



From Checkbook Campaigns to Civic Coalitions: Lessons from the Passage of Prop A



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Introduction

On April 6, 2010 the voters of St. Louis County approved a tax increase for transit with a surprising 63 percent majority. The ½ cent sales tax now raises about \$75 million a year to maintain the bus system and expand light rail. Seventeen months earlier a similar initiative had lost with 48 percent of the vote.¹ With the economy in a recession in 2010, unemployment high, and the anti-tax Tea Party movement rising around the nation, the huge majority for Prop A was startling. In this paper we try to explain the success of Prop A and tease out the lessons for future tax initiative campaigns and civic coalitions.

Compared to the defeat of Prop M in 2008 two characteristics of the 2010 Prop A election make the victory especially surprising and help to frame our analysis: 1) Prop A succeeded in an off-year election when the composition of the electorate is less inclined to support tax increases and public transit; 2) Prop A, at least initially, did not enjoy unified business support – usually the kiss of death for transit tax initiatives.²

1. Succeeding in an off-year election with a targeted turnout strategy. The “conventional wisdom” is that it is more difficult to pass transit tax initiatives in off-year elections when no state or federal offices are up for grabs. The reason is that those who are more likely to support a transit tax, such as lower income voters and minorities, turnout at lower rates in off-year elections. As Table 1 shows, the electorate in 2010 was less than a third of the size of the electorate in 2008 when the first African American won the presidency. The large African American turnout in 2008 should have helped propel Prop M to victory in St. Louis County. Indeed, Prop M received almost a quarter of a million YES votes. The problem is that it got even more NO votes. Clearly, drop-off was a problem: Prop M was the 37th item on the ballot in 2008 and, as Table 1 shows, 48,849 voters did not bother to vote on it. If a large enough majority of these nonvoters had voted YES, they would have put Prop M over the top.³ Facing a crowded ballot and with an electorate preoccupied by the national election, the Prop M campaign failed to motivate or inform enough sympathetic voters to search down the ballot and vote YES.

The challenge in the greatly shrunken 2010 electorate was very different. The shrunken electorate would tend to be less supportive of the transit tax. But if the campaign could motivate enough supporters to turn out (2008 showed there were plenty of transit tax supporters), then they could win (assuming opponents did not also turnout in higher numbers). The Prop A campaign concentrated on turning out its supporters rather than changing people’s minds. The challenge of a turnout strategy is to make sure that in turning out your supporters you don’t end up mobilizing your opponents as well. Mobilization producing counter-mobilization is a common theme in electoral systems where there is a great deal of slack, or low turnout, that can be motivated to vote when they see their opponents mobilizing. Moreover, the conventional wisdom is that in off-year elections tax initiatives are exposed to attack by opponents who can garner free media coverage in the absence of other high-profile electoral issues to occupy the voters. The question we address here is whether a highly targeted turnout strategy can work.

Table 1 Votes on Prop M (2008) and Prop A (2010)

Year	2008 (M)		2010 (A)	
Ballots cast	562,965		151,613	
Yes on transit	249,089	48.45 %	94,795	62.90 %
No on transit	265,027	51.55 %	55,884	37.10 %
Votes on transit	514,116		150,679	
Drop-off	48,849	8.70 %	934	0.60 %

Normally, the turnout in off-year elections is 13-15 percent but April 2010 turnout was about 22 percent of registered voters.⁴ This suggests that the campaign increased turnout but it does not tell us whether the groups the campaign targeted voted in greater numbers. To address the effectiveness of the Prop A campaign strategy we assembled a database capable of tracking the turnout of individual voters in St. Louis County over the past six years. The data base contains over 800,000 individual voter records. Using this data base we constructed a model to predict turnout in an off-year election like 2010. (See Appendix A for description of data and methodology.) Using this model, we were able to determine whether groups in the population targeted by the campaign, such as African Americans and certain geographical areas, turned out at rates higher than “normal.” If turnout did increase among these targeted voters, we conclude that this was probably due to the get-out-the-vote strategy of the campaign rather than the normal turnout tendencies in off-year elections.

2. Constructing a broad coalition with divided support from business. Representing the thirty largest corporations in the St. Louis metropolitan area, Civic Progress has always provided key financial support for electoral initiatives. Initially, however, Civic Progress opposed putting Prop A on the April 2010 ballot. Business leaders thought it lacked sufficient support and were not confident that the mistakes of the 2008 campaign had been corrected or that Metro had restored its creditability with the electorate. Along with other leaders in the community, Citizens for Modern Transit (CMT) pushed to put it on the ballot anyway. St. Louis County Executive Charlie Dooley supported an April vote and the County Council voted narrowly (4-3) to put it on the ballot. Eventually, Civic Progress endorsed Prop A. However, instead of funding Prop A directly, as in past campaigns, Civic Progress simply released its members to contribute to the campaign, which many did.

Partly as a result of the weak initial corporate support, the Prop A campaign had a number of characteristics that distinguished it from previous campaigns. First, CMT sponsored an educational

campaign before the Vote YES campaign started. Second, an extensive get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaign was developed staffed largely by volunteers. Third, John Nations, the Republican Mayor of Chesterfield, agreed to run Advance St. Louis, the Vote YES campaign.

In order to evaluate the nature of the civic coalition in 2010 we conducted a series of interviews with insiders and activists. These interviews provided valuable insight into the internal dynamics of the campaign. We also analyzed campaign contributions in 2008 and 2010 in order to compare the coalitions. Finally, we consulted newspaper articles in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *St. Louis American* to further evaluate the campaigns.

In this report we try to answer two questions: Was the coalition in 2010 significantly different from the coalition in 2008? If so, did this difference “make a difference” in the outcome?

Background: A Short History of Transit Funding in St. Louis⁵

The Bi-State Development Agency (Bi-State) was formed in 1949 by a compact between the states of Missouri and Illinois that was ratified by the U.S. Congress. In 1963, when the private transit companies in the region were failing, Bi-State took them over.⁶ The last trolley line was closed in 1966. In 1973, facing dire financial straits the public transportation system threatened to close down. The Missouri Legislature authorized St. Louis City and County to impose a ½ cent sales tax to support transportation. This was done by action of the Board of Aldermen and the County Council. Eventually the tax was made permanent in 2000.⁷

With the opening of MetroLink in 1993, St. Louis became one of the first metropolitan areas in the nation to build a new generation light rail system. Lighter than the older heavy rail systems that serve suburban commuters, the new light rail trains are faster and stop less often than trolleys. Approximately \$348 million of the \$465 million total cost of the initial line was provided by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Little local money was used for the project because existing railroad rights-of-way in the city and on the Eads Bridge supplied most of the local match for the federal funding. From the very beginning, MetroLink was a success with ridership exceeding expectations. In 1995 MetroLink won the first American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Outstanding Achievement Award for Light Rail. Partly based on the popularity of the new light rail line, in 1994 the voters approved a ¼ cent sales tax to expand the system by relatively wide margins (60-40 percent in the County and 66-34 in the City).⁸

Planning to expand MetroLink began soon after the first line opened. In 1994 the voters of St. Clair County approved a 1/2 cent sales tax for transit. In 2001 the \$339.2 MetroLink extension from downtown St. Louis to Southwestern Illinois College in Belleville, Illinois, was completed with 72 percent of the money provided by the FTA. St. Clair County Transit District provided \$95.2 million. In 2003 an extension from Southwestern College to the Shiloh-Scott station was opened, with \$15 million of the \$75 million cost provided by the St. Clair County Transit District, and the rest from the State of Illinois.

