

March, 2011

# The Language of Mobility

The New Language of Highway Transportation Funding



**Q: What's the number one responsibility of State Transportation officials?**

**your job.**

**[ To help people go where they  
want, when they want ]**

**your job.**

- + The **right words** can transform how an audience feels about candidates, companies, elections, issues, products, or services
- + The **question**: Do you know how your audiences hear your messages?

It's not what you **say** that matters,  
it's what your audience **hears**.

**our philosophy.**

- + We now live in an age with multiples truths, but only one truth matters—**their truth**.
- + In order to break through and connect with your target audience, you must communicate to **their truth**, not your truth.
- + That means:
  - Acknowledging their reality and frustrations
  - Talking about them, not you
  - Focusing on solutions, not problems
  - Speaking in a language they understand

**closing the gap.**

## + How to talk about transportation investment

- Build a state and local strategy – not one that appears to come from Washington, DC
- Start with a message that centers around something the people in your communities find most important – not what YOU think is most important.
- Stress approaches you are taking to ensure accountability and transparency.
- Use all communications platforms.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat.

message keys.

Overview

**Mobility** +

Technology and Modernization

Planning & Accountability

Jobs and the Economy

Environmental Impact

Paying For It

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**Mobility:** it's the **freedom** to move **where** you want to, **when** you want to, and **how** you want to

[ **mobility** ]

what drivers want.

[ **sustainable** ]

**Sustainable:** we can keep it going for the long-term

what taxpayers want.

## language to use +

We need to discuss the future of sustainable mobility. As populations grow, the more congested our roadways become. It results in more **time wasted** sitting in traffic. We don't just need more lanes. We need **more efficient** traffic. But we also need rail systems that allow people to travel throughout any region with ease. **Seamless connections** within the transit system allow people to move from home to work or play and back again.

People need the ability to choose their travel **OPTIONS**. That's what it means to be mobile.

# language of mobility.

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“It’s bigger than you and me.  
It’s all about **ME.**”

*-Stephen Colbert*



get personal.

+ Maintenance and upkeep...they *already* pay for these

### your truth

We're running a multi-billion dollar deficit in the Highway Trust Fund.

Without more funding, we won't be able to keep up with population growth.

### their truth

You've wasted the money we've already given you. Why give you more?

You should have had a plan for population growth.

it's not about maintenance.

- + Small, tangible advancements can be game changers
  - They don't need big shiny techno-promises
  - They're most interested in technology available today
  
- + It's not about bringing roads and highways into 2050, it's about bringing them into 2010

game changers.

## language to use +

Much of the standstill you experience sitting in traffic could be avoided by **small improvements in technology**. For example, by synchronizing traffic lights in urban and suburban areas, we can **increase the number of green lights** you encounter and make traffic move **much more efficiently**.

This technology isn't science fiction. It exists right now.

# increasing green lights.

language to use +

If we could **clear traffic accidents** and stalled vehicles off the roadway quickly, we can reduce as much as **50 percent of travel delay**.

This technology isn't science fiction. It exists right now.

**clearing accidents.**

- + Funding is required to completely modernize our roads and highways
  - But smarter, more efficient technology is worth it to all of us, and people realize this

### Technology Triad

**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 Participant

funding.

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- + Unless they hear that you have a long-term plan for the future, they'll never support a revenue increase
  - And they have to hear it's flexible enough to allow for population growth
  
- + Because they're not interested in playing catch-up forever

*“It's an old system. We can't build 20 lanes. So at some point we need to change strategy.”*

-Denver Participant

**we need a long-term plan.**

## **your truth**

We always expected to have to expand roads and highways as needs dictated

## **their truth**

You're just playing catch-up by adding more lanes. It's a broken system.

**a lack of planning.**

## language to use +

If we're going to tackle transportation, we need a **realistic long-term plan** that takes future growth into account. We must really **think ahead** – this isn't about what's needed this year, or even just what is needed this decade. This is about what the nation needs for the next **20 to 40 years**.

Another short-term fix isn't going to work. If we're going to take on transportation, we need to vote to fund a long-term plan that has funding built into **America's future**.

