

Getting to Yes: Paying for More Mobility

Once you have framed the issue and taken your audience step by step through the benefits, only then it is possible to talk about how to pay for these improvements.

1) **Explain the cost on a personal scale**—not \$20 million or \$1 billion shortfall; instead, put in into

the perspective of their own budgets: what is it going to cost them in dollars per year/per month.

2) **Frame it as a usage tax or fee**—people think that the cost of transportation should be paid by those who reap the benefits, and think not only of drivers and transit riders, but also the people who truck the milk to the grocery store.

3) **Frame the benefits**—what they personally will get for their dollars.



Language to Green Light: Words and Phrases that Will Have a Positive Impact

accountability, responsibility	"...any new transportation initiative must have accountability built into the process..." "...elected officials must take personal ownership and responsibility for..."
choice	"...people need the ability to choose their travel options..."
comprehensive strategy	"... a comprehensive strategy that reaches statewide..."
economy	"...transportation is the lifeblood of the economy..." "...bolstering our economy means improving transportation..." "...adding 50,000 jobs and over \$6 billion to our economy..."
efficient traffic	"...we need traffic that moves more efficiently..."
long-term plan	"... we cannot simply focus on the short-term. We must plan strategically – and optimistically – for the long-term..."
state and local controlled	"...everyone will maintain state and local control of money and project selection..."
sustainable mobility	"...we need a future of sustainable mobility because that's what it means to be mobile..."



Language to Red Light: Words and Phrases that Make People Tune Out

maintenance, fixing	"...for the on-going maintenance and improvements that are necessary..." "...maintenance and expansion will..."
public spending, spending money	"The most important part of public spending is..."
Washington	"...relying on the federal government and Washington..." "...and we are going to work with Congress to..."

Strategies and Messages and *The New Language of Mobility* are supplements to *Making the Case for Transportation Investment and Revenue*, produced under the National Cooperative Highway Research Program and prepared at the request of AASHTO. Full text of these documents can be found at: <http://downloads.transportation.org/ANewWayToTalkAboutTransportation>.



The New Language of Mobility: Talking Transportation in a Post-Recession World

maslansky
luntz + partners

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
STATE HIGHWAY AND
TRANSPORTATION OFFICIALS
AASHTO
THE VOICE OF TRANSPORTATION

A New Way to Talk About Transportation

Federal and state transportation agencies and the public face critical decisions about future funding for our nation's transportation system. Although there is currently an almost universal reluctance to increase funding for transportation at the federal level, some states have been successful in generating voter support for new funding mechanisms.

Off-the-shelf communications solutions, however, will not necessarily lead to voter support. Several states have shown that it is possible to identify core messaging themes that must be

present in a successful campaign to secure support for investment in our transportation network.

Last fall, the teams of PB and maslansky luntz + partners conducted research to uncover the new lexicon of transportation that can lead to voter support, post-recession and in the era of big budget deficits. The results of this research can be found in two volumes: *Strategies and Messaging* and *The New Language of Mobility*. Both can be found at <http://downloads.transportation.org/ANewWayToTalkAboutTransportation>. This paper presents the highlights from Volume 2.

"Traffic makes me feel trapped... it deprives me of my time and my freedom."

—D.C. Session Participant

How to Talk About Transportation Investment

Consistent, targeted messages are important, but they must be laid out carefully.

- 1) Conversations must be focused around the benefits you can add to people's daily experiences.
- 2) Build your case piece by piece, and start with a message that centers around something the people in your communities find most important—not what you think are the priorities.
- 3) Stress new approaches you are taking to ensure accountability and transparency.
- 4) Use all communications platforms. Opportunities abound—from the open house for your latest project to Twitter and Facebook—from the legend on your powerpoint presentations to your signature block on e-mails.
- 5) Repetition is key to making an impact.

Create More "Green Lights"

It would be hard to overstate the national mood against large government programs or new taxes right now, for any reason.

- Distrust of Washington and big government means all decisions need to be perceived as being made at the state and local levels—not federally driven.
- Traditional messages about maintenance and even relieving congestion simply are not as effective right now.
- Everything seems to be moving faster, but cars still move at the same speed (or slower).
- Transportation just has not evolved with the times and it is holding us back.