On the Missouri side of the river, however, it soon became clear that the ¼ cent sales tax passed in 1994 was inadequate to expand the system in a timely fashion, in part because of reduced support for transit operations at the federal level. Led by Civic Progress, the business community spearheaded an initiative to place a ¼ cent sales tax on the ballot in 1997.⁹ Prop M was “planned more or less behind closed doors”¹⁰ as part of what could be called a “stealth campaign.” The initiative was on the ballot in a low visibility special election and every effort was made to avoid divisive issues, such as exactly where the next MetroLink expansion would go. The idea was to build on the popularity of MetroLink. About six months before the election University of Missouri-St. Louis Professor Terry Jones conducted a poll which showed strong support for a tax increase to “speed up the development and construction of MetroLink” (68 percent favorable in the County and 70 percent in the City). Surprisingly, Prop M failed miserably in the County (42 percent YES) and barely passed in the City (50.4 percent YES).

Why did Prop M fail? It was not for lack of money. The campaign raised \$922,095, most of which was spent for television, radio, and direct mail. By contrast, the opponents reported raising only \$13,900. The best analysis of the 1997 transit campaign cites five reasons for the defeat:¹¹

1. **Placement on Special Ballot:** The lack of competing campaign issues created a vacuum in the media and the opponents were able to take advantage of free publicity.
2. **Failure to Identify Specific Uses of the Funds, Including a Transportation Plan:** Prop M was exceedingly vague, simply asking voters if they favored a ¼ cent sales tax “for transportation purposes.” Opponents took advantage of underlying distrust in government and seized on this vagueness, suggesting that the money would not be used for MetroLink expansion.
3. **Controversy over Specific Routes for MetroLink Expansion:** About a month before the election St. Louis Mayor Clarence Harmon and County Executive Buzz Westfall had a public spat over whether the already funded new line should go north or south of Forest Park, generating negative publicity for MetroLink.
4. **Partisan Conflict:** Prop M became ensnarled in partisan politics, with Democrats accusing Republicans of scuttling the tax and Republicans accusing the campaign of steering funds to Democratic political operatives and ward leaders.
5. **Poor Public Image of Bus Service and Metro:** Focus groups following the election confirmed that voters had a negative image of Metro based partly on the unpopularity of the bus service and annual operating losses.

The defeat of Prop M in 1997 is puzzling because in many ways the campaign paralleled that of the victorious 2010 campaign: it was put on ballot in an off-year election and the strategy was to turn out supporters without mobilizing opponents. As we will see later, however, there are important differences with the 2010 campaign, including the appointment of a Republican to lead the Prop A

campaign and the assemblage of a much broader civic coalition and a more vigorous get-out-the-vote campaign in 2010.

Even though the 1997 defeat slowed down MetroLink expansion, Metro had enough revenue from the 1994 ¼ cent sales tax to float bonds to build the Cross County Extension that opened in 2006. Unfortunately, a project that was budgeted for \$550 million ended up at least \$132 million over budget. Metro sued the consortium of engineering firms for causing the cost overrun but lost in court, costing the taxpayers about \$27 million in settlement and legal fees. In 2007 the Metro Board fired Larry Salci, the CEO of Metro who had pushed the lawsuit, and hired Bob Baer, an experienced St. Louis executive.¹² Baer had led Metro, then Bi-State, for three years in the 1970s and later served as President and CEO of UniGroup, Inc. United/Mayflower from 1977-2002. Intimately familiar with the local political landscape, Baer was well-qualified to address Metro's image problems.

Largely as a result of the cost overruns, Metro faced a reported \$45 million budget shortfall in 2008 that would force deep cuts in bus routes and light rail. St. Louis County Council voted to place Prop M on the ballot for November 2008. The timing seemed favorable because the closing of Highway 40 (I-64) was causing increased traffic congestion in the core of the region. The thinking was that the voters would support public transportation in order to reduce traffic congestion. Acting on a request from St. Louis County Executive Charlie Dooley, six days before the vote the East-West Gateway Council of Governments authorized a detailed study of the expansion of MetroLink out to Westport – which would carry the line through the heart of the County to a major job center. This enabled politicians to appear to provide tangible benefits from Prop M to a core constituency of voters.

The campaign was organized by political consultants close to County Executive Dooley and was registered as “Citizens for Better Transportation” (CBT). Their goal was to raise \$1 million or more to underwrite traditional campaign approaches such as direct mail, radio and television. The hope was that with a large African American turnout in support of the campaign of Barack Obama, North County voters would swamp the traditional anti-tax South County vote and there would be a split in West County, resulting in a win. Republican women were particularly targeted as polling showed that demographic inclined to support funding for transit.

Civic Progress agreed to put up about \$400,000 in support of the campaign and the Regional Business Council added \$100,000. While the Civic Progress contribution was significant, it was less than the \$700,000 the organization contributed to the 1994 successful Prop M campaign. Despite the initial influx of money into the campaign, fundraising did not go well.

Meanwhile, Metro held a series of public meetings and community outreach, outlining the service cuts that would be implemented if additional funding were not available. CMT volunteered to play a role in the campaign and waited for instruction about what it should do. Finally, lacking that direction, CMT formed the Greater St. Louis Transit Alliance and invited other organizations to get involved. The Alliance put up a website and began meeting to figure out what could be done on

behalf of the campaign. The Transit Alliance, frustrated by the appearance of lack of progress on the part of CBT, undertook a modest fund raising effort to fund the outreach of the Transit Alliance. The Alliance ended up raising \$120,000 which went for consultants, radio, printing and student outreach.

In the end, the CBT was unable to raise enough money to make a significant television buy to break through the clutter of the presidential, gubernatorial and numerous other ballot measures to get the attention it needed. Also, many member organizations of the Transit Alliance also were working on other campaigns and could not devote as much time to the Prop M campaign as they might have liked. Transit Alliance members did volunteer phone banking and door knocking, but often in conjunction with other campaigns.

There were other difficulties as well. The Transit Alliance assumed CBT would reach out to the African American community to gain their support and while there was African American representation on the Transit Alliance, it was not a broad-based representation of the African American community. In addition, opponents claimed that Metro's warning of service cuts had been made in the past and often didn't materialize. Unfortunately there was some truth to this: through the years Metro had improved its efficiencies, performed internal financial gymnastics and received favorable treatment for one time funding from East-West Gateway. Election Day came and the measure failed, receiving 48 percent of the vote. While the measure carried in most African American precincts, it was receiving favorable votes in the low 50s (percent) while Barack Obama was carrying those same precincts by 90 percent or more. And, as stated earlier, there was severe voter drop-off with over 48,849 voters not making it to the last item on the lengthy ballot after many had waited in line to vote.

