Voters in several states will consider the fate of transportation-related ballot measures in next week’s election. I have a refresher on the statewide measures in play as well as some local and county ballot measures to watch. Plus a number of items on how transportation is playing as an issue in a number of fall campaigns and how it could be on the agenda for state legislatures next year. As always, I also have my regular roundup of items on the future of the federal transportation program, state transportation funding efforts, public-private partnerships and tolling and state multi-modal strategies.

Statewide Transportation Ballot Initiatives

Five states will consider statewide transportation ballot initiatives next week. They include:

- **Louisiana:** Amendment 4 [2] would authorize the investment of public funds to create a state infrastructure bank, which would loan, pledge, guarantee and donate funds to eligible transportation projects.

  Read more: [“Transportation advocates organize to support Constitutional Amendment 4,”][3] The Times-Picayune, October 8, 2014.

- **Maryland:** Question 1 [4] would define the state’s Transportation Trust Fund under the state constitution. It would require that revenues in the fund be used for paying transportation-related bond debt and for the construction and maintenance of highways. It also would require that the revenues in the fund not be transferred to the state general fund or a special fund, except to the Maryland Transportation Authority, Maryland Transportation Authority Fund, counties, municipalities and Baltimore or when the governor declares a fiscal emergency or the legislature obtains a three-fifths vote in both chambers.

  Read more: [“Some legislators want to put the brakes on moving money out of the Transportation Trust Fund,”][5] The (Hagerstown) Herald-Mail, September 13, 2014


  [“Maryland voters could put transportation funding in a “lockbox.” Here’s what that would mean.”][7] Greater Greater Washington, October 14, 2014

- **Massachusetts:** Question 1 [8] would repeal the 2013 law that automatically adjusts the state gas tax to inflation, allowing for annual increases.


• **Texas:** Proposition 1 [12] would divert half of the general revenue derived from oil and gas taxes from the Economic Stabilization Fund (also known as the Rainy Day Fund) to the State Highway Fund for the purpose of providing transportation funding for repairs and maintenance of public roads. The move is expected to result in $1.2 billion annually going to transportation funding.


“Prop One looks to repave the Constitution... and highways.” [15] KFOX-TV, October 13, 2014

“Voters asked to approve $1.4B for Texas highways.” [16] KXAN-TV, October 16, 2014


“Texas looks to voters to ensure billions for highway funding.” [18] T4America Blog, October 27, 2014

• **Wisconsin:** Question 1 [19] would require that revenue generated by transportation fees and taxes be deposited into the state’s transportation fund. None of the revenue could be appropriated to any program not directly administered by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.


More on statewide ballot measures:


• “Transportation and this year's elections.” [24] The Hill, October 27, 2014

• “Voters in two states consider measures to restrict funding to transportation uses.” [25] T4America Blog, October 22, 2014

• “From Texas to Wisconsin, Voters to Determine Transportation Policy.” [26] Roll Call, October 20, 2014

**City & County Transportation Ballot Measures**

Cities and counties also have a variety of transportation initiatives on the ballot next week. Here’s a list:

• **Alameda County, California:** Voters will consider [27] a measure to increase the current
transportation sales tax from half a cent to a full penny for thirty years.


- **San Francisco, CA:** Voters will **consider an amendment** [29] to the city’s charter to provide a $23 million budget boost for transportation by retroactively accounting for population growth and taking money from the general fund. ... They’ll also vote on a nonbinding **declaration of policy** [30] that would protect the interests of drivers.

- **Monterey County, CA:** A **1/8 cent sales tax** [31] for Monterey Salinas Transit is on the ballot.

- **San Bruno, CA:** Voters will **consider an amendment** [32] to modify a city ordinance and lift the building height restriction around the Caltrain station.

- **Alachua County & City of Gainesville, FL:** Voters will **consider** [33] a one cent sales tax for eight years to fund $30 million annually in transportation projects selected by the county and city.

- **Pinellas County, FL:** Voters will decide on a **ballot question** [34] that would increase the sales tax by 1 percent in order to broaden the county’s transportation system through increased bus service and light rail.


