

2018 TRANSPORTATION MIDTERM ELECTION RESULTS

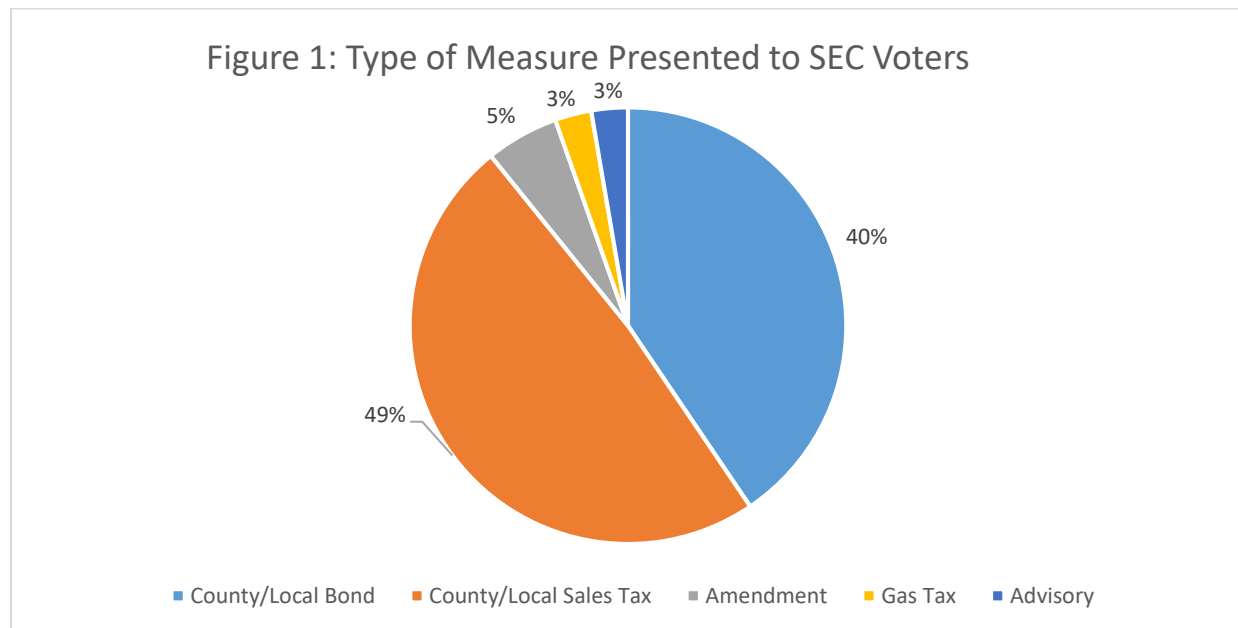


Introduction

The November 2018 midterm election changed the composition of the U.S. House of Representatives to Democrats having the majority and left the U.S. Senate in the control of the Republicans. Infrastructure improvements were crucial to many of those running for office; in some cases, forming the core of campaigns. During this election, 31 states had transportation-related initiatives brought to voters; with nearly 350 state, county, and local ballot measures (ARTBA 2018). More measures were passed than not passed across the country and over \$33 billion out of the \$58 billion considered for transportation measures was approved (Laska 2018a).

2018 Transportation Initiatives in Southeastern Conference States

Known as the Southeastern Conference, the SEC is most commonly recognized when referring to college sports. The states with universities included in the SEC are: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.



Of the 11 states that are in the SEC, seven had transportation related initiatives presented to the voters. Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee had no transportation related initiatives during the November 2018 midterm. In total, there were 37 transportation ballot measures that were presented to SEC voters as statewide amendments, bonds, gas tax, sales tax, or advisory measures (Figure 1). Each state's initiatives are detailed in the following paragraphs.

Alabama

There were no statewide initiatives; however, three counties voted on transportation related initiatives. In Franklin County, residents voted on renewing a one cent tax increase. 75% of the funds are allocated to the Franklin County Board of Education and 25% to the county road department (Pilati 2018). Funds are used to help with the costs of road and bridge maintenance and repairs. In the midterm election, this sales tax was extended by thirty years (ARTBA 2018).

