

ROADBLOCK

Voters reject city's transit plan

Business leaders call for a quick rebound and urge the city to find alternatives on the heels of the bruising defeat of Nashville's mass-transit plan.

STORY BY MEG GARNER | PHOTOS BY NATHAN MORGAN

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REAL ESTATE

Financial giant lands in Nashville

New York money manager AllianceBernstein is moving its headquarters, and 1,000 jobs, to Music City. **ADAM SICHKO**


MANUFACTURING

Famed Gibson files for bankruptcy

The signature Nashville guitar maker is regrouping after financial troubles. **ELEANOR KENNEDY**



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NATHAN MORGAN | NASHVILLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

EXPERTS SAY VOTE WON'T HANDCUFF RECRUITING

The landslide defeat of the May 1 transit referendum won't kneecap Nashville's efforts to recruit companies, according to two economic development and site-selection experts.

In separate interviews, John Boyd and Chris Lloyd said the voting results would be far from deadly to those efforts, whether for a distribution hub or the second headquarters that retail giant Amazon.com Inc. is pursuing — a contest in which Nashville remains one of 20 North American markets still in contention.

"Many companies say having transit is desirable and one of their criteria. But is it lethal? No. Are there many other factors that are encouraging people to come to the Nashville metro area? Yeah," said Lloyd, a senior vice president at Virginia-based McGuireWoods Consulting.

Boyd, a 43-year veteran in site selection, highlighted the corporate recruitments Atlanta notched in the years after voters there rejected a transit ballot issue in 2012.

"If there is one Achilles' heel of Atlanta, it's always been the roadway system and traffic and commuting. Atlanta did not skip a beat after that referendum was defeated," he said.

— Adam Sichko

munity has benefited from Nashville's new cachet, executives feel the city's mounting transportation issues acutely. That increasing congestion hurts both recruitment and retention of employees, in that it chips away at Nashville's quality-of-life pitch.

This is why many of the business community's biggest players — spearheaded by the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, an architect of the referendum campaign — have invested so much time and money into the city's transit push.

At an election night watch party at the

Adventure Science Center, Ralph Schulz, the chamber's CEO, conceded the race, telling the discouraged crowd the city's transit push wasn't over, but "voters have obviously spoken." Briley did not attend the pro-transit event.

Schulz later told reporters, "The most important thing to take out of today is that we still have the issue, and we're going to have to continue talking about this to solve the issue. ... This region is going to continue to grow, but the growth is going to take on a different complexion. It will now be even more urgent for businesses to be close to

their workforce, so I think you're going to see growth that isn't necessarily as concentrated" along specific corridors.

Business leaders, along with other transit backers who attended the watch party, stood in disbelief as the votes were tallied Tuesday night. Those in the crowd were heard saying: "We gave it our best shot," and, "It will only be more expensive next time."

Jim Schmitz, retired Middle Tennessee president of Regions Bank, was chairman

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"The team who originally proposed that plan should spend time learning what was missing to obtain a 'yes' vote. Revise the plan where necessary, and immediately meet with all community stakeholders to gain support. We still need solutions for transit in the very near future."

Don Hardin, founder and president, Don Hardin Group



"Nashville has been passionate and outspoken about our need for a solution. ... Let's not lose this momentum. Take a hard look to understand all sides of the plan and why it failed. Learn what aspects of the plan caused the most opposition. ... Use that information to keep charging toward a solution."

Lauren Reed, CEO, Reed Public Relations



"Improve our bus service to make it more convenient and accessible for riders so they don't have to go into downtown to change buses. We also need to come up with a transportation plan to really solve the traffic congestion on a regional level, which may or may not include a rail system."

David Hawkins, principal, FH Design



"The city's growing gridlock problems are not going to go away. The city should quickly pull together a group of community leaders and stakeholders to identify next steps and find innovative, cost-effective solutions to ensure Nashville remains a great place to live and work."

Barry Vandevier, COO, Asurion



"The failure of the proposed transit plan should be viewed as a step to an alternative transit solution. Transit has become an issue that reasonable people can disagree on. So, it stands to logic that reasonable people can also find common ground to find a plan that the majority can get behind."

JJ Rosen, CEO, Atiba