- **Polk County, FL:** Voters will **consider a referendum** [36] to levy a one-cent sales tax increase with half of the new revenues going toward the development, construction, equipment, maintenance, operation and supportive services for a countywide bus transit system.


- **Clayton County, GA:** Voters will **consider a cent sales tax** [38] to join the MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority) transit system.


- **Cobb County, GA:** Voters will **decide whether to renew** [40] a one cent sales tax for transportation projects, including Cobb Community Transit.

- **Wichita, KS:** Voters will **consider a one cent sales tax increase** [41] to fund projects. Bus service would receive 10 percent of the revenues—an estimated $40 million.

- **Wexford County, MI:** Residents will **consider renewing** [42] a .6 millage (property tax) for two years to help fund the Cadillac Wexford Transit Authority.

- **Bay City, MI:** Residents **will consider renewing** [43] a .75 millage to fund Bay Metro Transport.

- **Kansas City, MO:** Voters will **consider** [44] two ballot questions, which would impose a quarter-cent sales tax increase for 25 years for capital improvements and an eighth cent sales tax increase for 25 years for public transportation.

  Read more: “Almost no one supports KC’s two strange ballot questions,” [45] The Kansas City Star, October 27, 2014

- **Dona Ana County, NM:** Voters will **consider** [46] a ¼ of a penny sales tax to fund expanded rural bus service for the South Central Regional Transit District.

• **Sierra County, NM:** Voters will consider a similar measure to the one above.

• **Austin, TX:** Voters will consider Local Proposition 1, which would allow the city to sell $600 million in general obligation bonds for the initial leg of a light-rail project and $400 million for regional road projects.


“Results Are Mixed for Cities That Bundle Rail and Freeway Funding,” Next City, August 6, 2014.

• **Seattle, WA:** Voters will consider a measure that would create the Century Transportation Authority, which would have the power to tax to fund bond debt as a means to jumpstarting a proposed monorail project. They will also decide whether to approve a $60 car tab fee and 1/10 percent sales tax increase to prevent bus service cuts.


More on local ballot measures

• “Important state and local transportation measures will be decided at the ballot this year,” T4America Blog, October 8, 2014.

**Transportation Policy on the Campaign Trail**

• The AASHTO Journal noted that two governors running for re-election this year are looking at shifting transportation funding to sales taxes on fuel.

• Next City looked at how transportation is shaping mayoral races this year in Austin, Washington, D.C., and San Jose.

• **Connecticut:** The need to invest in transportation infrastructure is one of the issues in the Connecticut governor’s race, The CT Mirror reported.

• **Michigan:** Land Line magazine reported that transportation funding has become a big issue in the governor’s race in Michigan as well.

• **Ohio:** The Northeast Ohio Media Group asked Congressional candidates from Northeast Ohio to weigh in on whether increasing the federal gas tax would be a good idea.

• **Pennsylvania:** Infrastructure is also playing a role in the governor’s race in the Keystone State, WESA reported.

**MAP-21 Reauthorization & the Future of the Highway Trust Fund**

• A Bloomberg View editorial argued that the recent decline in oil prices makes it the perfect time to raise gas taxes: “So now that oil has fallen below $85 a barrel, and with America’s highways and mass transit systems starved for funding, is anyone in Washington sensibly calling for a gas tax increase? Of course not. Raising the gas tax is bad politics—and will remain so even after the November elections. But the economic case for a gas tax hike is compelling, and Congress should be paying attention.”

• U.S. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy is holding up 2012’s MAP-21 and this year’s Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) as examples of the type of legislation the Republican majority would hope to pass if it retains control of the House after next week’s election, The Hill reported.

• The American Trucking Associations’ Transport Topics publication recently editorialized against
the concept of devolution of the federal surface transportation program as promoted by Sen. Mike Lee of Utah and Rep. Tom Graves of Georgia. Bonus points for mention of the great Akron, Ohio new wave band Devo.

- But the conservative group Club for Growth recently came out in support of Lee and Graves’ bill, which would phase out the federal gas tax and transfer control of the National Highway System to states. The group’s president, former Congressman Chris Chocola, writes in a recent op-ed for USA Today [66] that: “Not only is raising the gas tax misguided, but we should not even have a federal gas tax to begin with because it finances a program that is inherently broken.”

