



No Tax for Tracks touts new poll that shows Greenlight losing

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No Tax for Tracks, the political action committee created to oppose the Greenlight Pinellas transit tax, today released a [new survey](#) from St. Pete Polls that shows the measure losing in November, 46-38 percent among all voters. Among active voters the discrepancy is even greater, with 48 opposed to 36 in support. However, more people aged 50 and over were included in the survey, a demographic considered more conservative.

"Older voters are the better voters, in terms of actually voting," stressed Barb Haselden with No Tax for Tracks, when asked about the disproportionate number of older voters polled.

Haselden said the survey shows that voters in Pinellas simply aren't interested in having the highest sales tax in the state (the sales tax would increase from 7 to 8 cents; however, homeowners currently assessed on their property taxes to fund the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Agency would be relieved of that burden). "It also tells me they're not interested in a train going from downtown St. Petersburg to downtown Clearwater. 16 stops like a carnival ride. This is not the wave of the future. This is the past."

But Greenlight supporters are shaking off the survey.

"We continue to have confidence in our polling, done by a national-level political consulting company, which shows we are ahead," says Kyle Parks with Yes on Greenlight, the PAC created to support the issue on the November ballot in Pinellas County. "We continue to gain momentum as Election Day draws closer."

In fact Yes on Greenlight announced this morning that the Tampa Bay Lightning became the latest sports franchise to contribute to their cause, giving \$25,000. Previously the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Tampa Bay Rays made financial contributions to the Yes on Greenlight campaign, which has now raised over \$774,000.

No Tax for Tracks hasn't raised 1/10th of that amount, but they say they don't need to. Just telling people that their taxes may be going up has been their best selling point, says Haselden.

“The proposal is extremely expensive given that buses can provide a superior service compared to light rail, carrying more passengers to more destinations at a far lower cost,” adds Randal O’Toole, Senior Fellow National Public Policy Analyst from Cato Institute, a public policy research organization, who is in town for a couple of days speaking on behalf of No Tax for Tracks.

O’Toole is a noted critic of light-rail systems, and appeared four years ago in Hillsborough County at about the same time in the election cycle to speak in front of groups opposed to the measure there. He's [authored](#) a study on the Greenlight proposal, and not surprisingly he's critical of the plan.

"It would be cheaper to give every single daily light rail rider a new Toyota Prius every single year for the rest of their lives," he said, than to spend the \$1.7 billion to fund the 24-mile light-rail network running from St. Pete to Clearwater.

He also claimed that with the highest sales tax in the state, Pinellas County would become a less desirable place for both residents and businesses to want to relocate to. Instead, he prefers an expanded bus system (something that the Greenlight also offers).

O’Toole said that he reviewed the Alternative Analysis, the financial analysis, as well as capital and operational plans in order to produce his critique. He said that he's "very familiar" with breaking down sometimes somewhat arcane documents when it comes to transit in a way that could be intimidating for the average voter. He was also critical of PSTA for not releasing information regarding traffic congestion, suggesting that PSTA might not want to release that information because it would hurt their cause.

But Yes on Greenlight's Kyle Parks scoffs at that criticism. "The new rail line in Pinellas will be designed to have rail cars crossing intersections at pre-existing red-light periods as much as possible, minimizing the impact on vehicle traffic," he tells CL.

When asked what city in his mind has done it right in terms of transportation, O’Toole mentioned Las Vegas, saying that unlike other cities in their region of the country that did light rail, such as Phoenix, Salt Lake City and Denver, that Vegas has actually doubled their transit share.

Also participating in the news conference (as well as a rally planned later on Monday in Indian Rocks Beach) was Nashville musician Darryl MacQuarrie, who performed his “No Tax for Tracks Ballad,” a three-minute country-themed ditty blasting the Greenlight proposal.

Haselden also said that she has contacted the St. Petersburg marketing dept. about being allowed to submit brochures advocating against the tax, based on the fact that Greenlight brochures and yard signs have been made available to St. Petersburg residents in libraries and recreation centers, " so residents will have access to both sides of this issue."