To succeed:

- You must provide a vision of how things can and should be.
- You need to make transportation more technologically advanced, more efficient.
- Essentially, you need to create more “green lights.”

Words That Build Support for Transportation Funding

- ▶ Mobility
- ▶ Technology and modernization
- ▶ Long-term local planning
- ▶ Accountable spending
- ▶ Jobs and economic development

What is important to people in the context of transportation?

The new research shows almost universal support for efforts to make transportation more like the rest of their world—more technologically advanced, more efficient—more options, more choices, more information. People are willing to pay for things that are important to them and are perceived to make life easier.

Mobility—the freedom to get where you want to go, when you want to get there. The freedom to choose how you get to where you want to go.

In a world that more and more centers around the “mobile” phone or computer—people want more mobility—and, to them, mobility means the freedom to move around, and to get where they want to go, when they want to get there.

But **this freedom must be sustainable**—both physically and financially. In this context, sustainable

means we can make our transportation system last and that we have planned adequately for the future.

Language to Use

“We all want a transportation network that makes us more mobile...it’s about giving us more options.”

“People need the ability to choose their travel options. That’s what it means to be mobile.”

A tangible benefit is “more efficient traffic flow, with less congestion, more green lights.”

“When I use transit, I want a seamless connection between my subway ride and the bus so I can get home more quickly and easily with fewer wait times.”

How do we achieve this mobility? (And the revenue to pay for it.)

1) Using new technologies and modernizing the system. People expect to pay more for new technology. The 4G Phone is a perfect example. Just like people know that a cell phone plan with upgraded phone and data networks costs more, people also understand that new technologies for transportation also come with a price tag. But you also have to show them the benefits: safer roads, less congestion, better travel times between work and home or home to school.

Small technological advancements should be championed: Better timing for traffic signals that synchronize green lights. Clearing stalled vehicles more quickly. Real-time traffic information. Getting smarter about moving cars around the city efficiently.

Language to Use

“We need a system that allows us to react in real time. In a smarter transportation system, data is gathered from the trains and buses and synced so that the buses know when to wait for a late train or to send an extra bus when the train does arrive. People get to work on time, the whole system works better.”

2) Implementing long-term planning with plenty of local input, with state leaders, local officials, the business and community groups involved. Plans that come from Washington, DC, should not determine how our gas tax money is spent. State departments of transportation should be in charge but the private sector and the general public must have a voice. And people want names—exactly who is at the table.

Technology Triple Play

- Q.** “If I could promise you synchronized traffic signals, a smarter traffic system, and technology that clears accidents off the roads faster, would you be willing to pay an extra \$100 a year for that?”
- A.** “I’ll write you a check right now!”
—Orlando session participant

People do not know how much planning state DOTs already do. Even if you know that the process exists and is real, the public does not.

Language to Use

“We need a comprehensive strategy that reaches statewide, creates jobs, provides for continued investment over the long term.”

3) Being accountable, with transparency so that citizens can check details whenever they want to.

Convince them that any new money will go only to transportation. No new bureaucracies will be created or established.

Show the public you are working at peak efficiency and have gotten rid of any waste—show them you have corrected any past mistakes. Visualize the projects with interactive maps.

Language to Use

“Tough financial controls will ensure funding goes to transportation and can’t be diverted by politicians.”

“We need to ensure that this tax increase won’t grow government. It will grow the private sector.”

Secondary messages

Two other issues surfaced during the research, but carried both positive and negative reactions. Therefore, depending on audience, these should be considered secondary messages.

New Jobs and Economic Development

Resist comparing America’s transportation investments to that of other countries, or that America is “falling behind.”

Do not just talk about jobs—talk about skilled jobs, sustainable jobs, or family-wage jobs. Shovel-ready and stimulus are (wrongly) becoming synonymous with failed programs.

Environmental Messages

Relate words that focus on modernization and technology improvements with the environment. Efforts to reduce congestion and idling mean that less smog and pollutants will be released in the air. Fewer pollutants mean more positive outcomes for children and seniors with asthma and respiratory diseases because it reduces exposure.