Every day 36 million boarding it is a big deal. It happens as a partnership – a four legged stool - federal, state, local, private - everyone has to lift a little bit of the weight.

“I like Denny Zane’s observation - be careful of the 30 year plan. It outlives the politician and most people – make sure there are the short term deliverables.”

“Listen carefully to Jason Jordon,” said Guzzetti. “Make sure the public understands what they are buying and feels connected to it.”

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“Transportation: Engine for Growth”

“Our current area of transportation research? How transportation road and public transportation networks foster the economic growth of the metropolitan region.

We wished to demonstrate why a good public transportation system is essential in the making of metropolitan regions (including suburban communities) attractive and economically healthy.

Free Congress Foundation

Next Steps drawn by Megan Owens
Breakout Groups

After dispelling myths about transit in Metro Detroit; grappling with barriers, real and perceived; hearing from speakers about their successes and failures, five breakout groups addressed the Mega-Question and the What, Who and How.

- What will consensus look like?
- Who is responsible for it?
- How will it get done?

**BREAKOUT GROUP 1**

**What** Develop an updated transit plan.

**Who** Regional Transit Authority and local public officials, users, workers and the general public

**How** Recruit Champions – people who are trusted messengers and have influence with various groups

**BREAKOUT GROUP 2**

**What** Establish trust of the RTA throughout the region
- Establish a communications committee; establish transparency
- Develop public awareness campaign with a (c) 4 advocacy group + (c) 3 to educate
- Make sure the plan’s a product of the community, gets workers to jobs, and addresses concerns of the region

**Who** RTA with support from all of us

**How** Develop a comprehensive earned media campaign.
- Find commonalities within the region; find labor consensus; strive for large community buy-in

**BREAKOUT GROUP 3 & 4**

**What** Have a clear shared vision of what our region should look like (example is Detroit Future City).
- Develop a clear description of regional transit; coordinate current systems.
- Create a regional plan that’s defined as four counties + the city of Detroit.
- Develop trust in the process and the mechanics of getting the system up and running by delivering quality services, audits and reviews; develop positive images.
- Ensure the RTA hires competent transit professionals. **Stop doing the wrong things!**

**Who** A representative group i.e. representatives of regional geography; City of Windsor

**BREAKOUT GROUP 5**

**What** Explain the facts clearly and simply – how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time!
- Engage youth – a large number of students to disseminate information in every way they can

**Who** Transportation professionals + advocates to develop talking points

**How** Engage a media relations firm (transportation facts can be boring and jargon filled).
- Distill facts and get them into a digestible form.
- Build trust. Listen to the people and listen to the opposition. Know the opposition.
- Use traditional and non-traditional champions including athletes and business leaders.

“There was lots of overlap and consensus – that might mean we are headed in the right direction!”

29 votes The RTA must establish trust throughout the region.
21 votes The RTA must develop a shared transit vision with coordination and strong champions.

Link to MDTW Video [http://youtu.be/Qr2QOiofpUo](http://youtu.be/Qr2QOiofpUo)
Advocacy + the Nuts and Bolts of Transit Campaigns
Marnie Obrien Primmer, Executive Director, Mobility 21, Irvine, CA
Chair of the National Alliance of Public Transit Advocates

Mobility 21 is a seven-county coalition representing 21 million Americans in Southern California. It is a public private partnership of transit providers and leading business groups whose main mission is to bring increased funding to all modes of transportation in Southern California.

The region was doing a lot of infighting. “We were our own worst enemy when it came to attracting funding for transportation in Southern California,” said Primmer. “Our Senators asked us to get our act together so that they could help us. Oftentimes we have an ‘ABC’ way of thinking, which means ‘Anywhere But California’ when it comes to getting money from Washington DC.”

Mobility 21 is multi-modal because they know they can’t build their way out of congestion; millions of people in Southern California need transportation alternatives.

The Automobile Club of Southern California is an active supporter of transit; they value transit as a benefit to motorists. Californians like the freedom of being able to choose but they like it even more when their neighbor chooses transit so we can be in our car by ourselves. Never overlook the value of self-interest!

Mobility 21 works with the MPO (SCAG), transportation agencies, the business community, contractors who are creating jobs that a capital investment in transportation supports, and the community that’s going to benefit from having a safe, reliable and affordable transportation system. There are rural and suburban areas outside Los Angeles who are making strides bringing increased commuter rail, streetcars, and BRT systems to our region.

“Mobility 21 is successful,” said Primmer, “because members come to the table wearing their Mobility 21 hats. They are there to work for the common purpose. All of their decisions are informed by their association with their individual groups but there is a fierce commitment to consensus building within Mobility 21 – give and take is very important to the process.”

Big takeaway from the Workshop...
Failure is temporary but transit is forever!

The key points Ito take away from the Workshop
■ Build trust at every level
■ We are our best resource
■ Don’t be afraid to fail and to try new things
■ Detroit could be one of the best examples of trying new things and comebacks.
The Practical Side of Campaigning – The Coalition

Tom Shrout
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Step 1 ▶ Identify Broad Categories of People within the Region

- Identify broad categories or communities of organizations that could be involved in a transit coalition. For example, list ‘Higher Education’ not ‘University of Detroit Mercy’; ‘Healthcare’, not ‘Beaumont Hospital’.
- This list, when populated, will help pull together and identify the broad coalition.
- Remember that everyone wants to be invited to the table.
- You cannot be too specific.
- This list is important because in a low budget campaign you have to have volunteers.