**realistic long-term plan.**

- + The Governor and State DOT should lead the conversation
- + The **control** over money and project selection should be as close to the communities using them as possible
  - They don't have *any* faith in Washington to tax and spend responsibly
  - But states and municipalities know what they need

*"Who knows better than the people who use it? And pay for it?"*

-Charlotte Participant

*"Local groups are closer to the source. They can be more specific. They can tailor the money to the problem."*

-DC Participant

**who's in charge?**

## language to use +

If we are going to invest billions of public dollars in public infrastructure, then the projects selection process can't simply be a black box of engineering or political decisions. These decisions need to be **made by the people who drive on and pay for the roads**. The private sector and general public must have a voice. **Local governments, chambers of commerce, advocacy groups for businesses and the environment**, and regular private citizens must all be at the table.

**everyone's invited.**

- + But in order to support any revenue increases, they need to know that **accountability** will be built into the process
  
- + They want to see **checks and balances** in project selection
  - They don't trust any one group to get it right
  - They need to know that government and the private sector will both be contributing to the lists of projects being created

**trust through collaboration.**

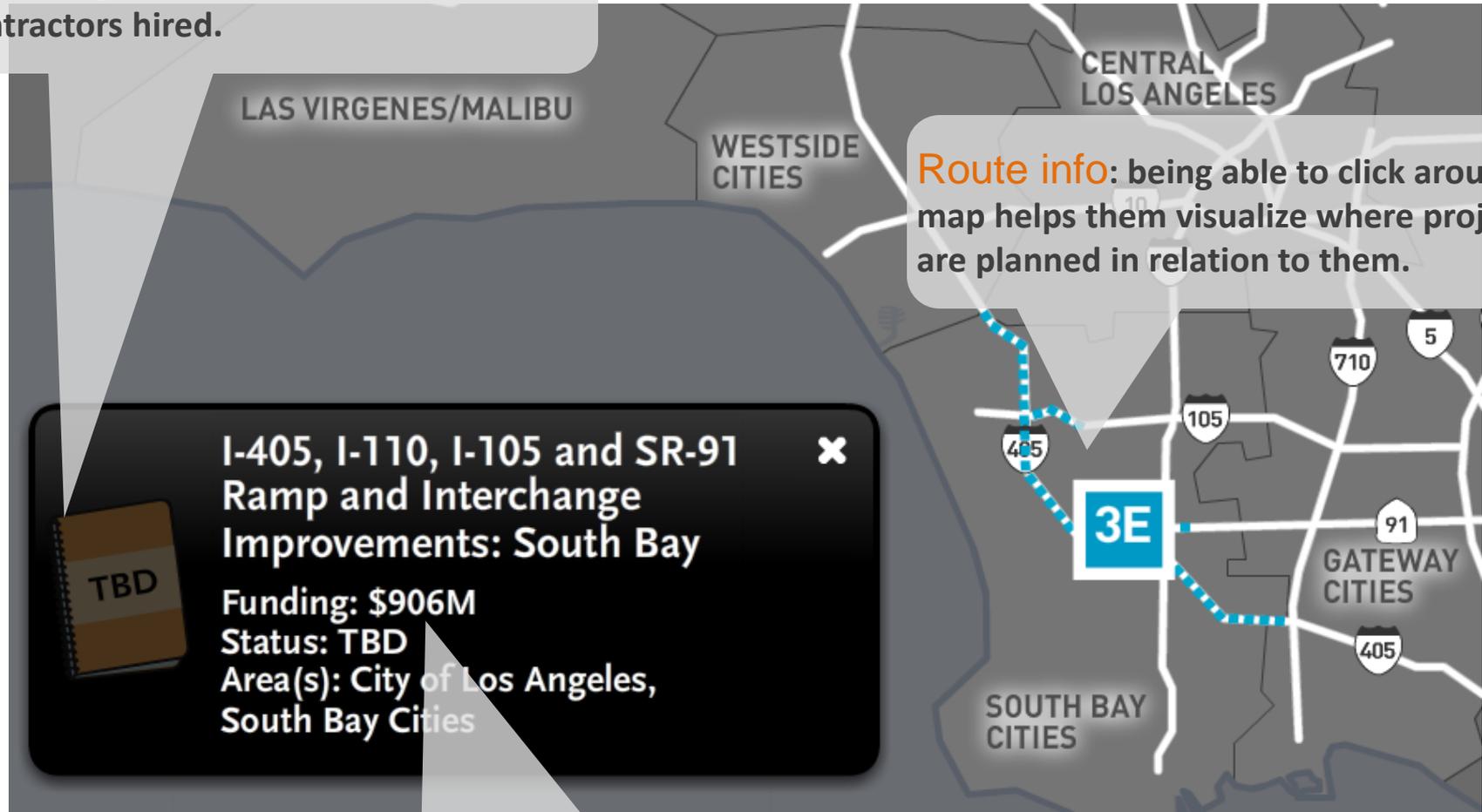
- + You must demonstrate funds will be spent on transportation
  
- + Provide assurances they can always track where their money is going
  - They like – but don't need – a list that “locks in” particular projects
  - Lists can protect their money from bureaucratic manipulation
  - Money disappearing into a “black hole” of political maneuvering is a big worry

*“If that's what we gave them the money for, they better damn well use it for that.”*

-Orlando Participant

transparency.

