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## **72 % of Transportation Measures Approved on November 3 Voters Choose Pro-Rail Candidates; Vote Down Anti-Tax Measures**

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On November 3, 2009, voters across the country approved 72% of transportation ballot measures. In a rough economy and an off-year for elections, these results indicate that voters feel strongly about supporting transportation despite major economic challenges. This is a continuation of what we saw last fall when 77% of transportation measures were approved, even though many voters were already feeling the effects of a weakening economy. The results from the past two years are in line with what has been happening throughout the past decade. Since 2000, approximately 70% of all transportation measures have been approved, a rate double that of ballot measures generally.

This November, measures were on the ballot in five states— Colorado, Indiana, Maine, Michigan and Ohio. Of the seven measures, five were finance, one sought to establish a Regional Transportation District, and one to amend a city charter to require voter approval of all public transportation projects. Voters in Cincinnati, Ohio rejected the city charter amendment, which was designed to delay and obstruct public transportation projects. Voters also approved four out of five finance measures, generating over \$74 million for transportation.

Earlier in the year, three elections were held with transportation measures on the ballot. Of those three elections, a sales tax increase in Island County, Washington and a property tax increase in Kalamazoo County, Michigan, were both approved. Voters in Grand Rapids, Michigan came close to approving a property tax increase for a high-speed bus line, but in the end it did not achieve the necessary support. There is one more measure scheduled in 2009—voters in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma will be asked to approve a sales tax on December 8 to support a variety of projects, including a new rail-based streetcar system, potential commuter lines and a transit hub.

Even beyond the traditional ballot measures, November 3 was a good day for public transportation. The defeat of several local anti-rail candidates and anti-tax measures that could have limited funding can be seen as boons for transportation advocates. In mayoral races in Cincinnati and Charlotte, the pro-rail candidate won. Newly re-elected Mayor Mark Mallory strongly supports the 7.9 mile streetcar plan for Cincinnati. In Charlotte, voters elected City Council member Anthony Foxx, a strong supporter of the Charlotte Area Transit System and finding new funding options for transportation. In both cases, the defeated candidate was less supportive of transportation issues. This was also a key issue in city council races in Boise, ID, and at the ballot, the candidates with the stronger transportation agenda were elected.

On two statewide ballots this November, voters were faced with initiatives known as TABOR measures. In both Washington and Maine, these measures sought to impose spending limits on state and local budgets and require voter approval of any increases. In the past, places that have approved such measures have seen dramatic decreases in state and local budgets, requiring intense cuts to services like public transportation. Maine and Washington voters roundly defeated the measures, ensuring that needed services and infrastructure will not be neglected because of artificial limits on spending.

The Center for Transportation Excellence anticipates that 2010 will be an even more robust year for transportation elections. Both state legislatures and communities around the country began considering a variety of potential measures in 2009, but held off as a result of the economic downturn. After the November elections, American Public Transportation Association President William Millar made the observation that “at a time when unemployment is high and economic uncertainty is foremost in peoples’ minds, you might not expect people to tax themselves for better public transit services.” He continued on to identify the key lesson from these recent elections that “these votes for public transportation speak loud and clear: the public wants more public transportation service and is willing to pay for it.” Already, there are fifteen likely measures for ballots in 2010 and additional measures are expected to be announced in the coming months.

Next Friday, November 13, the Center for Transportation Excellence will be hosting a webinar to analyze the results and implications from the November 2009 elections. “*Election Trends: Learning from the Past and Looking to the Future*” will also take a look at key trends that have appeared over the past decade and how they might play out in the 2010 election cycle and beyond. Registration for this webinar, which is the first in a six-part webinar training series, is available online at [www.cfte.org](http://www.cfte.org)

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A complete list of 2009 ballot initiatives, as well as potential measures in 2010, is available at <http://www.cfte.org>. The Center for Transportation Excellence is a non-partisan research group based in Washington, D.C.