



## Transportation group: Atlanta not a bellwether for transit funding votes

By Keith Laing - 08/07/12 04:28 PM ET

A Washington, D.C.-based transportation group said Tuesday that a vote in Atlanta to reject an \$8-billion tax to fund road and transit projects is not a "bellwether" for the nation.

A widely-publicized proposal to increase sales taxes in Atlanta by one cent via a Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (T-SPLOST) was [voted down](#) last week in a closely watched election. The measure was defeated by an almost 2-to-1 margin, losing 63 to 37 percent.

But Transportation for America (T4A) Communications Director David Goldberg said in a [post](#) on the T4A's website that the election was not representative of the rest of the country's opinions of road and transit projects.

"[I]s it a bellwether for transportation votes in other states and metros? The short answer, most likely, is 'no,'" Goldberg wrote.

"Like most ballot measures, the Atlanta vote failed for its own peculiar reasons," he continued. "The Legislature had ensured an uphill battle by mandating the vote be held during the primary election, rather than the November general election. The vast majority of contested races were in Republican districts in the suburbs. The Republican primaries drew an anti-tax electorate to the polls, while residents in the core, who tend to be less tax-averse, had fewer reasons to turn out."

Goldberg acknowledged that the vote was "a serious blow to the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, whose leaders led the battle to get the right to have a regional vote, and to politician-supporters such as Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed."

But he said the rejection of the transportation tax was not an anti-transit vote.

"Certainly, some of that sentiment exists," he said. "But remember there was plenty of money in this for road building, too. Atlanta is made up of thousands of newer and younger residents who do not carry the baggage of race-based, anti-transit battles of previous decades. Most of them just want a system that works, regardless of mode, and they want efficiency and accountability in their operation."

The problem with the Atlanta transportation tax proposal, Goldberg said, was that it offered a regional approach in an area that does not have a strong collective identity.

"Regional votes in places without a tradition of regional institutions and decision-making are an extremely heavy lift," he said. "In our focus groups, the idea of a regional solution held a lot of appeal. But in reality, voters were being asked to send a lot of their money to a 'regional' approach with unclear lines of accountability.

"The money would have gone to the [Georgia Department of Transportation], [Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority], the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority and to local jurisdictions throughout 10 counties," he continued. "But with money spread all over the place, where did the buck actually stop? [Voters] were being asked to trust, not just their local electeds, but government writ large. In this day and time, with this electorate, that may have just been too much to ask."

The transportation tax was voted down in 9 of 12 Georgia regions that voted on predetermined lists of road and transit projects.

A key financial rating agency, Moody's Investors Service, said this week that the rejection could **negatively impact** the city of Atlanta's credit rating.

Source:

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