Faith based
Recreation
Labor unions
Utility companies
Neighborhood Association
Environmental groups
Transportation advocates
Chambers of Commerce
Ethnic groups (NAACP, Hispanic groups)
Local government
Immigrant groups
Foundations
Civic groups
Public Health Organizations

Entertainment/hospitality
Sports teams
Convention and visitors bureau
Disabled community
Landscaper Architects and Planners
Education
Political parties
Casinos
Health care
Riders
Service providers – aging and disability
Health care
Professional associations
Community Service Associations

Youth groups
Senior groups
Neighborhood associations
Local government
Economic developers
Consumers groups
Bushiness associations
Youth groups,
Cycling organizations
Developers
Auto Clubs and Insurers
Transit providers, public and private
Media
Architects and Engineers

Step 2 ▶ Identify Specific Groups within each Category

- Organize the list of categories into specific groups or organizations - Education, Transportation, Business, Sports
- Under each category list specific educational institutions, transportation groups, business organizations, sports teams

Educational Institutions  Transportation Advocates  Business Associations  Sports Teams
UDM  TRU  Detroit Regional Chamber  Tigers
Charter schools  MOSES  Small Business Association  Lions
K-12  Trans4m  Southwest Business Solutions  Pistons
Community Colleges  Michigan Fitness  Local Chambers  Red Wings

Step 3 ▶ Identify Specific People and Champions within each Group (Workhorses and Show horses)

- Continue to populate the list by identifying specific people (the name of a real person) within each organization that can be the contact person for that organization or category.
- In this step you should identify any obvious Champions in each category. Is there a Workhorse (Assistant to the President) or a Show horse (The President) for each category? You will need both.

Coalitions are messy. People come and go; some people work, others don’t; some people will not come to meetings. Eventually you want some person from each group who’s responsible for ensuring the people in their category get new information. It will take time to populate the list. Share it with other groups to see if there are people that you missed. Put it in Google Docs and the list will grow and grow. But ultimately someone will have to be in charge.
Messaging for Transit Referenda

Kyle Curtis, R & R Partners, Salt Lake City, UT
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R & R Partners are the advertising agency for the Utah Transit Agency (UTA) but work on transit coast to coast.

Successful Referendum and Ballot Initiatives

Every referendum is unique but there are things that work and things that if you don’t do you can be pretty sure your referendum are not going to work.

- **Start early.** The best time to win a transit referendum is when you’re not in the middle of the referendum. If you can get people appreciating transit a year or two in advance you can be ready to win when it comes up.

- **Give people ownership of the system.** People can’t view transit as something for someone else.
  
  ✓ Convince transit non-riders. They pull “Some of Us Ride It - All of Us Need It”, the St. Louis slogan, through all the work they do. Put transit in terms that people hadn’t thought of before. “UTA takes enough cars off the road to fill a three lane highway for 80 miles.”

- **The transit agency always has to have a vision.** You need to be working toward something. The public must share your vision. [http://www.transitworksforus.org/](http://www.transitworksforus.org/) It doesn’t have to be TV; the Kansas plan was spelled out in 10 paragraphs.

- **Makes sure people trust you.** Trust is a difficult thing to maintain; it’s affected by everything. Does the agency have their act together? Are they using funds correctly? You need a regular ridership message.

- **Why should I care? Why now?**
  
  In Charlotte, NC, congestion is a problem. They put one billboard next to the biggest bottleneck, starting with a simple message. They changed it every week, ending with. “If the transit tax is repealed you’ll have more time to read wordy billboards with longer messages that ramble on and on while you sit in traffic with nothing better to do.” It was simple and cost effective. It answered the question about why now and why should I care.

- **It’s always better to have someone else tell the story about how great you are.** US World and News Report ranked Salt. Lake City #2 for Transit (not UTA). Business leaders talked about it and did seven TV spots; they were only going to do two but it became a competition!

- **The transit agency always has to have a vision.** If possible, pre-empt them. In Charlotte, the perception was that the light rail line was a boondoggle. They got two Mayors who disliked each other to talk about why they support transit. You can stop people’s arguments before they even start.

- **Riding transit is a social experience.** A small group of people engaged in social media can really make a difference. The St. Louis student group, the Washington University social media team, was the main key to success – they responded to every tweet!
Valley Metro – I Rode the Bus

Valley Metro (Phoenix) had to cut 30% of their service and were getting beat up in media. They wanted to grow their ridership but didn’t have any money.

There are a lot of local bands in the region, all with good social media. R and R’s research showed that a lot people didn’t know how to ride the bus so we decided to teach them using these local bands. We did a casting call; we told them the four points we wanted them to make and asked them to write the best song they could. The winner would be put in an animated video. We gave them $100 for the first demo. If we liked their song we gave them $1,000 and got them into a studio. It was a great opportunity for local bands and inexpensive for Valley Metro. In the end we produced a series of 8 videos that had a huge impact for just a little money.

See more at: http://www.valleymetro.org/notes/topic/ridebuswls#sthash.9gVPZ1ZX.dpuf

Question: How do you figure out the couple of messages that will be the most resonant?

Answer: Do focus groups, just talk to people. In Kansas City they told everyone at the ad agency they didn’t have a car for a couple of weeks – everyone rode the bus and talked to people. They did focus groups and telephone surveys to see if they were on the right track – once you find the truth the message become obvious.

Link to I Rode the Bus Video
http://youtu.be/K-CxDZlgWfg

The band in the “I Rode the Bus” video
Lessons from Transit Campaigns

Jason Jordan, Center for Transportation Excellence
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The Center for Transportation Excellence (CFTE) is the clearinghouse for local and statewide transit campaigns. They promulgate the ideas that work, and learn from ideas that don’t. “Your challenge,” said Jordan, “is to refine these ideas into the very specific context of Metro Detroit.”