The Prop A Campaign

Following defeat of Prop M the worst fears of its proponents came true. In March of 2009 Metro laid off 550 workers, cut about one-third of all bus routes, and reduced MetroLink and Call-a-Ride services. Service was suspended on 2,300 out of about 9,000 bus stops with hoods being placed over the bus stop signs. Nearly all bus service outside I-270 was eliminated. Concerned about the access of workers to jobs, the City of Chesterfield pledged more than \$173,000 to restore bus service along the Highway 40 corridor. This money was never spent, however, because in August of 2009 Metro received a one-time appropriation from the state and additional federal stimulus dollars totaling about \$12 million that helped restore many of the cuts. With the federal money running out the following May, CMT and other transit proponents argued that St. Louis County should put a ½ cent sales tax on the April 2010 ballot.

Civic Progress, which had been the prime funder of previous campaigns, argued against putting the initiative on the ballot, maintaining that voter support was weak and flaws in the 2008 campaign had not been corrected.¹³ Civic Progress had good reasons to oppose another tax initiative. An October 2009 poll showed that only a slim majority (55 percent) favored a tax increase, a nearly identical level of support that polling leading up to the November 2008 vote had shown. Support for

tax increases is notoriously soft and can erode quickly. In addition, the smaller April electorate would be less inclined to support tax increases and public transit than the 2008 electorate and the faltering economy also would make it more difficult to argue for a tax increase.

CMT and its allies decided to go forward anyway. Many felt they had no choice: without a tax increase the transit system would suffer Draconian cuts that would hit the most vulnerable members of the community the hardest. Polling showed more than 90 percent of the voters were aware of the severe transit cuts. CMT, Metro and other supporters thought the public should be given another opportunity to say whether cuts in transit were their final word on the topic. Facing a tough re-election campaign in 2010, County Executive Charlie Dooley, nevertheless, supported the tax initiative and on December 21, 2009, the St. Louis County Council voted (4-3) to put the tax on the April ballot.

The campaign for Prop A could be viewed as a three-legged stool. First, there was a separately funded educational campaign designed to frame the issue around the value of public transit to the region. Second, there was the standard Vote YES on A campaign, called Advance St. Louis. Third, a broad civic coalition was assembled under the banner of the Greater St. Louis Transit Alliance, and a grassroots voter turnout campaign was developed to increase turnout among supporters. All three legs were essential for success.

Citizens for Modern Transit's Educational Campaign

Citizens for Modern Transit (CMT) is a civic organization whose mission is to expand light rail in the St. Louis area as part of an integrated public transportation system.¹⁴ CMT is limited in its ability to directly advocate for a YES vote on Prop A and still retain its tax exempt status. CMT decided, however, that an educational campaign could help prepare the ground for the Prop A campaign. CMT withdrew \$300,000 from its endowment to fund the educational campaign. St. Clair County Transit appropriated an additional \$100,000 to the campaign which ultimately spent about \$525,000 in cash and in-kind expenses.

Part of the back story of the campaign is that a number of people associated with CMT travelled to Salt Lake City, Utah, in May 2009 to attend the Transit Initiatives and Communities Conference where advocates for transit initiatives from around the nation trade insights about how to run successful campaigns. As a result of conversations there, CMT wanted to hire a firm out of Salt Lake City, R&R Partners, which had won five straight transit campaigns. A number of key political operatives out of the Mayor's Office argued aggressively for using local St. Louis political consultants. CMT resisted this pressure and went ahead and hired R&R Partners.

The educational campaign had two main challenges. First, Metro still had a negative image; the campaign



had to shift attention away from Metro to public transit. Second, the campaign had to convince voters who do not ride transit that they should care about it. Most people do not use public transit on a regular basis; only about 3 percent of workers take public transit to work. The campaign needed to put a face on public transit. One way the campaign did this was to show that even though most people do not ride transit, almost everyone depends on workers who do ride transit. Television ads, for example, showed people on the street making the point that the nurses who take care of us in hospitals and the people who serve us coffee in the morning depend on public transit. The centerpiece of the campaign was the slogan: “Some of us ride it. All of us need it.”

The campaign also identified “transit champions,” trusted faces who could deliver the pro-transit message. Bypassing politicians and Metro itself, the campaign instead chose local civic leaders from across a broad spectrum of the community. Washington University Chancellor Mark Wrighton, Chancellor of St. Louis Community College Zelema Harris, University City Loop developer Joe Edwards, sports broadcasters Mike Shannon and Al Hrabosky, and African American pastor Tommie Pierson were shown in television ads declaring “I love transit.” The television ads, which began airing on February 12 during the Olympics, had a populist tongue-in-cheek appeal, with one ad dramatizing what would happen if transit were cut by showing hundreds of people on the streets of St. Louis trying to hitchhike *en masse*. The educational campaign, which also included



radio spots and direct mail, won the APTA’s “Ad Wheel Award” for a “Public Relations/Awareness or Educational Campaign” and five Pollie Awards from the American Association of Political Consultants. From all accounts the campaign was effective in creating a more favorable public image of transit (but we have no independent survey evidence to confirm this).

The Political Campaign: Advance St. Louis

The campaign which explicitly advocated voting YES on Prop A was led by Advance St. Louis. This is the traditional political campaign that all voter initiatives need to prepare a common message and deliver that message to voters through television, radio, direct mail, and the Internet. What made the Prop A campaign different from previous campaigns is that it was headed by a suburban Republican mayor and it was overseen by a large steering committee that coordinated the mass media campaign with the grassroots GOTV effort.

