

Rail Transit

Business Challenge/Environment

Honolulu politicians tried over 40 years to construct a rail transit line in the city. In April 2008, an anti-rail organization announced its intent to file a ballot initiative to prevent rail transit in the city forever. In response, Mayor Mufi Hannemann sponsored a ballot initiative to authorize rail transit. Support for the measure was eroding as opponents bombarded residents with claims the rail line would mean higher taxes and a give-away to developers — an especially effective message during an economic recession.

Outcome

Voters approved the pro-rail measure by a margin of 53% to 47%. The final vote was 155,880 in favor to 140,623 opposed — a difference of 15,257 votes. Our efforts are widely recognized as having made the difference in this campaign, as the margin of victory was only 5 percentage points.

Our Approach

The pro-rail campaign had hired many consultants but none others dedicated to grassroots organizing, which is critical because a well-organized Get Out The Vote effort can add as much as 5 percentage points to a campaign's vote. To accomplish this assignment, we:

- Developed a message focused on reducing traffic congestion, protecting the environment and promoting smart growth and economic development.
- Identified geographic regions where research showed voters were inclined to support rail if made aware of what the proposal would do.
- Developed profiles of the types of voters most likely to support rail — for instance, we found a strong correlation between longer commute times and a person's likely support for rail — and targeted voters with those characteristics.
- Designed and directed a Get Out The Vote field plan to reach our targeted voters through personal contact, and trained local volunteers to serve as representatives of the campaign in the community.
- Knocked on over 12,000 doors and made more than 6,500 volunteer phone calls, complemented by more than 12,000 paid phone calls — all targeted geographically or based on our voter profiles to maximize effectiveness.

CASE STUDY