The Coalition
There is no substitute for coalition building and public engagement. You can run a great air campaign but at some point you need a good ground game to do the daily pieces the campaign requires. Identifying the coalition is an important foundational piece – you can’t do the things on the laundry list unless you’ve built a strong one.

The Asset Inventory
One of the first things to do is to ask people in the coalition:
- What information assets do you already have?
- Which assets are underway?
- Which ones are already funded?
Before you go into the field with a poll, sit down and find out what everyone’s doing. Catalogue it! It if isn’t written down it doesn’t exist.

Do pre-campaign education and outreach over an extended period of time
- Communicate what the RTA and transit providers are doing.
- Be mindful of the importance of reputation management.
- Engage the public early so they understand what everyone’s doing.

Put specific value and benefit proposition behind everything you do.
- Identify values to the region. It’s tempting to talk broadly about the benefits transit provides, but ultimately you have to be talk narrowly about what people will see, feel and experience as a result of the investment you are asking them to make.
- It speaks to transparency and accountability–transit providers are being entrusted with tax dollars.
- Being able to quickly and readily list out for people what they are buying is incredibly important and will inform all other decisions you are going to make
- There is a dance that has to happen between the public agency and the campaign. If it’s not a coordinated and choreographed dance with a nice sequence of activities, a lot of extra money can get spent. Everyone has to be aware of their distinct, complimentary roles.
- Get strong champions – have a roster. Think broadly about the assets they bring. Businesses are effective with some audiences, sports figures with others. Polling can help you figure out on who will resonate with different groups.

Information and fundraising
- Do early polling to establish baselines data.
- Build in intervals so you can figure out what’s working or not working. You can’t make strategic decisions without it.
- Polling ensures that everyone is working from a standard baseline of how people feel about various operations.
- Test individual messages.

“You are now moving to a point where there are a host of coalition operational decisions you need to be making.
- Structurally - how are we going to organize yourselves
- Who’s going to be responsible for the various pieces of the coalition plan
- What’s the point and purpose and what we are trying to achieve?

“The challenge of having lots of different organizations coming together and having a conversation - in the end everyone feels good about it but no one takes responsibility for it. You know we need a coalition - now make the specific decision to make it a reality.”

“Coalitions don’t manage themselves – somebody, somewhere has to wake up every single day and feel like it’s part of their responsibility to move this ball forward or else the ball won’t move. forward.”
The business community typically plays a vital role. It’s different in different places.
- They bring the money.
- They can be vital for credibility.
- It is a business group, individual or key sector that makes all the difference.

You need a plan to develop a specific engagement strategy for key constituencies.
- Segment the strategy to meet constituents where they are.
- A Detroit strategy might be different that suburban strategy – with different spokespeople. The message can even change between neighborhoods.

Identify values of the region
- Discover how people want the region to grow and prosper over time so you can start to wrap the benefits of transit around what they value – a structure people already have. It’s not just a ‘ROI strategy’ but what makes people tick.

Social media is hugely important. We can learn a lot from candidate elections. The tweets flowing from today’s Workshop shows we know how it works!

Knit together the air game and the ground game. In Atlanta the two things got a little separate and just didn’t work well. In St. Louis is worked well.

There are professional critics. They are paid by interest groups who do nothing but go around tearing down pro-transit arguments; they are familiar arguments but you have to decide how proactive you want to be.

Build strategy around local context. Politically and economically - how does our effort fit in? Take the time to analyze the context.

For this coalition - the Metro Detroit coalition - transit is the most important thing but for others - for many of the groups we need on our side - transit might be one component of their larger vision. We have to figure out how to make transit feel like a legitimate part of what they are trying to figure out.

The goals isn’t to try to make transit advocacy everybody’s core mission. One of the ways you build trust is by demonstrating that you are trying to advance what they already believe in, and a vehicle for that is transit.

Get professional support – successful campaigns don’t run themselves!

We have the Burden of Yes. The political scientists tell you that the default vote for ballot campaign is ‘no’. No is the status quo – pulling the yes’ lever means change. It’s always easier to run a ‘no’ campaign - if there’s doubt, if people are confused it’s easier to vote no. Even ‘yes’ for renewal is a different hurdle than new tax for new investment. By accepting that challenge we have a special burden is to get people to ‘yes’.

Polling
Hire people who know what they are doing - don’t try to do it yourself.

It’s tempting and easy to get into a room like this with people who are committed and engaged and begin throwing out messages that resonate to us but may not resonate with the people you are trying to move once you actually get out and test them.

At some point poll likely voters - people who are going to show up to vote. Surveys help but if the respondents aren’t going to vote it skews information when it comes to a campaign.

Early polling doesn’t minimize other kinds of information gathering. Surveys and polls are needed to produce the mosaic of information needed to come up with a larger profile.

If you we are talking to partners who are polling regularly insert two or three questions about transit as a cost effective way to continue to build our information base.

UDM and TRU are doing a survey that might be preliminary to a poll. The pilot project is a survey of public opinion with 315 respondents. In the fall they are going to do a much more comprehensive survey with at least 800 respondents, which will help us with polling later on.
How it’s done in Grand Rapids

Bill Kirk, Public Outreach Coordinator, The Rapids
billkirk@ridetherapid.org

The Rapids is Grand Rapids/Kent County’s six-city regional transit system. Before 2000 it was the Grand Rapids Area Transit Authority (GRATA) providing extremely limited service. The Mayors of 5 cities agreed to support a property tax increase to improve transit and to form an authority. The result? Ridership increased from 4.5 million to 11.9 in 2013. Improved transit filled in large latent demand.