**The Plan:** they want to be able to click here and get more details, like lists of contractors hired.



**Route info:** being able to click around a map helps them visualize where projects are planned in relation to them.

✕

**I-405, I-110, I-105 and SR-91  
Ramp and Interchange  
Improvements: South Bay**

Funding: \$906M  
Status: TBD  
Area(s): City of Los Angeles,  
South Bay Cities

**Budget and timing:** they want to know what it's costing, and exactly when construction will begin and end. TBD is not acceptable.

interactive maps.

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- + Jobs are a required benefit of transportation spending
- + But, people are skeptical of short-term stimulus
  - Even President Obama has admitted “shovel-ready” was a myth
  - They haven’t seen the gains from the stimulus bill
  - They understand that a temporary job is a temporary fix

**your truth**

“Shovel-ready” means that in 6 months, we can have this project up and running,

**their truth**

“Shovel-ready” means you can start tomorrow

**stimulus isn't worth it.**

- + Jobs for the **long-term** are better than jobs for the short-term

**don't say -**

jobs

increasing transportation funding is the strongest stimulus tool available

**instead say +**

sustainable jobs, family-wage jobs

transportation is vital to the success of 84% of the US economy

**jobs aren't a magic bullet.**

- + Both Democrats and Republicans are concerned about wasteful spending, but “stimulus” is becoming a four-letter word
- + Use economic impact analysis instead to prove the legitimacy of your projects

**language to LOSE -**

Increasing transportation funding is the strongest stimulus tool available. Building roads, bridges and public transit is good for the economy because it puts our citizens back to work.

a word about “stimulus” .

**Q: Which of the following facts is most important when considering raising taxes to fund transportation?**

**Adding about \$230 million in transportation funds can add 50,000 jobs and over \$6 billion to the economy.\***

**Transportation infrastructure is vital to the success of the five major economic sectors that account for 84 percent of the US economy.**

\* Numbers from Kansas TWORKS campaign

**economic benefits.**

## language to USE +

Too often transportation projects are undertaken for the wrong reasons, and as a result, they end up costing more money than they bring to – or save – their communities. We need to make sure that any projects undertaken with these new funds will contribute to the economies they're going to serve. That's why no project will be undertaken without first performing **economic impact analysis**, to ensure we get more from the benefits of a project than we put into it in tax dollars. We'll look at how much economic activity a project is going to generate for the businesses that surround it, and if that doesn't outweigh the costs of the project, it simply won't be done.

# economic impact analysis.

- + People already know transportation is **the heart of the economy**
  
- + They respond well to **medical metaphors** that explain transportation as vital to economic health
  - They believe that transportation is intimately connected to just about every important aspect of the US economy
  - They understand that without the efficient movement of people, goods, and services, our economy will fall behind

**economic livelihood.**

language to USE +

Transportation infrastructure is the **lifeblood of the economy**. So bolstering our economy means improving transportation. Congestion and deteriorating roads are making it difficult to move freight efficiently and inexpensively. One major business has relocated its regional distribution center from one state to another because deliveries were taking too long. By 2025, the number of vehicle hours trucks spend on the road is expected to increase by over 50%. If we **fail to invest adequately in transportation**, we're looking at **potential economic losses of \$800 million in this state alone**.