- Rebecca Strauss of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) offers a critique [67] of the Obama Administration’s handling of the federal transportation program in a recent article: “Obama’s transportation legacy may actually be that the process of devolution started under his watch—or, in other words, that transportation decisions began passing from the federal government to states,” she writes. “Amidst federal paralysis, at least thirty states have launched serious initiatives to increase transportation-dedicated funding since 2013. Most major metro areas are expanding commuter rail networks, projects which are financed mostly by local taxpayers. Maybe local is the better way to go, since the vast majority of Americans only use infrastructure in their own county. Local ballot referenda for transportation bonds have a stellar success rate. But this is more the result of federal inaction than deliberate policy. And it probably is not the legacy Obama was hoping for.”

- The CFR’s Steven Markovich looked at the infrastructure underinvestment that has marked the Obama years in a recent backgrounder brief. [68]

- “Infrastructure Investment Creates American Jobs” [69] is the title of a report just out from Duke University’s Center on Globalization, Governance & Competitiveness. The report makes the case that underinvestment and a piecemeal policy approach have cost the U.S. more than 900,000 jobs and helped create a $900 billion backlog of infrastructure projects. According to the report: “A six-year transportation bill of at least $100 billion annually would support upwards of 2.18 million American jobs and rebuild our underperforming infrastructure. It would also make America more competitive, supporting the basic needs of U.S. businesses and their workers.”

- The Bluegreen Alliance, a coalition of 15 labor unions and environmental organizations, is out with a new report entitled “Making the Grade: How Investments in America’s Infrastructure Benefit Our Economy and Environment.” [70]

- Parsons Brinckerhoff Senior VP Steve Lockwood notes in a recent edition of the Eno Center for Transportation’s monthly newsletter [71] that the revenues of the highway account of the Highway Trust Fund will stabilize at $34 billion at the end of this decade, a decline of 25 percent from recent levels when it was $45 billion-plus. Lockwood says it may be worth considering the adequacy of a $34 billion federal aid highway program “to meet key national interests in the changing context for national highway development.” He writes that three trends may impact the future context of the program:

  - Flattening of VMT and changes in vehicle ownership;
  - The development of innovative program finance and development initiatives at the state, local and regional levels; and
  - Vehicle automation.

  Forbes contributor Joseph Thorndike makes the case [72] for a mileage-based user fee or VMT tax in a recent column: “Ultimately, privacy may be an anachronism—a quaint memory from our childhood, like Howard Johnson’s restaurants. We can wish for an earlier age of liberty, freedom, and highway anonymity. But there’s no turning back the clock. Realistically, we should spend our time figuring out how to live with a loss of privacy, not wishing for a bygone era. The gas tax has had a pretty good run. But it was built for a different age, when electricity was for light bulbs, not Lamborghiniis. It’s time to find a new, more effective revenue tool for our energy-sipping future – something like the VMT tax.”
State Activity on Transportation Revenues

- **Mississippi**: Members of the Mississippi Transportation Commission are warning that the state department of transportation will need $400 million a year more to spend on the state’s infrastructure, the AASHTO Journal reported [73].

- **New Jersey**: The Tri-State Transportation Campaign looks at [74] options the state legislature has proposed so far to shore up the state’s Transportation Trust Fund. The fund is expected to be flat broke without an infusion of new money by next year. The state could also lose more than $1.6 billion in matching federal money if no action is taken. All the revenue the state currently takes in from transportation taxes and tolls goes toward paying off debt with nothing left to fund projects. One idea that received some discussion at a recent legislative hearing was applying the state’s 7 percent sales tax to retail purchases of gasoline, NJ.com reported [75]. The state’s new Transportation Commissioner Jamie Fox said this month raising taxes in some fashion to increase revenues is the preferred option, NJ Spotlight reported [76]. “There has to be a revenue enhancer,” he said. “If it’s a gimmick, we’ve failed. We have to tell legislators we will be there with them. Anyone who thinks we’re going to get this done without a tax is just mouthing words.” Some are speculating Fox was brought on board to try to broker a compromise between Republican Gov. Chris Christie and Democrats in the legislature on transportation funding, which could include a gas tax, The Record reported [77]. But others believe any deal might include a short-term fix for the transportation fund that relies on borrowed money with a long-term agreement for a sustainable funding source to come later. That could protect Christie from appearing to support a near-term tax increase if he runs for President in 2016 as well as any Democratic lawmakers that might want to run for Governor to replace him. Bloomberg News also reported [78] recently on the state’s transportation conundrum.