The Millage Votes

- 2000 - To form an authority and tax themselves  **Successful**
- 2003 and 2007 - Millage renewals and an increase packaged around service enhancements. **Successful**
- 2009 - Millage renewal and an increase to fund new BRT system. **THEY LOST BY 1,300 VOTES. 😞**

The Problem

- Difficult messaging - BRT was only going through 3 of the 6 communities
- Bus Rapid Transit was new in Michigan.
- The short timeline allowed for a very easy ‘No’ campaign.

Regrouping - The Transit Master Plan

The agency got smart. They hadn’t solicited public opinion to see if the public was ready for BRT; they had done what they thought was good for the community. The agency established a long term planning process and engaged the community by forming a citizen’s stakeholder group who met every month to craft the Comprehensive Transit Master Plan (click on image to view). The board adopted it in 2010; the public took ownership.

THE 2010 CAMPAIGN

They asked for .35 mil increase in May, 2010. It was a heavy lift. They had a 90 day campaign, 6 months after the rise of the Tea Party. Transit was the issue all galvanized all advocacy groups – students to business leaders.

The Opposition - Kent County Families for Fiscal Responsibility

A small but vocal and organized minority was led by their State Representative, Dave Agema. They put their information out under **ITP Watch** (Interurban Transit Partnership - the technical name of The Rapid). The media considered them to be the credible opposition despite untruths. The Grand Rapids press loved the conflict - every press release got a story - if Friends of Transit wasn’t there to combat it became the story.

The headlines read...

“The Rapids Needs Efficiency and Transparency Not a Tax Hike”.
“Supporters of Rapid Tax Troll for Support from Grand Rapids Public School Board.”

Friends of Transit

Formed in 2000, they provided structure and buy-in; they can raise money and ask people to vote ‘Yes’. The media was used to hearing from them **BUT** the opposition was more interesting. Friends of Transit planned for it.
Third Party Advocates
Retired Congressman Vern Ehlers helped assemble a group of business leaders. They needed facts to raise their Transit IQ. The Rapid took them to events and did presentations and they turned into powerful advocates who still meet a couple times a year.

Symbols
This became the ubiquitous symbol.

Social Media, TV and Transit 101
Discussion and debates on Facebook showed there was momentum. It also showed there were more of us than them. If you provide your supporters with the facts and the right information they will stand up for you. TV coverage works the same way. Rapid Growth Media - Grand Rapids equivalent of Model D - printed their information. Conduct Transit 101. Teach people - inform your supporters of the facts.

The opposition was not done yet
IPT Watch got the city of Walker to get an issue on the ballot in November, 2012 to vote themselves out of The Rapid. 73% of voters in Walker said they didn’t want to leave the authority despite the fact that they usually vote against tax increases.

The Lesson
The Friends of Transit network didn’t go to sleep after the 2010 election. When the city of Walker issue came up they didn’t have to scramble to defend it – it was a reactivation of an existing coalition.

Every little teeny thing you do matters.
THEY WON BY 136 VOTES.

- Be out there all the time.
- Talk about how good your service is and what you’re doing to make lives better for the people in the region.
- Make the press get sick of you – make sure they have the facts you want them to use.
- Increase the region’s Transit IQ. The supporters get it but you have to educate the rest of the people.
- Engage community members so the transit plan is not seen as a product of planners in a conference room.
- Let people plan their own transit system – get them to have ownership of it. Push the RTA towards that sort of planning process.

Spend time increasing the region’s Transit IQ. When you get outside this room [of advocates] you have to educate the people who are busy leading their lives. Engage community members so it’s not some planners in a conference room plotting – let people plan their own transit system and get them to have ownership of it. The more you can push the RTA towards that sort of planning process the more buy in you’ll have from the community.
The Benzie Bus Keeps Rolling

Joe Maue, Chair, Benzie Bus Yes
http://www.mauedesign.com/contact/

The Coalition, Friends of Benzie Bus, was established in 2006 for the election that established the transit authority. “You are looking at the core of it,” said Maue. “There were four people to start - two riders, the ‘relentless guy’, and me, the ‘marketing guy’.”

The renewal election was held in May of 2011, in a Tea Party climate. There is a mistrust of government in Benzie County. And in northern Michigan it’s very cold in May so they had an enthusiasm gap.

When they campaigned in August 2006 they had college students at home and tons of volunteers. Joe was the ‘pain in the ass’ guy in that campaign. So when the renewal came along they asked him to run the campaign. Because the campaign was in May they didn’t have any numbers, which became a significant problem. There are only 13,000 people in Benzie County, but he was only one guy. So, you can plan, plan, plan, but things happen – a lack of volunteers was one of them.

“Love thy enemies and pray for the people who persecute you.”

Joe didn’t understand what that line from the Bible meant until there was a scathing letter to the editor published in late February, 2011. The letter was littered with inaccuracies; the writer didn’t understand transit funding. He thought bus funding came from the general fund and should be spent on public safety. He also happened to be the Tea Party candidate for the 2nd Congressional District, so he had a following that allowed people to see the other side of the debate. The campaign’s biggest problem? They were not getting bus employees to support the campaign. He thought they were natural advocates but none were showing up at the meetings. 30 jobs had been created after the 2006 campaign, but he couldn’t just walk into the bus garage and ask them to join the coalition.

“Some of the stuff that happened was ridiculous. We had a huge freak wind storm. Our investment was in yard signs and they were all blowing away! I drove around the county searching for them, posting on Facebook asking for help (the Facebook page now has 100 likes – before the campaign it had 97 so you know they were dealing with an older demographic).