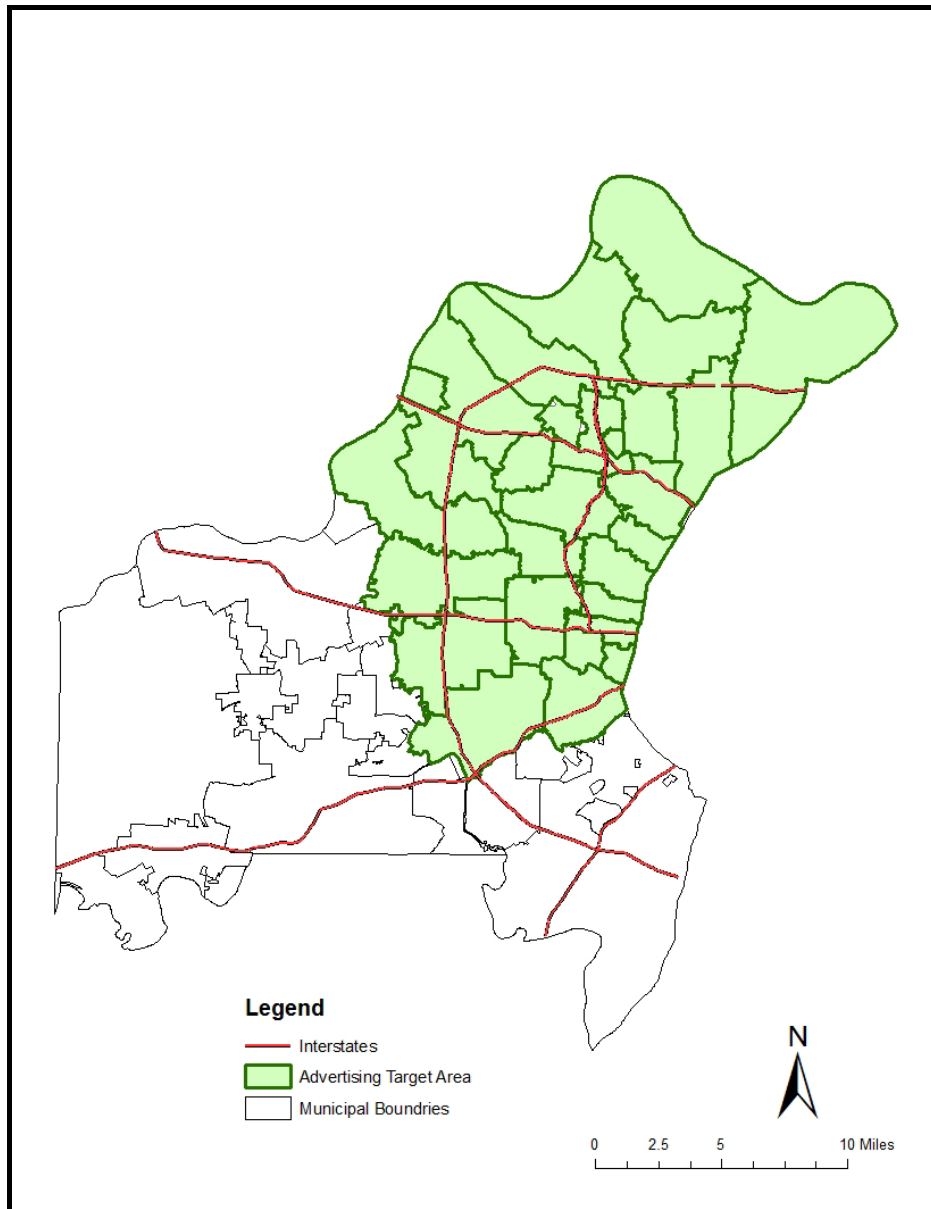
Advance St. Louis was overseen by a 40-member Steering Committee co-chaired by Dr. Donald Suggs and Chancellor Mark Wrighton. Wrighton’s willingness to take on this assignment was crucial and in some quarters, controversial. Leaders of major universities do not usually stick their necks out and take stands on public issues – especially to support a tax increase. Washington

University is heavily invested in public transit. As a highly ranked university that draws students from all over the nation, Washington University recognized that students from the two coasts want to go to school in a cosmopolitan community and expect a modern transit system. Washington University has five MetroLink stations that serve the main and medical campuses and provides free Metro passes for all of its fulltime faculty and staff. Wrighton's willingness to chair the Steering Committee helped reassure corporate contributors – especially in the wake of initial business opposition. The Steering Committee helped to coordinate the political campaign with the GOTV campaign. For example, the political campaign followed the strategy of targeting its ads on areas which have traditionally supported transit and avoided campaigning in areas that historically have voted against transit taxes (in order not to stimulate their turnout). (See Figure 1.)

In a surprising move, Metro CEO Bob Baer and Chairman of the Metro Board former St. Louis Mayor Vince Schoemehl (with the support of County Executive Charlie Dooley) chose Republican John Nations to head the campaign. The Mayor of suburban Chesterfield, Nations took the lead in getting the City of Chesterfield to commit \$173,000 to restore bus cuts to the city. As a Republican Nations could overcome some of the partisan tensions that had hampered the 2008 Prop M campaign, which took place in the midst of a heated presidential election. In April 2010 there were no partisan contests and Nations worked to activate Republican, as well as Democratic, public officials behind Prop A.

Nations was an articulate spokesperson for the campaign, stressing that a strong public transit system was necessary for a healthy regional economy. Building on the “Some-of-us-ride-it-all-of-us-need-it” theme, Nations frequently told the story of meeting a woman from Chesterfield who did not ride the bus and who saw Prop A as “just another tax.” But she changed her mind, Nations said, when she found out that the people who took care of her mother in a nursing home, “who my mom loves,” rely on public transit.¹⁵

Figure 1: Advertising Target Area



The opponents of Prop A never achieved much traction in the campaign. This failure needs to be explained, given that one of the widely recognized dangers of running a tax initiative in an off-year election is the potential for opponents to garner free publicity when there are few big electoral issues to distract the public. Given the poor economy in 2010, it would seem relatively easy to galvanize anti-tax sentiment. The failure of opponents must be attributed partly to their inability to raise money and their weak organization.¹⁶ This had not stopped opponents in the past, however, from being effective.



Clearly, the transit cuts that occurred after the failure of Prop M in 2008 brought home the value of transit to many voters. Opponents of Prop M in 2008 had argued that the claim that defeat would require deep cuts in transit was simply a scare tactic designed to frighten voters into supporting the tax increase. Organized in 2010 under the banner of Citizens

for Better Transit, opponents of Prop A argued that funds from it would only be used for expensive and inefficient light rail. If you really support the bus system, they argued, then you should vote against Prop A. But the fact that bus routes had been severely cut in the wake of the failure of Prop M two years earlier undermined their argument. Opponents were not successful in labeling Prop A as anti-bus. One of the strengths of the Prop A campaign was that it maintained a solid coalition between bus riders, more low income and minority, and light rail supporters, who tend to be higher income and whiter.

Opponents also tried to connect Prop A to Metro and its problems with huge cost overruns on the Cross-County line. Tapping in to distrust of government, opponents contended that Metro had “betrayed the trust of the taxpayers.”¹⁷ Several factors helped to weaken this argument with the voters. First, pro-transit student bloggers were quick to push back against the leaders of the opposition who had been involved in controversial right-wing causes that may have eroded their credibility. Also, Bob Baer had now headed of the agency for two years and had conducted a concerted campaign to give a human face to Metro and sell Metro to the public. Finally, with non-Metro leaders, such as Nations and Wrighton, serving as the face of the campaign, the issue was framed not as a bailout of Metro but as a vote to improve the community.

One of the problems with tax initiatives is that the voters do not trust how the monies will be spent. There was no regional plan for the expansion of light rail that everyone could buy into.¹⁸ Metro engaged in an extensive process of civic engagement to assemble a 30-year plan called *Moving Transit Forward*.¹⁹ Metro conducted surveys, focus groups, webinars, utilized social media, and conducted three series of regional public meetings to solicit input from the public. The final plan

does not recommend specific routes for new light rail lines, but it does promise future expansions according to a timetable and outlines the options. Moving Transit Forward articulated a vision for transit in the region that all parts of the region could benefit from. The extensive citizen engagement process probably helped to undercut the argument of opponents that Metro could not be trusted and was not accountable to the public – though, once again, we do not have independent survey evidence to confirm this.

An analysis of campaign contributions and expenditures also helps to highlight differences between the 2008 and the 2010 campaigns. Tables 1 and 2 show a breakdown of the contributions and expenditures for the 2008 Prop M and the 2010 Prop A campaigns. The dollar amounts reported are from the campaign finance disclosure reports filed with the Missouri Ethics Commission. Across the board, the levels of contributions were slightly higher in 2010 than in 2008. We should add that in 2010 there was also an educational campaign costing over \$500,000 that helped support the Prop A campaign.