- **New York**: Gov. Andrew Cuomo said recently that some of the $4 billion windfall the state is receiving in bank settlements will be used to create a new state infrastructure bank, The Journal News reported [79].

- **Washington**: A transportation funding package was high on the agenda for state lawmakers in Olympia over the last two years but nothing ever came to fruition. Now comes word that a legislative push in 2015 to satisfy the state Supreme Court’s demand for adequate education funding could prevent the legislature from revisiting the issue, The Kitsap Sun reported [80]. “Lawmakers will be required to pass a two-year transportation budget during the 105-day session that begins Jan. 12,” the newspaper’s Ed Friedrich writes. “If there’s no long-range revenue package, Washington State Ferries will have to be funded the way it has been the past 14 years — through fare increases, service cuts and transfers from state Department of Transportation highway accounts.”

**Public-Private Partnerships & Tolling**

- **The Future of Toll Roads in the U.S.** [81] was the focus on a recent edition of The Diane Rehm Show. Her guests included American Trucking Associations President (and former Kansas Governor) Bill Graves and Building America’s Future Co-Chair (and former Pennsylvania Governor) Ed Rendell.

- **Indiana**: Pension funds and infrastructure investors from around the world are partnering to bid for the operator of the Indiana Toll Road, which filed for bankruptcy last month, Reuters reported [82]. Also, Robert Puentes and Patrick Sabol pondered how a good deal went bad on the toll road in a recent piece [83]. And state Rep. Ed Delaney wrote a guest column for the Bloomington Herald Times [84] in which he argues borrowing to build infrastructure is a better strategy to finance infrastructure investment than public-private partnerships: “Indiana was able to borrow to build in the past. This was true when we had a modest surplus and interest rates were 5-6 percent, not around 1 or 2 percent. What we had then was common sense. We knew that when you have good credit you have choices. You can play games with financial engineering, you can fight over scraps or you can invest
at reasonable rates, using your good credit. Yes, invest. How’s that for an old-fashioned idea?” ... Kevin DeGood of The Center for American Progress, a Washington, D.C. think tank, penned an op-ed for The Indianapolis Star in which he makes a similar point: “Indiana has many ways to raise money to fund its infrastructure needs without resorting to complex and uncertain lease agreements. The bankruptcy offers Indiana residents the opportunity to tell their elected officials that infrastructure finance should not be based on a long-term gamble about what the future holds.” ... State officials are still trying to figure out how to finance an extension of I-69 from Martinsville to Indianapolis, the Associated Press reported. The options could include tolling but officials say it’s too premature to say how it might be paid for. There is also currently no funding in place for a bridge that would take I-69 across the Ohio River into Kentucky at Evansville. Money from the lease of the Indiana Toll Road funded construction of the first three sections of I-69.

**Kentucky:** The Kentucky-Indiana Joint Board for the Ohio River Bridges Project voted last week to restart its search for a company to handle tolling on the bridges under construction in the Louisville area following concerns about a possible conflict of interest in the process, the Associated Press reported. Meanwhile, Bloomberg News reported recently on how the Ohio River Bridges Project has the potential to become a model for infrastructure project investment in this country. An anti-tax group that tried to stop Cincinnati’s streetcar has joined forces with Northern Kentucky United, a coalition opposing tolls for a new Brent Spence Bridge, The Cincinnati Enquirer reported.

**Maryland:** Both candidates for governor have expressed an interest in reconsidering toll rates on the Intercounty Connector, the three-year-old highway between Montgomery and Prince George’s counties that has drawn complaints for high tolls and low traffic volume, The Washington Post reported.