After the letter the meetings doubled in size

He finally knew what they were up against and that fear helped motivate the coalition. They used it as a rallying cry, so they worked even harder. They did ‘Transit Thursday’ emails profiling riders and partners; they passed out flyers at the post offices; they did phone banks. All of this was part of the plan.

“The great thing about campaigns and involving people in the process,” said Joe, “is that new people eventually show up.”

The scathing letter happened in February; people started showing up in March including a problem volunteer who wanted to change the entire campaign on a dime (Joe was that guy in the 2006 campaign so he knew ‘that guy’ was coming).

Having the plan makes it easier to deal with ‘that guy’ when he shows up. They stressed why transit is important. They had two outlays of money - lawn signs and the big mail piece that encompassed everything they thought made up Benzie County - businesses, community leaders, riders and hospitals, and they told individual success stories (getting to the hospital for dialysis is a big deal in Benzie County). They had ‘Vote Yes Today’ flyers, and they held a rally, where Joe earned a lesson about public relations.
Public Relations – The Lesson

He was desperate toward the end of the campaign to get some TV coverage. Benzie County gets beat up a lot in the Traverse City market. He called the TV station to tell them there was going to be a rally. They held the rally in the middle of the day at the senior center. The reporter asked him how many people would be there. Joe didn’t know but he said, “At least 100.” (They didn’t even have 100 Facebook likes!). The TV station came to the rally. Then he learned another lesson: They interviewed him for 10 minutes; he was getting out all the talking points - all the ways transit helps - but what quote did they use? They asked him “How do you think you’ll use the bus?” “My answer,” said Joe “was totally arbitrary – it had none of the messaging and that’s the story they ran.” The twofold lesson:

- Stay on message and never answer the question that was asked.
- Don’t give numbers.

The night before the election he used a projector to cover his entire house with Benzie Vote Yes! He didn’t know if he’d gone too far but the next day the Clerk asked if that was his house all lit up, so he felt vindicated! It was a great shtick.

One of the board members on the authority started coming to the [campaign] meetings and was an ardent Tea Party supporter, but she got to see the usefulness of the bus - her brother is losing his eyesight - so the bus became very important to them. By engaging her they were able to stop a lot of the Tea Party messages.

They had excellent turnout and a convincing 3 - 1 victory

3,000 people turned out for the election. There was an election in Kalkaska County that day. Kalkaska County is about the same size as Benzie County; Kalkaska County had 1,000 who showed up to vote. If there’s anything the campaign took from the election - that he took ownership over - was the turnout. They really worked hard as advocates.

What happened with the guy who wrote the letter?

He met with the Executive Director of the transit authority who explained transit funding; the letter became an issue for him when he ran in the Primary for County Sheriff in 2012. The letter was the rallying cry for the opposition. He won the race but he had to write a letter to the editor saying that he liked the bus and respected the decision of the voters. Now he’s one of Joe’s clients; he’s’ doing a website for the Benzie County Sheriff’s Department.

Transit is all about sharing;
Sharing the experience,
Sharing tax burdens,
Sharing an experience on earth.

Campaign basics – tell stories. ‘The Friends of Benzie Bus need your stories about the Benzie Bus and what it means to you as an individual, family, organization, or company. We will use your stories to help paint a picture of the past 5 years of bus service in Benzie County and secure a YES! Vote on May 3, 2011.’
Questions, Answers and Random Comments

**Question to Denny Zane by Larry Krieg:** Explain what you meant when you said that rail broadens the political base.

*Denny Zane:*

The thing about a rail line is that it’s a highly visible thing with highly visible stations so it broadens the base of people that perceive themselves as beneficiaries. Bus lines are everywhere, which in some ways means they are not anywhere – it doesn’t have the community identity rail stations have. You can mobilize support within a ½ mile - rail stations give lots of perceived up sides for people who might not otherwise vote for the measure.

*Che Watkins*

Avoid ‘opt in-opt out’; that’s how they got MARTA. There was a five county vote and two counties opted out, which meant there has not been enough money to really run the system well.

*Tom Shrout*

Think carefully about the organizational structure of the coalition. Find out how to put together this group as a legal entity.

*Randy Rentchler*

Before you get the privilege of losing an election remember that it’s going to be a long trip. Don’t be frustrated by how long it’s going to take. LA is a good example.

**Question:** We heard about different ways to pay for transit – what is the best practice?

*Che Watkins:*

Sales tax but you have to be careful about the number of exemptions

*Randy Rentchler*

Regionalism is so important but there is nothing about regionalism in our government and about how we construct it to effectively compete. But we have to do it anyway.

**Question:** How did different groups assist the campaign?

*Tom Shrout: In St. Louis the SEIU (Service Employees International Union) had access to the VAN (Voter Access Network). They had a ton of data on the voters. They produced overlays i.e. Sierra Club, bike people, etc. Then we to tried to ID them. If they were ‘Yes’ votes we didn’t bother them. In 2008 there was no ground game. They had to compete with for Obama and they did not have access to the VAN.*

*Tom Shrout*

I’m not sure I believe that a November election is good; they couldn’t blast through the presidential election in 2008. If you are going to have a low voter turnout election you need to have a low voter strategy.

*Che Watkins*

If you are the only thing on the ballot you can’t run a low voter election.

**Question:** It seems like the Sierra Club/NAACP are natural allies – why did they oppose the transit campaign in Atlanta?