Table 2: Contributions in Support of Public Transit Initiatives in 2008 & 2010 (Dollar Amount and Percent of Total)

	2008	2010
Total Contributions	\$858,289	\$1,030,391
○ Civic Progress (or Civic Progress member companies)	\$195,485 (23%)	\$393,510 (38%)
○ Washington University & BJC	\$17,500 (2%)	\$168,510 (16%)
○ Local Unions	\$7,500 (1%)	\$20,200 (2%)
○ Contributions \$500 and less	\$6,305 (<1%)	\$20,740 (2%)

Note: Figures are based on campaign reports filed with the Missouri Ethics Commission.

A number of contrasts between 2008 and 2010 are evident. First, contributions from members of Civic Progress made up a higher percentage of total contributions to the 2010 campaign (38 percent) than to the 2008 campaign (23 percent). Despite the initial opposition of Civic Progress to Prop A, this did not stop its members from contributing to the campaign. It is worth noting that Washington University is a member of Civic Progress and its contributions were a substantial part of the 2010 Civic Progress amount. It also is worth noting that the contributions of the Regional Business Council, which initially opposed putting Prop A on the 2010 ballot, fell precipitously, from \$100,000 in 2008 to only \$10,000 in 2010.

The second contrast that leaps out is the greatly increased support from Washington University whose contributions increased almost tenfold from 2008 to 2010. Local unions also increased their contributions and small contributions of \$500 or less more than tripled (though they were still a tiny portion of the total). These trends support the argument that the 2010 campaign consisted of a broader civic coalition.

What the campaigns spent their money on also reveals differences in the campaigns. Table 3 shows that while each campaign spent similar amounts of cash, the 2010 campaign spent less on media and more on grassroots get out the vote (GOTV) efforts. The 2010 campaign spent 24 percent less on TV ads, radio ads, and print media than the campaign in 2008. While the total amount spent on GOTV was still small in 2010, the percentage spent on GOTV went from less than one percent to 5.4 percent of total expenditures. We present evidence below that the money spent on reaching out to specific groups of voters paid off.

Table 3: Expenditures Paid to Support Public Transit Initiatives in 2008 & 2010 (Percent of Total)

	2008	2010
Total Expenditures	\$927,396	\$934,756
o Media (TV, Radio, Print, etc)	\$826,297 (89%)	\$606,808 (65%)
o GOTV (Grassroots Outreach)	\$8,000 (<1%)	\$50,754 (5%)

Note: Figures are based on campaign reports filed with the Missouri Ethics Commission.

The Broader Civic Coalition and the Get-Out-the-Vote Campaign

Under the banner of the Greater St. Louis Transit Alliance, the 2010 campaign assembled a broad coalition of civic groups. Led by Nancy Cross, Vice President of SEIU Local 1, the Alliance mobilized hundreds of volunteers for a GOTV operation. In addition, college students in the region mobilized as never before and added a new style and verve to the campaign.

The key strategy in the 2010 campaign was to mobilize supporters to vote without, at the same time, mobilizing opponents. Research by political scientists shows that mass media is relatively ineffective at stimulating turnout. The most effective strategy is face-to-face communication with voters.²⁰ The implication is that effective turnout campaigns are labor intensive. Paying people to contact individual voters is expensive; effective GOTV campaigns often rely on volunteers. Very little of the approximately \$1 million raised for the Prop A political campaign was devoted to the GOTV operation. It was almost all volunteers. The campaign drew volunteers from a broad

coalition of groups. Over 250 groups eventually endorsed Prop A. The Greater St. Louis Transit Alliance, a coalition of over 50 organizations, was formed “to improve and expand transit throughout the region.”²¹ Members of the Transit Alliance stretched across the political spectrum -- from elite business groups like the Regional Chamber of Commerce and Growth Association to grassroots groups like Metropolitan Congregations United and Jobs with Justice. According to Tom Shrout, Executive Director of CMT, “Ninety-five percent of the phone banking and door-to-door outreach was done by [them].”²²



Photo of Liz Kramer, “Miss Metrolink”, flanked by two student supporters, Katie McFadden and Mike Post.

Volunteers for the Prop A campaign made phone calls, hung leaflets on doors, and spoke to voters in churches and union halls.²³ A key element of the GOTV operation was phone banking. Nancy Cross, Vice President of SEIU Local 1, provided phone banks and enlisted volunteers from unions. CMT and other civic groups also recruited volunteers. The phone banking operation had lists of likely voters and concentrated its efforts on areas that had provided large majorities to Prop M in 2008, basically areas north of I-44 and east of I-270. African American precincts in North County were also targeted. (See Figure 1.)

Chancellor Wrighton sought to ensure that the Prop A Steering Committee was a diverse group and asked Dr. Donald Suggs, publisher of the *St. Louis American*, the region’s leading African American newspaper, to serve as co-chair. Dr. Suggs was approached about how best to reach out to African American voters and improve upon that aspect of the campaign that had not worked well in 2008. Suggs agreed and invited about a dozen of the leading African American clergy to meet with campaign leaders, Bob Baer, John Nations, Tom Shrout, and Nancy Cross to discuss voter outreach. The clergy agreed to bring Prop A to the attention of their members and to lend their support and prestige to the campaign.

In addition Metropolitan Congregations United (MCU) held a rallies in North County that targeted the African American Community. Another rally featured the support of Congressman William (Lacy) Clay and several clergy that was covered in a front page article in the *American*. Finally, the weekend before the April 6 vote, the campaign hired constituents of the pastors to knock on doors of likely yes voters in North County to urge that they go to the polls and vote yes.

A vigorous GOTV campaign was also conducted on college campuses, especially Washington University. Liz Kramer, a graduate of Washington University, led the college campaign, making

connections with transit activists on the campuses of Saint Louis University, University of Missouri-St. Louis, St. Louis Community College, Webster University, and others. At a meeting a little more than two months before the election, the Washington University student group pledged “We will register, educate, identify and get out to vote 5,000 pro-transit individuals for Proposition A on Wash U’s campus on April 6th.”²⁴

The students added a new style to the campaign. Transit policy can be boring – something only policy wonks care about. Student activists took a different approach. Among the list of specific goals of the Washington University student group was “Having fun!” The campus campaign clearly achieved that goal. They conducted tee-shirt painting parties, organized a transit flash mob dance during lunchtime on campus, which included Chancellor Wrighton wearing a cardboard MetroLink train around his waist, and the day before the election baked cookies shaped like buses with Metro logos.

Students also made extensive use of social media, including creating a Prop A Facebook page which at its peak had nearly 5,000 members. In the week before the election over 500 people changed their picture on Facebook to “Vote April 6” emblazoned over a Metro logo. By forming an online network, including the use of twitter, students were able to respond rapidly to any attacks on Prop A, particularly on talk radio.

Did the Targeted Turnout Strategy Work?

We first examine the impact of the campaign to pass Proposition A on voter turnout in 2010. Since voter turnout is relatively low in April elections, it is crucial for any initiative campaign to mobilize voters. Turnout in the April 2010 election was higher than any April election in St. Louis County in more than ten years. The average turnout for the ten previous April elections in St. Louis County was just under 105,000. Turnout in the April 2010 election was substantially higher at 151,613. Since Proposition A was the only countywide issue on the ballot in 2010, this suggests that the Proposition A campaign helped boost voter turnout in that election. However, there were some other competitive contests on the April 2010 ballot that also influenced turnout in that election. To separate out the effect of the targeted turnout effort, we conducted a rigorous statistical analysis that controlled for a range of factors that affect turnout.

