Transit Manipulation by the Koch Brothers: Analyzing the Relationship between the Division of Power in the United States Government, Societal Benefits, Voter and Rider Composition, Referendum Language and Cost of Improvement Under the Lens of the 2018 Nashville Transit Improvement Program Referendum

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**Introduction**

Public transit is the medium that transports all people from point A to point B. In Nashville, Tennessee, Charles and David Koch, known as the Koch Brothers, manipulated these areas—the division of power in the United States government, societal benefits, voter and rider composition, referendum language and cost of the improvement—in order to turn what was initially positive voter feedback into a roadblock for the 2018 Nashville Transit Improvement Program Referendum, a multi-modal system of interconnected bus, light rail, automobile, biking, and pedestrian transportation.

**Koch Brothers**

- Known for their funding to conservative, Republican political candidates
- Own holdings in the petroleum industry
- Interested in anti-transit movements, leading to funding organizations such as Americans for Prosperity and NoTax4Tracks

**Societal Benefits**

Pro-public transportation voting Americans support public transit because of social benefits: reduction of congestion, cleaner environment, and for the poor and socially excluded, revitalization of cities, and job creation, resulting in limited in-support votes and ridership, reflecting the greater influence of self-interest on voters, especially when taxes are involved.

**U.S. State and Federal Division of Power**

Projects in states that received most of the funding for the 2010 national high-speed rail failed because of misrepresented expectations of the people. A systemic bias exists against transit funding as it requires a vote to increase taxes whereas highway funding, historically, is included in state and federal budget.

**Voter and Rider Composition**

Nashville’s median household income is $48,361, supporting the average resident could not afford the tax increase required. Increased public transit promotes public health. Discontinuing the obesity prevention program, despite 37.4% of adults and 29% of adolescents being overweight in Davidson County, reflects the Transit Referendum potential to the general population.

**Reference Language and Cost of Improvement**

The Referendum language in Nashville and Davidson county explicitly includes large figures, such as $5,354,000,000 (capital cost) and $9,997,000,000 (required revenue through 2032), to describe the cost and value of the program, opposing the median voter’s willingness to pay.

**Conclusion**

Understanding the failure of the 2018 Nashville Transit Improvement Program Referendum was a result of the Nashville’s societal and economic conditions that were exploited by conservative political groups, such as Americans for Prosperity, one can apply such knowledge to future transportation referendums and mirror or counteract the Koch Brothers’ actions to prompt successful passage.

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