**Massachusetts:** Gov. Deval Patrick still hopes to jumpstart two potential P3 opportunities before he leaves office in January: express toll lanes on Route 3 south of Boston and a third bridge across the Cape Cod Canal, The Boston Globe reported. Meanwhile, Bloomberg News reported recently on how the Ohio River Bridges Project has the potential to become a model for infrastructure project investment in this country. An anti-tax group that tried to stop Cincinnati’s streetcar has joined forces with Northern Kentucky United, a coalition opposing tolls for a new Brent Spence Bridge, The Cincinnati Enquirer reported.

**North Carolina:** Republican U.S. Senate candidate Thom Tillis is facing some conservative backlash for supporting a toll road project he pushed through as state House speaker, The Washington Times reported. An anti-tax group that tried to stop Cincinnati’s streetcar has joined forces with Northern Kentucky United, a coalition opposing tolls for a new Brent Spence Bridge, The Cincinnati Enquirer reported.

**South Carolina:** Paul Campbell, executive director of the Charleston International Airport and a state senator wrote an op-ed for The Post and Courier recently arguing the state should never pursue tolls on existing interstates.

**Texas:** (Fort Worth) Star-Telegram columnist Bob Ray Sanders weighs in on a growing anti-toll backlash in a state with two dozen toll roads covering more than 500 miles: “Texas must find other ways to build public highways without tolls, which doesn’t mean the public won’t be paying for them. In addition, the state must make more progress in funding other transportation such as mass transit. We won’t be able to construct enough expressways to accommodate rapid growth in a state that is still in love with the automobile.” Sanders says proposition 1 on the November 4 ballot will address part of the problem by allocating a portion of the state’s oil and gas tax revenue to the highway fund. But state transportation officials say $5 billion a year more will be needed just to build and maintain highways to keep congestion at current levels. “That means it’s also time to consider raising the federal gasoline tax ... and the state motor fuels tax,” Sanders writes. “After all, whether it means tolls or taxes, roads will never be free.” The Wall Street Journal also reported recently on the backlash. Following public outcry about a proposed toll road linking Garland and Greenville known as the Northeast Gateway, the North Central Texas Council of Governments said they will not recommend the project to the Regional Transportation Council, WFAA reported.

**Virginia:** Douglas Koelemay, the Director of the Virginia Office of Public-Private Partnerships, recently outlined proposed changes in the way the commonwealth would handle future P3s, The
*Bond Buyer reported* [99]. Virginia officials would have to notify lawmakers and the public of potential risks to the state from any new P3 under the revised procurement guidelines Koelemay presented to the Commonwealth Transportation Board [100] October 14th. The revised guidelines were prompted when Virginia Transportation Secretary Aubrey Layne halted spending on U.S. 460, a controversial P3 project to build a toll expressway between Petersburg and Suffolk, in January to await further environmental reviews. *The Richmond Times-Dispatch also reported* [101] on the new guidelines.

**State Multi-Modal Strategies**

- *Streetsblog USA reported* [102] on a recent *Washington Post* forum on transportation featuring the mayors of Atlanta, Los Angeles, Denver, Miami and Salt Lake City.

**Transit**

- The World Resources Institute identifies “4 Ways Cities Benefit from Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).” [103]
- *The Atlantic* CityLab looks at “What France Can Teach U.S. Cities About Transit Design.” [104]
- **California:** The Ventura County Transportation Commission has decided to nix plans for HOT lanes along Highway 101 between Thousand Oaks and Ventura, *The Camarillo Acorn reports*. [105] Some would rather see the lanes devoted to light rail or even a maglev train instead, but the logistics and high cost of such a project make either unlikely.
- **Connecticut:** Eric Jaffe of *The Atlantic* CityLab was among the guests on a recent WNPR Connecticut Public Radio broadcast looking at “The Return of the American Streetcar.” [106]
- **District of Columbia:** *The Washington Post reports* [107] there are still questions surrounding the planned opening of the District’s first streetcar line in half a century. ... DC Mayor Vincent Gray, whose term ends in January, released a long-range transportation plan that would expand the city’s transit options while discouraging driving through the use of toll lanes and congestion fees, *The Post reported elsewhere* [108]. ... But some argue the plan still relies too heavily on highways to solve future congestion and not enough on expanding mass transit, *WAMU reported* [109].
- **Michigan:** After years of study, transit leaders are planning a 13-mile bus rapid transit system between Grand Valley State University and downtown Grand Rapids, which could be set to roll by 2018, *Michigan Live reported* [110]. It’s expected to cost about $45.5 million with 80 percent of the cost paid for with federal money and 20 percent from state government.
- **North Carolina:** *Progressive Railroading looked at* [111] Triangle Transit’s plans to build a 17-mile light-rail line that would connect Chapel Hill and East Durham.
- **Ohio:** Consultants for the Ohio Department of Transportation are suggesting the state should nearly double what it spends on public transit services over the next decade to address demand, *The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer reported* [112]. State funding for public transit has plunged almost 85 percent since 2000.
- **Virginia:** Another blog post, another article (this one from *Elevation DC* [113]) on how the Silver Line Metro extension is already remaking the Tysons area.