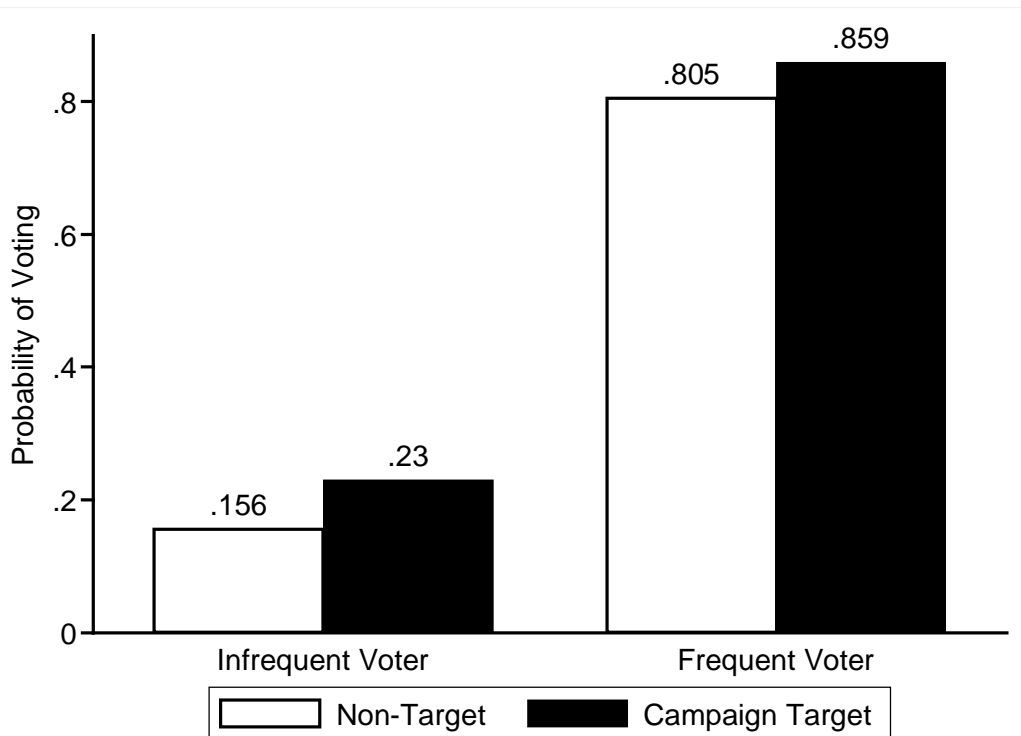
We analyzed data from the St. Louis County voter history file to estimate the impact of the Proposition A campaign on voter turnout in the April 2010 election. The voter history file contains information about each registered voter in the County, including whether he or she voted in all of the elections from 2004 to 2010. This allowed us to observe who voted in the April 2010 election, and whether they were frequent voters in previous elections.

The leadership of the Proposition A campaign told us that they focused on particular geographic areas in the central and northern portions of the County closest to the City of St. Louis. Figure 1 shows the area of the county targeted by the campaign. Slightly more than half of registered voters in St. Louis County resided in the area targeted by the campaign. The two main sections of the light

rail system go through this portion of the county, and in 2008 the target areas voted more strongly in support of Proposition M than other areas. The campaign made a strategic decision to avoid campaigning in a large swath of the southern and western portions of the county (areas with thin transit service) to avoid stirring up opposition among anti-tax groups in those areas. Voters in the target region were contacted by mail, cable TV advertisements, and a get-out-the-vote effort. As we detail above, a significant portion of the campaign budget was devoted to direct mail and cable television advertisements. Voter turnout was 21.0 percent among registered voters in the targeted area, compared to 15.9 percent turnout outside the geographic area targeted by the campaign. This again suggests that the campaign influenced turnout.

Just because areas that were targeted showed an increase in votes for Prop A, however, does not mean that the campaign was responsible for that increase. Our statistical analysis examines whether this difference in turnout holds up when controlling for other factors that influenced turnout in the April 2010 election. The April 2010 election also featured school tax levy or bond campaigns in 6 of the 24 school districts in the county, as well as competitive mayoral elections in 11 of the county's 91 municipalities. Most of the areas with competitive mayoral contests or school propositions were in inner-ring suburbs where support for Proposition M had been high in 2008. Thus, having higher than expected turnout in these areas probably worked to the benefit of Proposition A in 2010. Our statistical model of voter turnout that controls for the other local contests on the April 2010 ballot is described in more detail in the Appendix A.

Figure 2: Estimated Impact of Advertising Campaign on Voter Turnout



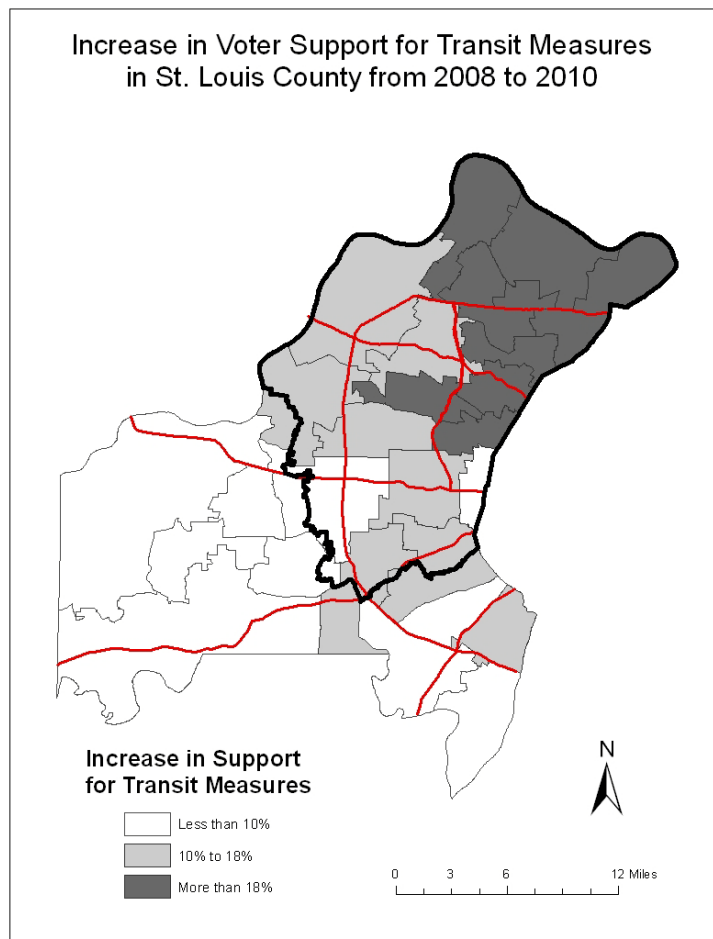
Overall, we find evidence that the Proposition A campaign stimulated voter turnout in the targeted geographic areas of the county. Controlling for one's propensity to vote as well as other local campaigns, the odds of voting for a person in the targeted region of the county was about 65 percent higher than for the same type of voter in other parts of St. Louis County. In addition, the GOTV campaign had a bigger effect on infrequent voters. Based on the model estimates, we computed the impact of the Proposition A campaign on the likelihood of voting for an infrequent voter (one who had only voted in one-third of previous elections) and for a frequent voter (one who had voted in at least two-thirds of past elections). As Figure 2 indicates, the Proposition A campaign boosted the turnout rate among infrequent voters from 16 percent to 23 percent in the April 2010 election. The Proposition A campaign also boosted turnout, by a smaller amount, among frequent voters.