*Che Watkins: I think we took the NAACP vote for granted and, for the Sierra Club, the road improvements were too much to bear even though there were transit improvements, too.*

**Question:** How do you figure out the couple of messages that will be the most resonant?

*Kyle Curtis: Do focus groups, just talk to people. In Kansas City they told everyone at the ad agency they didn’t have a car for a couple of weeks – everyone rode the bus and talked to people. The did focus groups and telephone surveys to see if they were on the right track – once you find the truth the message become obvious.*
**Question:** The issue that always gets raised has to do with long term investment in reputation management. How did UTA make the decision to do reputation management – to advertise even when there’s no campaign?

**Kyle Curtis:** UTA realized that running ads had a 3-5% direct impact on ridership – that clearly outweighs the money they spent on advertisements.

**Question:** Do you have any specific suggestions that you have seen work in other campaigns that you have seen work to build that trust, to establish a shared vision?

**Jason Jordon:** That’s part of the early work this coalition is going to need to do. There is a tangible example from Baton Rouge. The community had real challenges – the transit agency had terrible approval ratings and it was a sharply divide community along racial and class lines and because of immigration from Hurricane Katrina.

There was significant pressure from various sources but they knew they needed to go to ballot to make a needed investment in transit. No one trusted the other to come up with a solution so the Mayor, a big transit supporter, knew he wasn’t the best spokesperson. He set up a blue ribbon commission; people were put on the panel that came out with a report and the report became the vehicle for engaging the community in conversation. As a result, some groups used the report to organize around – to really do deep community engagement. Things began to emerge around a document that wasn’t seen as particularly political or written by one interest group or another – there was less fighting about a half penny or whole penny, or which line would come first – there was a consensus that there needed to be something.

There is a core lesson - it’s about giving people a genuine opportunity to be engaged and being very cognizant about who’s driving and owning the conversation. That’s very important in the trust building exercise.

For this coalition - the Metro Detroit coalition - transit is the most important thing but for others - for many of the groups we need on our side - transit might be one component of their larger vision. We have to figure out how to make groups figure out how to make transit feel like a legitimate part of what they are trying to figure out.

The goal isn’t to try to make transit advocacy everybody’s core mission. One of the ways you build trust is by demonstrating that you are trying to advance what they already believe in and a vehicle for that is transit.
Presenters

Paul Hillegonds
Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs and Communication, DTE Energy Co ⬤ Detroit MI
Chairman, Regional Transit Authority ⬤ Metro Detroit
Paul Hillegonds was appointed by Governor Rick Snyder to Chair the recently formed Regional Transit Authority for Metro Detroit. Mr. Hillegonds has been Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs and Communications at DTE Energy Co. since May, 2005; he oversees its Governmental Relations effort at the local, state and federal levels as well as external and internal communications. Mr. Hillegonds served in the Michigan House of Representatives from 1979 – 1996 serving as Republican Leader, Co-Speaker of the House and Speaker of the House. From 1997 – 2005 he served as president of Detroit Renaissance, a non-profit, civic organization comprising SE Michigan business leaders. He has been the recipient of numerous honors during his career including Governing Magazine’s 1984 Public Official of the Year and was named Michiganian of the Year by the Detroit News in 1996. Mr. Hillegonds earned a law degree from Thomas Cooley law School and a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Michigan.

Toby Barlow
Creative Director, Team Detroit ⬤ Detroit, MI
Toby began his career at Hal Riney & Partners in San Francisco working on the Saturn car account. Over nine years, he produced more than 56 commercials for the little car from Spring Hill. He also worked on Stroh’s beer, Mirage Resorts, and created one of the first commercial websites for a little brewery in Montana called Black Star. Toby moved to New York where he served as Creative Director at TBWA/Chiat Day working on Barnes & Noble, ABC, Absolut Vodka, New York Life and Seagram’s Brands.

Jason Jordan
Center for Transportation Excellence ⬤ Washington, DC
Jason Jordan serves as the director of the Center for Transportation Excellence (CFTE). He oversees CFTE staff and programming related to transportation ballot initiatives, state and local transit finance policy, communications, and research. CFTE is a national research and technical assistance center dedicated to public transportation ballot campaigns and finance policy. Jordan is also a partner in the Washington, D.C., public affairs and government relations consulting firm Advocacy Associates, LLC, where he directs the firm’s transportation and community development practice providing lobbying and strategic support to groups including the American Planning Association, where he also serves as director of policy and government affairs, and Smart Growth America.

Denny Zane
Move LA ⬤ Los Angeles, CA
Denny created Move LA in 2007 to bring together business, labor and environmental leaders and organizations with the goal of raising significant new funding for Los Angeles County’s transit system. This coalition helped lead the campaign for the Measure R sales tax; they proved to be a powerful force in getting the measure on the 2008 ballot and with winning its passage, with the result that LA has embarked on an ambitious build-out of its transit system. Denny previously served on the Santa Monica City Council, serving one term as mayor.

Dr. Leo E. Hanifin
Professor, past Dean of UDM’s College of Engineering & Science and Director of the MIOH UTC ⬤ Detroit, MI
Dr. Hanifin is a Professor of Mechanical Engineering and a leader of research in transit and innovation at the University of Detroit Mercy (UDM). He was the Dean of the College of Engineering and Science at UDM from 1991-2012 and served as the Director of the Michigan Ohio (MIOH) University Transportation Center from 2006-2012. He led the team that developed the preliminary plan for the “Woodward Transit Catalyst System” (now M1 Rail) and he remains a member of the M1 Rail Board. Dr. Hanifin is currently leading a team of 30+ faculty members and students engaged in transit activities at UDM, as part of the Mineta National transit Research Coalition. Current projects include studying factors that impact regional transit, surveying public opinion regarding transit, the regional transit workshop, transit summer camps and the development of transit curriculum.