Marengo County residents voted on Amendment 1 (different than the statewide Amendment 1) that would allow for golf carts on public roads. In the midterm election, this advisory amendment narrowly passed. Finally, Mobile County residents voted on “Pay-As-You-Go” Bonds. This 41 year old property tax goes on the ballot every two years for renewal (Mobile County 2018). During the four decades this bond has been in use, it has never been voted down by voters. Mobile residents were presented with a specific list of road and bridge projects before the election, even including the total miles to be improved (Patton 2018). In the midterm election, 74% of voters approved the renewal of this measure (ARTBA 2018).

Florida

There was one statewide initiative, Amendment 11, five county initiatives, and two local initiatives that were transportation related on the Florida ballot for the November 2018 midterms. All eight transportation initiatives that were on ballots throughout Florida were approved by voters (Puentes 2018). Amendment 11 covered three separate constitutional amendments, only one of which related to transportation. In 2004, Florida voters voted against a high-speed rail project; however, verbiage was left in the constitution (Kenyon 2018). A vote yes on Amendment 11 would remove verbiage relating to the high-speed rail system. In the election, Amendment 11 passed with 62%; therefore, removing the language from the constitution (Puentes 2018).

Broward County is home to large beach cities including Hollywood and Fort Lauderdale and is the 15th most populous county in the United States. Residents voted to approve a 30 year sales tax that was marketed by the county as a “Penny for transportation.” This one cent surtax will fund various transportation projects meant to create a more connected grid, relieve congestion, improve service, and expand multimodal transportation (Broward County Government 2018). The money collected from this tax will be placed in its own trust with an independent board to manage funds. Hillsborough County residents approved a similar 30 year sales tax. Intended uses for these funds include: a mass transit system, allow for more frequent road improvements, add bike and pedestrian trails, and use connectivity to reduce traffic issues (ARTBA 2018).

Collier County residents approved a similar one cent tax that will last for 7 years. 90% of these funds will go to transportation related projects such as road improvements, bridge replacements, and sidewalk additions (Collier County 2018). St. Lucie County voters approved a ten-year half-cent sales tax where the funds would be used to repair roadways and drainage systems and improve sidewalks (St. Lucie County Florida 2018). The citizens of Doral, Miami Beach, and Sarasota County approved bond measures that would increase bike trails, pedestrian walkways, and neighborhood safety. Ultimately, the citizens of Florida supported measures that would improve a variety of transportation in their communities (ARTBA 2018).

Georgia

In order to finance transportation related initiatives, the state of Georgia in 2010 initiated the Transportation Investment Act (TIA). This act was voted on statewide based by the 12 Georgia regions and if passed would enact a law known as the Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST) (GGFOA 2018). This law set a one percent sales tax with a ten year limit in order to pay for transportation related projects. Of the 12 regions, only three passed the tax in 2012 (GGFOA 2018). After adjustments to the law in 2017, counties that did not approve the TIA would be able to enact their own local TSPLOST. A local TSPLOST would not remove the tax passed in 2012 but would provide an extra one percent should the county place it on the ballot and citizens approve it. This tax process was created in an attempt to create a funding option to voters that was not a property tax.

During the November 2018 midterms, seven counties in Georgia had a TSPLOST option on the ballot. Three counties voted against implementing TSPLOST, while three counties voted for TSPLOST, and one county voted to renew the tax.

Louisiana

There was one statewide initiative, Amendment 4, and two county initiatives that were transportation related on the ballot for the November 2018 midterms. In 1990, all revenue collected from tax on fuel was pooled into the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF). Monies collected fund highway and bridge maintenance, flood control, ports, airports, and more (PAR Council of Louisiana 2018). Included in this law was the allocation of money to be used to fund a portion of the state police for traffic control services. Governors have used this provision to fund state policy by approximately \$700 million prior to the passage of Act 380 in 2015, which capped the amount that state police could receive at \$10 million annually. TTF funds have not been used for that since (PAR Council of Louisiana 2018). Approval of Amendment 4 would remove the ability of state police to use money in the TTF. In the November 2018 Midterm, voters approved the amendment with 56% of citizens voting yes (ARTBA 2018).