We also find evidence of voter mobilization around Washington University. In the year leading up to the April 2010 election, roughly 450 new voters registered in the precincts where most Washington University students vote. Voter turnout was also higher in the Washington University student precincts than in the rest of the County. According to our model estimates, the odds of voting in the April 2010 election were approximately 90 percent higher for voters in the Washington University student precincts.

Overall, we estimate that the advertising campaign boosted turnout by roughly 18,000 voters. Given that the Prop A margin of victory was 38,911 votes, this means that almost half the victory margin was due to increased turnout. The victory was apparently due both to a shift in public opinion from 2008 to 2010 and to increased turnout among traditional supporters of transit initiatives.

The voting returns also suggest that the campaign helped increase voters support for Prop A in 2010. Figure 3 shows areas where the vote for Prop A in 2010 increased over the vote for Prop M in 2008. The portion of the county outlined by the heavy black line in Figure 3 is the area targeted by the advertising campaign. The biggest improvement in the percentage of voters supporting the mass transit initiative from the 2008 election to the 2010 election came in the northern portion of the county that was targeted by the campaign. These were also areas that had experienced unusually high levels of ballot drop-off on Proposition M in 2008. The portions of the county with the smallest improvement in support for Proposition A in 2010 were in the southern and western areas of the County that were not targeted by the campaign.

Figure 3: Increase in Votes for Prop A (2010) over Prop M (2008)



Conclusion: What are the Lessons of the Prop A Victory?

It would be great if we could “bottle” the spirit of the Prop A campaign and then simply pull it off the shelf for the next civic initiative. But it is impossible to do this; every campaign is unique. Nevertheless, we can draw lessons from the passage of Prop A to help guide future campaigns – lessons applicable to other cities across the country and lessons that apply more specifically to St. Louis. Lessons drawn from the targeted turnout strategy are applicable to initiatives in cities across the country. Lessons drawn from the nature of the Prop A coalition can help guide future campaigns in the St. Louis region.

The first lesson is that targeted turnout strategies can work. Putting transit initiatives up in low-visibility off-year

elections can succeed if proponents can mobilize supporters without mobilizing opponents. Part of the reason this strategy can be effective is because modern technologies enable campaigns to target much more precisely than with earlier mass media strategies. Although direct mail has long had the ability to target sympathetic voters, we were surprised to learn that cable television purchases can also be targeted to specific zip codes containing the most sympathetic voters.

Money to purchase targeted campaign ads has limits, however. Political science research demonstrates that effective GOTV campaigns require face-to-face relations.²⁵ Although it would be possible to pay people to conduct a GOTV campaign, that would be very expensive and it probably helps to have people who really believe in the cause. The Prop A campaign was able to mobilize large numbers of volunteers to staff phone banks to remind supporters to go to the polls. The phone banking was not face-to-face but it was more personal than TV or direct mail. Volunteers also went door-to-door to leave reminders to vote. The Greater St. Louis Transit Alliance also mobilized its member organizations (about 250) to encourage their members to vote. A speakers’ bureau was organized and numerous face-to-face events occurred in churches and union halls encouraging supporters to vote.

In short, our analysis of individual turnout records suggests that *well-designed GOTV efforts with large numbers of volunteers can increase turnout among supporters without mobilizing opponents.*

The second major lesson has to do with the nature of the coalition. Part of the reason for the contrast between 2008 and 2010, we believe, is that there was a broader civic coalition in 2010 that mobilized civic energies and inoculated the campaign from attacks. People who cared the most about transit played key roles in the campaign. In past initiatives Civic Progress generally took the lead. Because Civic Progress usually raises the lion's share of the money for campaigns, most civic organizations deferred to Civic Progress and waited to be told what to do. As a result, in past initiatives civic organizations did not feel ownership of the campaign and their commitment to the campaign was limited. That attitude could be summed up in the phrase: "Let Civic Progress do it."²⁶

The 2010 Prop A campaign was different. Because Civic Progress did not support putting the measure on the ballot, civic organizations, let by CMT, felt they had to take the lead. The unions, churches, and civil rights organizations played active roles in the campaign. Katie Jensen-Larson, Executive Director of Metropolitan Congregations United (MCU), a social justice coalition of more than 40 churches in the region, talked about the difference in 2010. "This time, we decided it was our campaign," she said. "If it passes, we need to make it pass."²⁷ Pastors incorporated Prop A into their sermons, volunteers collected pledge cards from voters, and Catholic churches talked about it at fish fries. In short, the civic energy mobilized behind Prop A in 2010 was greater than that behind Prop M in 2008 – and this heightened civic energy made a difference.

This suggests a second lesson of the Prop A victory: *successful civic initiatives should not be controlled by big business (or any other single element of the community) but by a broad coalition that stretches across economic, racial, and civic divides, and includes people who care the most about the issue.*

Does this mean that Civic Progress and large corporations don't matter? Absolutely not! As we saw, the campaign depended overwhelmingly on large corporate contributions. The campaign would have been impossible without them. The difference is that the Prop A campaign was a true coalition led by a representative steering committee that coordinated with an alliance of over 250 endorsing organizations (Greater St. Louis Transit Alliance). The campaign combined top-down and bottom up approaches that mobilized unprecedented amounts of civic energy.

Can this broad civic coalition be mobilized for other civic initiatives in the future? The truth is the Prop A campaign was special in many ways. Perhaps the key was that the cuts in the bus and light rail systems had brought home the cost of failure to the voters. Moreover, the interests of bus riders and light rail advocates came together. They saw that they needed each other to succeed. Efforts to split the coalition failed. And having been stung by the bus cuts, corporate employers saw that their interests were also served by a well-functioning public transit system.

Other initiatives, such as improving K-12 education in the region, restructuring tax increment financing (TIF), or reforming city government, will not naturally attract a broad inclusive coalition

like that which coalesced around Prop A. But that does not mean that civic leaders should not try to recreate such a coalition. The key is not just to invite a broad coalition to support an initiative that has already been formed but to actually engage these organizations in framing the reform agenda in the first place.

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Appendix A: Statistical Methods

We analyzed data from the St. Louis County voter history file to estimate the impact of the Proposition A campaign on voter turnout in the April 2010 election.¹ The voter history file contains the address, date of registration, and birth date for each registered voter in the County. In addition, the voter history file records whether each registered voter participated in each of the past ten elections, going back to the April 2004 election. Thus, the data allow us to account for the most important control variable, a person's propensity to vote. For example, someone who voted in all twelve elections prior to 2010 is highly likely to vote in the April 2010 election. By the same token, someone who did not vote in any previous elections is very unlikely to vote in the April 2010 election. We created a voting propensity variable as the proportion of times a person voted in previous elections. This is the main control variable in the statistical model.