**High-Speed Rail**

- *The Atlantic CityLab has a status report* [114] on proposed high-speed rail lines in California, Texas and the Northeast.
- **California:** The California Supreme Court recently declined to review a lawsuit challenging the issuance of bonds for the construction of the state’s high-speed rail project, *The Sacramento Bee noted*. [115]
- **Florida:** University of Miami President (and former Clinton-era Health & Human Services Secretary) Donna Shalala explained why she’s a supporter of the All Aboard Florida express passenger rail system planned for South and Central Florida in a recent *letter to the editor in The Miami Herald*. [116]
• **Illinois:** Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) program partners and federal, state and local officials recently marked the opening of the Englewood Flyover, a major railroad bridge that’s expected to reduce conflicts between passenger and freight trains and prepare the corridor to accommodate high-speed rail service, *Progressive Railroading* reported.

• **Ohio:** The mayor and city manager of Hamilton are requesting a feasibility study on a possible high-speed rail line from Cincinnati to Chicago, *The Cincinnati Business Courier* reported.

**Transportation Planning**

• **Washington:** The Seattle-based environmental think tank *Sightline noted* that the Washington State Office of Fiscal Management recently issued a new *transportation revenue forecast* that acknowledges for the first time how travel habits are changing. While the amount the average American drives has been on the decline for nearly a decade, many transportation agencies are still making decisions based on traffic projections that reflect older trends of traffic growth. Such projections may have led some states to invest in projects that weren’t needed and to build toll roads and other facilities that couldn’t produce the revenues investors envisioned (underwhelming traffic counts were blamed for the Indiana Toll Road bankruptcy, for example). Sightline’s Clark Williams-Derry explained the significance of Washington State’s new forecast that assumes the modest traffic growth of the past decade will continue, and will then be followed by a slight decline: “By undermining both the rationale for new roads and the belief that we’ll be able to pay for them, a forecast of flat traffic should help inject a needed dose of reality into the state’s transportation debates.”

By:
Tuesday, October 28, 2014 at 03:01 PM
Tags:
*Capitol Comments* [121]
*Policy Area* [122]›*Elections* [123]›*Ballot Initiatives* [124]›*Policy Area* [122]›*Transportation* [125]›*Administration and Finance* [126]›*Alternative Funding Sources* [127]›*Policy Area* [122]›*Transportation* [125]›*Administration and Finance* [126]›*Authorization* [128]›*Policy Area* [122]›*Transportation* [125]›*Administration and Finance* [126]›*Congestion Pricing* [129]›*Policy Area* [122]›*Transportation* [125]›*Administration and Finance* [126]›*Debt Financing* [130]›*Policy Area* [122]›*Transportation* [125]›*Administration and Finance* [126]›*Fuel Taxes* [131]›*Policy Area* [122]›*Transportation* [125]›*Administration and Finance* [126]›*Highway Trust Fund* [132]›*Policy Area* [122]›*Transportation* [125]›*Administration and Finance* [126]›*Public-Private Partnerships* [133]›*Policy Area* [122]›*Transportation* [125]›*Administration and Finance* [126]›*Tolls* [134]›*Policy Area* [122]›*Transportation* [125]›*Cost and Financing* [135]›*Passenger Rail* [136]›*High Speed Rail* [136]›*Policy Area* [122]›*Transportation* [125]›*Public Transportation* [137]›*Policy Area* [122]›*Transportation* [125]›*Transportation Planning* [139]›*Sustainable Design* [140]