In Iberia Parish, southeast of Lafayette, citizens voted on a ten year $\frac{3}{4}$ cent sales tax to repair roads and associated drainage improvements. This rural parish had no dedicated transportation funds; the tax would bring in \$3.5 million annually (Vaughn 2018a). However, voters decided not to support this measure with 63% of citizens voting against the new tax (Vaughn 2018b). Voters in St. Charles Parish, directly west of New Orleans, voted on the renewal of a \$5.9 million, ten-year property tax for road and bridge construction and maintenance. This measure was overwhelmingly approved by voters with 68% of citizens in favor of the property tax (ARTBA 2018).

Missouri

There was one statewide initiative, Proposition D, and one local initiative that were transportation related on the ballot for the November 2018 midterms. Proposition D was marketed as a long overdue increase to the gas tax in the state. If this measure was approved, ten cents would be gradually added to the price taxpayers pay at the pump (KSDK Staff 2018). Funds collected as a result would go to local governments for road projects, state law enforcement, and a special emergency fund to reduce bottlenecks. It was widely reported that this tax would bring in \$288 million for state highway patrol and \$123 million for local government transportation projects (KSDK Staff 2018). Citizens in the election voted against Proposition D and funding streams remained unchanged (ARTBA 2018).

Finally, on the ballot in Platte City was the option to extend a 3/8 cent sales tax for an additional 20 years. This sales tax was used to fund transportation related projects in the city. In the November 2018 midterm, this tax was renewed by the voters.

Case Study: Missouri Proposition D

Proposition D was promoted as a gas tax increase that would help the state fund road projects. Since the last gas tax increase occurred in 1992, more than two decades ago, the cost of maintaining the road system in Missouri increased. It was widely reported that this tax would increase state funding by more than \$400 million with \$288 million being allocated to the highway patrol and \$123 million to go to local governments for infrastructure improvements (KSDK Staff 2018). Also included in this proposition were a tax exemption for Olympic winnings and the creation of a fund to help with traffic bottlenecks. Support for the proposition was bipartisan and these aspects of Proposition D were widely reported in Missouri in the months preceding the election. However, voters rejected the proposition by 54% (ARTBA 2018).

Even though the gas tax was rejected by voters, the lack of funding for road projects at the Missouri Department of Transportation remained. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch article “Gas tax defeat means Missouri lawmakers will be seeking money for roads” analyzed the fallout from the bill’s failure by interviewing Missouri House leadership (Schlinkmann 2018). The failure of Proposition D did not indicate a lack of awareness from voters but the desire for better prioritization of road projects and fund delegation.

South Carolina

There were no statewide initiatives; however, there was one county initiative on the ballot for the November 2018 midterms. Citizens in Beaufort County were able to vote on a “penny tax” to collect 120 million dollars over four years for traffic and sidewalk improvement, road and bridge replacement, and safety enhancement for pathways in school areas (Engineering Division 2018). In South Carolina, half of the money collected from the gas tax goes to the state department of transportation and half goes to the State Infrastructure Bank for transportation projects. By collecting funds through sales tax, the county would have capital that would be matched by the State Infrastructure Bank (Lauderdale 2018).