**the heart of the economy.**

- + While they're paying for modernization and efficiency, they still like hearing that those investments are going to bring economic gains
- + But their enthusiasm about economic gains is linked to how bad they feel the economy is in their specific area
  - Charlotte and Orlando – where they feel the economy is pretty good – were less excited than Denver – where they think it's only OK
  - In DC – where they think nationally – the economy is more important
- + So frame economic gains as an expected benefit of their investments in **modernization**

*“A transportation plan needs to stand on it's own. But the economy is a great side effect.”*

-Charlotte Participant

**enthusiasm is relative.**

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- + Use language that makes the environment a **personal issue**
  - More efficient traffic and more public transportation cut down on the pollutants and smog that an area experiences
  - This is NOT the same as talking about emissions or greenhouse gases
  
- + The difference is in **how the audience experiences** the words
  - Pollutants affect you **personally**
  - They poison the **air around your car** as you're sitting in traffic.
  - You can **smell** them.
  - And **smog is visible**, hanging like a coffee stain over the skyline

*"I'm not a climate change person, but anyone can see smog and pollutants are bad."*

- Charlotte Participant

**talking about the environment.**

## language to USE +

Reducing congestion, and reducing the amount of time you spend idling in traffic or at red lights, means **reducing the amount of smog and pollutants in the air**. That's important for children and seniors because it will cut rates of asthma and respiratory disease. And it allows you to pollute less without giving up a single thing, and by doing nothing more than getting where you need to be faster.

**it's personal.**

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- + People are willing to pay up to \$100 a year for
  - new **technology**
  - that makes our infrastructure **smarter**
  - and more **efficient**.
  
- + They're most interested in
  - Synching traffic lights
  - Real time information on congestion, accidents, and road conditions
  - Interconnected road, bus, and train systems
  - Clearing stalled cars and accidents faster

**what people will pay for.**

- + When it comes to discussing **costs**, tell them
  - in dollars
  - per year
  
- + Allow that figure to be the one against which they measure all your existing benefits

**language to USE +**

The average person drives 15,000 miles per year or less. If we increase the gas tax by 10 cents per gallon, the average person driving the average car would only pay about \$75 more per year.

**real numbers.**

**For audiences who care most about...**

**Frame the costs this way...**

**relieving congestion**

**If I can promise you greater, sustainable mobility – by which I mean synchronized traffic lights, a smarter, more efficient transportation system, and faster clearing of accidents from the roads – would that be worth \$100 a year to you?**

**government spending**

**If I can show you that we've cut the waste from our current budget, and commit to you that these new funds will be locally controlled, and that both government and business interests will be at the table, would you be willing to pay \$100 a year for better mobility, more efficient traffic and new economic growth?**

**framing cost.**

**For audiences  
who care most  
about...**

**Frame the costs this way...**

**transparency**

**If I can promise you that every dollar collected will be spent only on transportation, and that every project undertaken will be transparent and make all budget and project calendar and contractor information available and easily accessible online, would you be willing to pay \$100 a year for better mobility, more efficient traffic and new economic growth?**

**the economy**

**If I can show you that every project undertaken will generate more dollars for the economy than it costs to undertake, and that this transportation measure will create 50,000 sustainable, family-wage jobs right here in your state, would you be willing to pay \$100 a year for greater mobility and more efficient traffic?**

**framing the cost.**

## language to USE +

The most important part of any public spending is that it provides you—personally with a real benefit. The next time you're sitting in your car, behind the line of others in front of you despite the green light you can see from a block away, take a moment to **imagine** what it would be like to get where you're going a little faster. Picture a quicker commute with less time in traffic. Imagine **synchronized traffic signals** that mean **more green lights** when and where they're needed most.

Imagine passing lanes that prevent you from getting stuck behind slow moving trucks on narrow roads. And unlocking the bumper to bumper traffic that is choking our atmosphere with greenhouse gases, endangering our future, and diminishing our quality of life. Picture **a future** where driving doesn't mean passing from one bottleneck to another.

All of this is possible. And truly attainable. But we need to be willing to invest the money to make this future out reality.

**tell your story.**

- + Outside-in (**local**) strategy **better than** inside-out (**Washington**)
- + Where the need is more obvious, **talk first about benefits**, then process
- + If the need isn't apparent, you won't have the benefit of the doubt, so talking first about process builds trust and credibility
- + The conversation **can't be about revenue or taxes**, it's about the value of a modern well-planned system
- + Democrats want local/state government to lead, Republicans want private sector. **Everyone wants both involved**
- + The payoff at the end is more **MOBILITY**

**summary.**

- + The New Language of Mobility
- + Strategies and Messages: Three Case Studies of Successful Campaigns to Raise Revenue for Transportation
- + A New Way to Talk About Transportation
- + Available at <http://bit.ly/TalkingTransportation>

Reports.

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It's not what you say,  
it's what they hear<sup>®</sup>.

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