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Voters Say ‘Yes’ To Great Neighborhoods, Transportation Choices Via Tuesday Ballot Initiatives

Strong show of support for key transportation and land-use measures underscores common ground on neighborhood improvements

CONTACT: Tom Madrecki, tmadrecki@smartgrowthamerica.org, 202-215-8858

Washington, DC – Voters decided more than a president last night, with dozens of local decisions across the country to fund or approve important transportation and land-use ballot initiatives.

“With transportation choices and smart growth decision-making being so closely linked to economic development and long-term cost-savings, the public’s say on these measures plays a critical role in determining which communities will have an opportunity to leap forward,” says Smart Growth America President and CEO Geoffrey Anderson. “You’re voting on the future of your hometown, what you want your neighborhood to look like, and whether you want to see economic growth happen there.”

“The good news is that across the nation last night, we saw widespread support for investing in our existing communities. When voters see the real benefits of putting their tax dollars into a project, they’re very much inclined to support it, no matter what kind of town they’re from.”

Some of the most important ballot initiatives passed last night include:

- In Arlington VA, voters widely supported a series of bond measures totaling more than $100 million to support investments in transit, smart growth, community infrastructure and other neighborhood improvements.
- In Philadelphia PA, voters said yes to a ballot question that asked whether the city could borrow $123 million for capital improvements to be spent on transit, streets and sanitation, municipal buildings, parks and recreation, museums and economic/community development.
- In Virginia Beach VA, about 62 percent of voters cast their ballot in favor of extending Tide light rail service into the city. The final decision will be made by the City Council, but the vote underscores widespread public support for the project.
- In Everett WA and Orange County NC, voters approved sales taxes that will fund transit operations in those regions. Meanwhile, voters in Kalamazoo MI, Muskegon City MI, Eaton County MI and Mahoning County OH funded similar operations via the renewal of mill levy property taxes.
- In Michigan, Ohio and Maine, voters strongly rejected a series of ballot initiatives that would have asked communities to withdraw from regional transit agencies. Case in point: 73 percent of Kent County MI voted to not withdraw from the Grand Rapids area’s transit agency, while voters in Falmouth ME rejected a similar measure 70-30 percent.
- In Stephenson County IL, voters narrowly passed a show of support for a county-wide transit system supported by federal, state and local funds.
• In Maine, voters also approved a set of three bond issues totaling $76 million for bridge and road investment, land conservation for outdoor recreation and water treatment.
• In Marin County CA, Measure A received nearly 74 percent of the vote as of Tuesday night. The sales tax increase will raise approximately $10 million per year for nine years to preserve open space and farmland and to maintain parks and recreational programs.
• In Longmont CO, voters extended tax-increment financing by 20 years for redevelopment and community improvements. The TIFs would have expired in 2013.

While these ballot measures highlighted voters’ strong support for neighborhood reinvestment and community building, other initiatives came up short, most notably in California and Tennessee. Likewise, an amendment passed to Virginia’s constitution limiting eminent domain privileges could slow some economic development and community rebuilding projects in the commonwealth.

• In Los Angeles County CA, voters narrowly failed to pass a transportation sales tax extension to Measure R, which was first approved in 2008. The initiative, which needed 2/3 of the vote but only garnered 65 percent, would have extended Measure R’s expiration date from 2039 to 2069, providing more guaranteed revenue now to finish current projects quickly.
• In Alameda County CA, voters also came very close to passing a half-cent sales tax increase to raise $7.8 billion over 30 years for transit, road, bicycle and pedestrian projects. But despite 65.5 percent of voters saying yes to the measure – a clear indication of support – the initiative failed to pass because it did not receive the 2/3 supermajority necessary in California.
• In Tennessee, Memphis voters strongly rejected a one cent per gallon gas tax to fund transit operations. Surrounding Shelby County similarly rejected a half-cent sales tax increase to fund a variety of projects including public school investments. With the city making significant headway in recent years thanks to a series of reinvestment projects, grants from the federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities, a budding “Aerotropolis” and more, this outcome may be seen as a setback if it holds back in-demand development and important local neighborhood initiatives.
• In Arkansas, voters turned down an amendment to the state’s constitution authorizing counties and municipalities to create districts within the county or city for development and redevelopment projects, and to leverage tax-increment financing for bond issuance within those new districts.
• In Yuba County CA, votes are still being tallied for Measure T, which would have helped to protect agricultural lands and open space by requiring a public vote whenever those areas saw zoning changes. Early indications are that the initiative failed to pass by a narrow margin.
• In Houston TX, voters supported an initiative that will allow the Metropolitan Transit Authority to continue diverting part of its sales tax revenues to road and other non-transit projects.
• In Clark County WA, a proposed 0.1 cent sales tax increase to generate $4.5 to $5.5 million for light rail operations and bus rapid transit failed to pass. That outcome creates added uncertainty about the future of the Columbia River Crossing project, which would replace the Interstate 5 Bridge, extend light rail into Vancouver and rebuild the freeway on both sides of the Columbia River.
“Where ballot initiatives passed, residents found common ground strengthening their towns and cities at a local level,” Anderson says. “It’s important to recognize that all spending isn’t good spending, and that not every project is necessarily in a town or city’s long-term best interest. Voters’ support for transportation choices and community investments, though, shows awareness to the economic and fiscal benefits of smart growth – that these expenditures, done correctly, can cut costs and expand revenue streams. Where the information was clear and the facts were on the table, residents said, ‘Yes,’ to great neighborhoods and continuing to rebuild our country’s economy.”

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**Smart Growth America** is the only national organization dedicated to researching, advocating for and leading coalitions to bring smart growth practices to more communities nationwide. From providing more sidewalks to ensuring more homes are built near public transportation or that productive farms remain a part of our communities, smart growth helps make sure people across the nation can live in great neighborhoods. For additional information visit [www.smartgrowthamerica.org](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org).