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FasTracks Case Study and Lessons Learned for Hillsborough County

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The Denver FasTracks Initiative- 2004



- RTD is an 8 county taxing district established by the Colorado General Assembly in 1969; in 2002 the General Assembly granted additional taxing power of .4 tenths of one percent to take the tax to a full penny
- RTD tax had not been raised in 21 years
- Legislature only granted the RTD the power to go to the ballot by petition
- Governor and CDOT opposed the election
- This was the second time that the district had gone to an election to raise taxes to build rail; all 4 lines on rail had been built with existing tax levels, fare box, and federal dollars; we could not afford to lose

The Campaign

- Private Sector and environmental community led effort
- Had the unanimous support of all 32 mayors in the region and the county commissioners
- Spent from June of 2002 – February of 2004 testing and researching the attitudes of the voters
- Launched the “Official” campaign in March of 2004
- Exceeded the required number of signatures by twice the amount; collected strictly by volunteers and completed in less than 60 days.
- Raised and Spend \$3.6M in 6 months

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Critical Components needed in order to be successful

RESEARCH

- Abandon all preconceived notions as to who supports transit and who doesn't
- Focus on your non-user who end up paying the tax
- Understand what the citizen wants out of their transportation system; be cognizant of that as you are building that plan for the additional tax
- Confidence in the governmental entity is key: Have an entity in charge who has a track record of delivering large projects and who can also be held accountable

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What did the research show us?

- Voters wanted specifics; they want to know what they are getting for their tax money
- It was all about “the map”
- Just because you were not going to use it did not mean that you weren’t willing to pay for it
- They wanted transportation choices
- Users were not necessarily an automatic yes
- The road is not your enemy; Do not pit transit against the road; voters want both
- The voters wanted it now

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Why were we successful?

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- The agency had a track record; had opened 3 lines on time and on schedule
- In 1999 had asked the voters for bonding authority to build the 4th line in partnership with CDOT; the project called TREX expanded one of our major highways and authorized the rail line
- We had a vision for the region
- We articulated our vision in a direct message
- We had a unified local political leadership in favor of the initiative
- We maximize the political capital of the regionally popular newly elected Mayor of Denver

What can Hillsborough County learn from any of these experiences?

ADVANTAGES

- FDOT believes that regional projects should receive funding
- TBARTA has elevated the dialogue regionwide and highlighted the need for transit in the region
- There are numerous agencies who are ready and able to be parties in this very significant endeavor but they must be led, and they must know how the overall rules fit in with the program
- You have a very supportive business community who is positioned to be your partner

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What can Hillsborough County learn from any of these experiences?

CHALLENGES

- This is your maiden voyage into rail and it will, by necessity, only reach a small portion of the County
- You will have to balance that portion of the county that will be getting the line with the portions of the county that are not; how will they benefit?
- You may not be able to make this a strictly transit issue, but you need to have enough money to ensure that you will be able to build and complete a project as promised
- Your governance issues need to be clear- who will be in charge of the project?

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