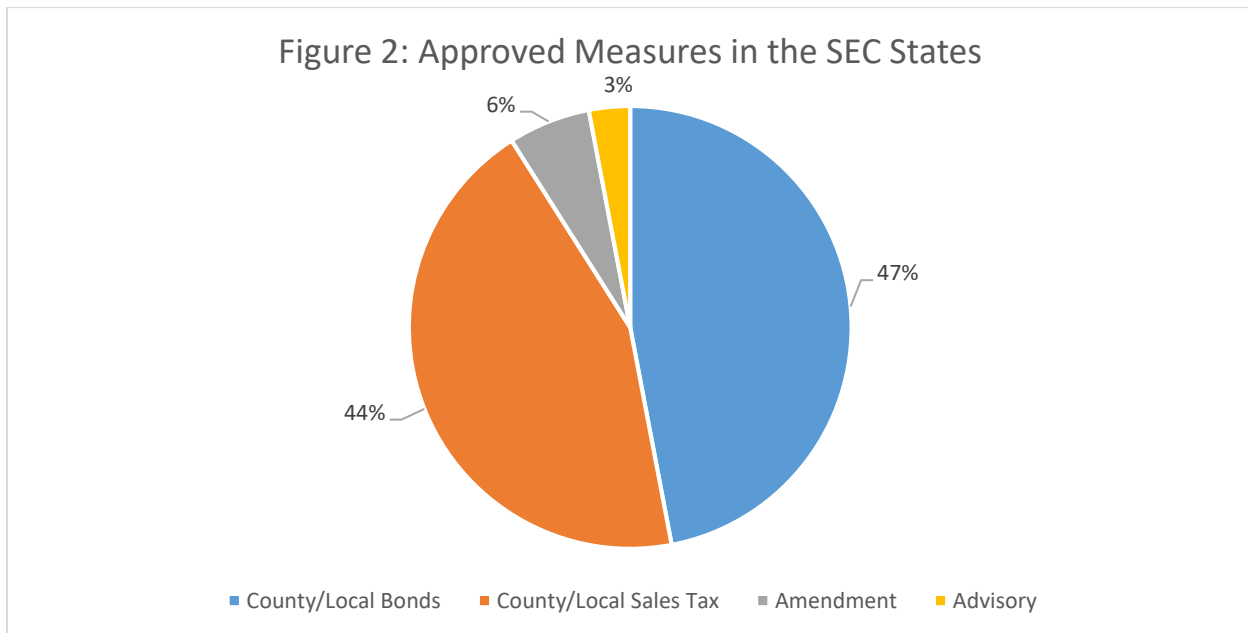
This tax will apply to all taxable purchases made in the county. A similar initiative was on the ballot in 2016 and was voted down by 54% (Livingston and Wilson 2018). Heavy emphasis in the penny tax marketing was placed on the potential bridge updates and expansions as this county contains areas that are bridge-dependent, such as Hilton Head Island and Lady Island (Lauderdale 2018). In recent years, Beaufort County developed into a popular tourist location. With this sales tax plan, it was projected that half of the funds would come from tourists rather than placing the entire \$120 million on the local residents. The penny tax was approved with 58% of citizens voting in favor during the November 2018 midterm (Livingston and Wilson 2018).

Texas

There were no statewide initiatives; however, there were fifteen initiatives, local and county, that were brought to voters during the November 2018 midterm election. Only one of these initiatives was a sales tax and the rest were bond measures (Puentes 2018). The majority of these measures covered general infrastructure improvements and reconstruction with some including repairs for drainage issues. All fifteen of these initiatives were approved by Texas voters in the midterm.

Transportation Initiatives across the United States

86% of the 2018 midterm transportation initiatives in SEC states were approved (Figure 2). This was higher than the national approval average of 79% (Powell 2018). Of the initiatives approved, 91% were either a local sales tax or bond, meaning that citizens chose a tax or debt increase. The need for transportation related funding has emerged as a bipartisan issue; increases in debt and taxes overwhelmingly occurred at the local and county level. Statewide amendments occurred in 6% of the SEC states and only one state brought a gas tax increase before citizens. While a gas tax was not approved by the SEC voters, most transportation-related measures were approved.



Many other states had similar tax and bond measures for transportation initiatives presented to their citizens as in the SEC states. Some states, such as Ohio, had dozens of local and county level property taxes on the ballot for local maintenance of roads and bridges. These new and renewed taxes are historically popular in Ohio, with approval rates higher than 70% (ARTBA 2018). While local and county initiatives were typically successful nationwide, the success of statewide measures varied. Four states (California, Colorado, Missouri, and Utah) had statewide amendments that would implement a widespread tax for transportation related initiatives.

Colorado had two competing statewide measures, Propositions 109 and 110. Proposition 109 provided a specific list of highway projects to voters at a cost of \$5.2 billion over 20 years. Proposition 110 was a sales tax that would have brought in \$767 million in the first year. Funds raised would have been divided between highways, cities, and counties (Kohler 2018). Both were rejected by approximately 60% of Colorado voters (ARTBA 2018).

California had several successful sales taxes on the ballots in cities and counties but national attention was focused on statewide Proposition 6, a gas tax repeal measure (Vock 2018). California voters decided to keep the gas tax with 55% of citizens voting to not repeal. Finally, Utah lawmakers presented an advisory measure on the ballot asking citizens if they would support a gas tax that would predominately be used to fund schools. The measure overwhelmingly failed with 66% of Utahans voting no on a ten cent increase (ARTBA 2018).

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