

[How Sound Transit Abused the Planning Process to Promote Light Rail by R.C. Harkness, PhD Urban Systems Planning,](#)

**Excerpt:**

**The importance of trust--** It has become increasingly clear that voters don't trust Sound Transit and Sound Transit doesn't trust voters. In fact, Sound Transit has become the poster child for why voters distrust government to spend their transportation tax dollars wisely. There are good reasons for this mistrust.

Voters overwhelmingly voted to rescind Sound Transit's tax on vehicle registration, but ST still fights to overturn that expression of public will in the courts. ST changes the project greatly from what voters approved in 1996 but vigorously fights a lawsuit that would have put the much altered plan back on the ballot for a vote of confidence.

Sound Transit wants more money. However, while claiming it has a public mandate and support for light rail, ST is deathly afraid to ask voters to increase the existing light rail tax. Thus ST supporters used political strong-arm tactics to force light rail into a broad package of regional transportation projects where voters couldn't reject it without rejecting everything else as well.

On this November's advisory ballot voters were asked if they supported that package, which the ballot explicitly said was intended to reduce congestion and improve safety.

Since Sound Transit had already admitted Link wouldn't reduce congestion, putting it into that package was a remarkable example of cynical manipulation and deception.

The problem is magnified since that ballot –which still implies Link would help reduce congestion-- was seen by millions, while few have seen the truth.

When one party has the funds to broadcast misleading statements through a megaphone while their critics have only the occasional Op-Ed or letter to the editor to whisper a rebuttal, there is simply no way the public will get a balanced story. Critics, such as CETA, have found the facts don't matter when there's no money to get them disseminated. This has been a fundamental structural problem throughout the entire light rail debate here in Puget Sound.