Tom Shrout
Partner, Avvantt Partners LLC ⬤ St. Louis, MO
Tom Shrout led Citizens for Modern Transit for 22 years. In 2010, as the organization’s Executive Director, Tom conceived, managed and produced an outreach program to the citizens of St. Louis County about the benefits of transit to everyone whether they ride it or not. The result was a 63% win at the polls for a transit tax after a defeat of an identical reassure 17 months before. After retirement in 2008 Tom formed Avvantt Partners with his wife Deb.
Che Watkins
VP for Transportation, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce ♦ Atlanta, GA
Che Watkins was the Education and Campaign Manager for the Citizens for Transportation Mobility. Ms. Watkins was vice president of external affairs at the Metro Atlanta Chamber where she was responsible for building relationships with local government officials, metro area Chambers, regional and community non-profits, the faith community and corporate community affairs leaders. She is currently managing the Committee for a Better Atlanta evaluation process – a coalition of business and business organizations that help citizens make informed voting decisions in the City of Atlanta.

Randy Rentschler
Director of Legislation and Public Affairs, Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) ♦ San Francisco, CA
Randy Rentschler has worked at the Metropolitan Transportation Commission for ten years, where he is currently Director of Legislation and Public Affairs. In the public eye, he is most well-known for being the spokesperson for MTC.

Art Guzzetti
Vice President-Policy, American Public Transit Association ♦ Washington D.C.
Guzzetti is a 32-year veteran of public transportation at the local, state, and national levels. Art is responsible for APTA’s extensive policy research agenda, policy analysis and development, transportation information, and statistics and, along with the APTA team, work with the legislative and executive branches of all levels of government and with other national associations, think tanks, and interest groups to cultivate the ideas, relationships, and advocacy initiatives that will propel public transportation forward. Mr. Guzzetti spent 16 years in management at two of the nation’s leading public transportation systems – New Jersey Transit Corporation and Pittsburgh’s Port Authority of Allegheny County - along with two years at New Jersey DOT.

Marnie Obrien Primmer
Executive Director, Mobility 21 ♦ Irvine, CA
Chair, National Alliance for Public Transportation Advocates;
Primmer brings more than a decade of experience in public affairs and transportation infrastructure planning and development. Previously serving as the Director of Marketing and Business Development for CALTROP Corporation, a leading construction management firm, Primmer brings extensive business development, public affairs and community outreach experience to Mobility 21. Prior to joining CALTROP, Primmer served in the External Affairs Department at the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), where she played a key role building public awareness for capital projects, and served as a liaison to key agency stakeholders, elected officials and business leaders.

Kyle Curtis
Creative Director, R&R Partners ♦ Salt Lake City, UT
Coming up through the ranks of account planning before spearheading the Salt Lake creative team, Kyle is an idea-generating machine – the type of ideas that boost clients’ sales curves and appear in the One Show annual, Adweek magazine, the National ADDYs, and even college marketing textbooks. Nationally recognized as a public transit-marketing expert Kyle was named one of the “Top 40 Under 40” transit minds in the country by Mass Transit magazine. Kyle’s client list includes transit systems from Hawaii to Washington, D.C., Foot Locker, Champs Sports and research projects for Nike, Toyota and Infiniti.

Bill Kirk
The Rapids ♦ Grand Rapids, MI
Bill Kirk is the Public Outreach Coordinator for The Rapid in Grand Rapids. He is the liaison to citizens, businesses, and community groups in the six city area, and also assists with The Rapid’s overall marketing efforts. Prior to joining the Rapid, Bill helped the Michigan League of Conservation Voters open a Grand Rapids office and served as their Communication Director. Most recently, he was Field Organizer for the Michigan House Representatives.

Jon Maue
Campaign Coordinator, Benzie Bus Yes ♦ Benzie County, MI
Jon is a Web Designer, Graphic Designer, video maker, writer, computer fixer and above all, a marketer. Maue is a past member of the Michigan Land Use Institute’s Benzie Advisory Board and a participant in the initial Millage campaign that spawned the Benzie Bus. Maue also served as the Campaign Coordinator for the 3 to 1 renewal of the Benzie Bus, the fastest growing bus system in Michigan. Maue has been active in the Grand Vision within Benzie County, highlighted by the 30 minute video he produced.
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Brandy Agerbeck
Graphic Facilitator, Loosetooth.com ♦ Chicago, IL
Brandy Agerbeck creates conceptual maps of conversations to help clients navigate the complex territory of their meetings, workshops, and conferences. She works in a large scale format and in real time, visually synthesizing their discussions. Brandy was a board member, conference speaker coordinator and volunteer for the International Forum of Visual Practitioners. Her work has been published internationally and can be seen at GraphicFacilitator.com. Brandy believes in the power of drawing as a thinking tool.

Antoine M. Garibali
President of University of Detroit Mercy ♦ Detroit, MI
University of Detroit Mercy, a Catholic, Master’s Comprehensive University sponsored by the Religious Sister of mercy and the Society of Jesus. Prior to joining UDM n Jun 2011, he was president of Gannon University for nine and a half years. National recognized for his more than three decades of teaching, scholarly work and administrative experience in education and the federal government, Dr. Garibaldi is the Fellow of both the American Psychological Association and the American Education Research Association and the author of eleven books and more than 85 research articles and chapters. He serves on the boards of several local and national organizations and universities. Locally, he is on the Boards of Directors of the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) and New Detroit. A native of New Orleans, he received his undergraduate degree magna cum laude from Howard University in 1973 and his Ph. D. in Education Psychology from the University of Minnesota in 1976.