Using the voter history data file, we estimated a statistical model to predict voter turnout in the April 2010 election. The dependent variable is a dummy variable indicating whether a registered voter participated in the April 2010 election. For the statistical analysis, we estimated a logit model appropriate for the dependent variable. In particular, we were interested in testing whether people targeted by the campaign to pass Proposition A were more likely to vote in the April 2010 election. In addition, we examined whether voters in three polling places in close proximity to Washington University were more likely to participate in the April 2010 election.

The campaign shared with us the zip codes where direct mail was sent and where cable TV advertising was targeted. We created a dummy variable identifying registered voters in the area targeted by the campaign to pass Proposition A. This is the main variable of interest in the statistical model of turnout in the 2010 election. The turnout model also included an interaction term combining the campaign target variable with the voting propensity measure to determine whether the advertising campaign had a stronger impact on infrequent voters.

Our turnout model included dummy variables for voters living in an area with a competitive mayoral race or school funding issue, on the theory that voters might be turned out by those local campaigns. Finally, the turnout model included control variables for each voter's age, the median household income in the voter's block group and the percent of the population that is African-American in each voter's block. These variables account for the fact that voter turnout tends to be lower in low-income and African-American neighborhoods in local elections, as well as among young voters.

Table A1: Predictors of Turnout in April 2010 Election
Model Results Used to Estimate Turnout Effects in Figure 3 and Text

Independent Variable	Coefficient (standard error)
Percent African American	.0003 (.0002)
Median Household Income (thousands)	.001*** (.0001)
Propensity to Vote	8.06*** (.04)
Mayoral Race	0.47*** (.01)
School District Ballot Issue	0.61*** (.01)
Advertising Target	0.56*** (.02)
Advertising Target X Propensity to Vote	-0.25*** (.05)
Washington University Precincts	0.64*** (.04)
Age of Voter	0.29*** (.01)
Constant	-5.05*** (.02)
Pseudo R ²	.32
Observations	732,847

Note: Cell entries are logit regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses). The dependent variable indicates whether the registered voters participated in the April 2010 election in St. Louis County, Missouri. The data source is the St. Louis County voter history file for 2004 to 2010. *** p < .001

Appendix B

Historical Sales Tax Ballot Initiatives

Date	County	Sales Tax	Result
November 1993	St. Clair	0.5 percent	Passed
August 1994	City of St. Louis	0.25 percent	Passed
August 1994	St. Louis	0.25 percent	Passed
August 1996	St. Charles	0.5 percent	Failed
November 1996	St. Charles	0.5 percent	Failed
November 1997	City of St. Louis	0.25 percent	Passed
November 1997	St. Louis	0.25 percent	Failed
November 1997	Madison	0.5 percent	Failed
November 2008	St. Louis	0.5 percent	Failed
April 2010	St. Louis	0.5 percent	Passed

Endnotes

¹ Transit tax initiatives had lost twice before 2010. In 1997 a ¼ cent sales tax lost in a special election in St. Louis County by 58-42 percent. The ¼ cent tax just barely carried in the City of St. Louis with 50.4 percent of the vote. (The City of St. Louis sales tax did not kick in until St. Louis County voters approved their sales tax increase in 2010.)

² Werbel & Haas (2001) cite having the vote in a general election and “sponsorship by the business community” as two factors that help predict the success of transit initiatives.

³ Prop M lost by 15,938 votes; 48,849 people who showed up at the polls did not vote on Prop M. In order to put Prop M over the top by getting these voters to vote on the initiative, they would have had to break about 2:1 for Prop M. There is some evidence that the nonvoters were more inclined to vote YES. We know that black voters tended to vote YES on Prop M. The drop-off in 2008 was strongly correlated with race: in all five townships with a population more than 40 percent black, the drop-off was higher than 10 percent; in the other 23 mostly white townships, only one had drop-off higher than 10 percent.

⁴ According to Joseph Donahue, St. Louis County Board of Commissioners, as cited in Leiser, April 8, 2010.

⁵ For a list of all votes on transit taxes in the St. Louis region, see Appendix B.

⁶ “A History of Transit Sales Tax Initiatives: St. Louis County;” see http://www.gatewaystreets.org/2010/03/history-of-transit-sales-tax_05.html (accessed March 13, 2011).

⁷ Unlike St. Louis City, the County devotes only half of the proceeds to Metro, with the other half going for maintenance of County roads.

⁸ The voters of St. Charles County, however, were unimpressed, voting twice in 1995 not to join the regional transportation system.

⁹ Our analysis of the 1997 campaign is based on Werbel & Haas 2001.

¹⁰ Werbel & Haas 2001, 20-21.

¹¹ Werbel & Haas 2001.

¹² By most accounts, Salci was an effective manager but he was not good at public relations. In perhaps his most famous gaff, in November 2007 he said of KTVI’s Elliot Davis, “He fits right into St. Louis, he’s a (expletive) clown.” Salci later apologized. Quoted in Patterson 2007.

¹³ The Regional Business Council, which had been another key funder in 2008, also opposed putting it on the ballot.

¹⁴ See <http://www.cmt-stl.org/>.

¹⁵ Quoted in Leiser, Feb. 28, 2010.

¹⁶ Citizens for Better Transit was led by 26-year old graduate of Truman State, John Burns, who was close to the Tea Party Movement. Citizens for Better Transit created a website and was able to get modest media attention but had little organizational presence in the campaign. As far as we know, there was no ground coalition of organizations opposed to Prop A.

¹⁷ Quoted at: <http://www.stoptheprop.com/wordpress/about-citizens-for-better-transit/>.

¹⁸ East-West Gateway Council of Governments had developed a plan for expanding MetroLink but it had not involved extensive citizen engagement and was not well known by the public.

¹⁹ See <http://movingtransitforward.org/>.

²⁰ The finding on the effectiveness of face-to-face communication for increasing turnout is supported by the “gold standard” of scientific research, controlled experiments with separate experimental and control groups. For an introduction to the research see Gerber and Green 2008.

²¹ <http://www.moremetrolink.com/about-the-alliance.html>.

²² Quoted in Metro Magazine 2010.

²³ The campaign also used a new technology called Voter Neighbor (<http://www.imagevictory.com/nv/>) which provides a high-tech method for person-to-person contact in campaigns. Essentially, Prop A supporters were able to identify neighbors, relatives, and other personal acquaintances from a list of registered voters to receive personalized post cards from them to vote Yes on A.

²⁴ Our primary source for the campus campaign is Kramer 2010.

²⁵ Gerber & Green 2008. We should note that currently we do not have the data to separate the effect of targeted media buys versus the GOTV effort in generating the increased turnout we found in our data analysis. The political science literature suggests, however, that face-to-face GOTV efforts will be more successful than targeted media buys. In the future, we will also examine the impact of the phone bank effort on voter turnout in the April 2010 election.

²⁶ Another good example of problems with top-down campaigns is the 2004 initiative to revise the Charter of the City of St. Louis. Civic Progress funded the effort and, despite the development of a Stakeholder Assembly, there was relatively little buy in from civic and political organizations. This made Charter Reform vulnerable to the criticism that it served the interests of the white business community and was against the interests of poor and minority communities. For an analysis of the defeat of charter reform along these lines, see Cropf & Swanstrom 2004.

²⁷ Quoted in Leiser 2010.