Scott Benson
Urban Planner and Economic Development Specialist ♦ Detroit MI
Scott Benson is an urban planner with 15 years of experience in community and economic development, commercial real estate and municipal planning. Benson’s most recent experience is with Midtown Detroit, Inc. where he managed small business development in Detroit’s Midtown area. He is a graduate of Wayne State University, Hampton University and the National Defense University. Scott’s long career of service also includes over 20 years in the military that have taken him to Kuwait and to Gulfport, Mississippi immediately following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Scott is currently a candidate for the Detroit City Council, District 3.

Marie Donigan
Transit Advocate & Workshop Organizer, Donigan McLogan LLC ♦ Royal Oak, MI
Marie Donigan has been a transit advocate for many years - as a Royal Oak City Commissioner and then as a State Representative where she served from 2005-2010. As State Representative, Ms. Donigan held many transit town hall meetings around the Metro Detroit region; chaired the House Sub-Committee on Public Transportation, and chaired the Intergovernmental and Region Affairs Committee where she steered several transit-related bills through committee including legislation to form a Regional Transit Authority. Marie was named Friend of Transit and Champion of Transit by the Michigan Public Transit Association and the Michigan Municipal League. After being term-limited Ms. Donigan was Principal Consultant for McKenna Associates, a Northville-based Planning firm and is a partner in Donigan McLogan LLC. Marie has a Master’s Degree in Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning from the University of Pennsylvania and is now the Executive Director of the Springfield Township-based North Oakland Headwaters Land Conservancy.

Alex Fike
Legislative Director for State Representative Jim Townsend, Michigan House of Representatives ♦ Lansing, MI
Alex Fike has been with the Michigan House of Representatives since 2012 and is currently Legislative Director for State Representative Jim Townsend. Fike was District Director for Townsend’s 2011 campaign. Fike attended Michigan State University.

Neil Greenberg
Founder, Freshwater Transit ♦ Detroit, MI
Neil Greenberg is a Detroit-based transit professional. He has worked for four transit organizations and one national vendor to the transit industry. He has used at least 9-different transit systems. Neil is fond of innovative routing, efficient scheduling and sleek graphic design. Amid general support for transit, Neil spotted a specific opportunity to move the conversation about transit in Metro Detroit to a so-juicy-you-can-taste-it image of transit – he produced Freshwater Railway as a way to communicate transit concepts. Freshwater Railway, now Freshwater Transit, was so real people couldn’t wait to ride it! Currently Neil works as a transit map editor. He created and is program administrator for airBus, a transit connection between University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and Detroit Metro Airport.
Chris McCarus
Executive Director, Michigan Now Radio and Television ● Lansing, MI

Kevin McLogan
Consultant, Donigan McLogan LLC ● Royal Oak, MI
As a principal with Donigan McLogan LLC, Kevin - a long-time transit advocate - provided technical assistance to the Workshop, preparing and managing extensive mailing lists, presentations, social media, communication and logistics. A seasoned trainer and facilitator, Kevin advises school boards and teaches Excel skills in a group setting or to suit individual needs. He spent 29 ½ years as manager with the Detroit Media Partnership and served 12 years on the Royal Oak Board of Education.

Megan Owens
Executive Director, Transportation Riders United ● Detroit MI
Ms. Owens is the Executive Director of Transportation Riders United (TRU). Founded in 1999, TRU is Detroit’s non-profit transit advocacy organization, dedicated to improving and promoting public transit throughout greater Detroit. Ms. Owens serves on the Oakland County Public Transit Authority, which oversees SMART bus service in Oakland County, and on the Transportation Advisory Committee of SEMCOG. She is active with the statewide Trans4M coalition. Previously, Megan spent six years with PIRGRIM (the Public Interest Research Group in Michigan) and presently serves on their Board of Directors.

Jim Townsend
State Representative, 26th District ● Royal Oak and Madison Heights
State Representative Jim Townsend is serving his second term as the voice of the 26th District, which covers Madison Heights and Royal Oak. Prior to joining the Michigan House, Representative Townsend served as Executive Director of the Tourism Economic Development Council where he guided a 10-year strategy for increasing SE Michigan’s tourism economy by $3 billion per year. He also founded and directed the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, a non-profit organization devoted to revitalizing and reinventing communities. Jim led national marketing and sales for Ford Motor Company’s $4 billion minivan business which achieved record sales in 2000. Representative Townsend holds an MBA and master degree in public policy from the University of Michigan and bachelor’s degree from the University of North Carolina.

Chris Webb
Co-Director, Engineering Society of Detroit Institute ● Southfield, MI
Christopher J. Webb, J.D., FESD is Director of the Engineering Society of Detroit Institute (ESDI). Founded in 2008, The Engineering Society of Detroit is modeled upon the National Academy of Science in Washington, D.C. As a neutral, problem-solving forum, ESDI’s mission is to bring together individuals of differing backgrounds, opinions and expertise to foster creative and independent thought and to deliver focused and consensus-based actions that can be adopted by policymakers in the private and public sectors around the world.

Dave Woodward
Oakland County Commissioner ● District 19, Royal Oak
County Commissioner Dave Woodward was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives at the age of 22. He served three terms and was then elected to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners where he is serving his fourth term. He is Minority Vice-Chair of the Finance Committee and is Vice-Chair of the Democratic Caucus. Dave is also state director for Center for Progressive Leadership and for Progressive Majority and has trained hundreds of progressives in Michigan and across the country.