

Texas Transportation Poll

In spring 2014, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute initiated the Texas Transportation Poll, a longitudinal survey of more than 5,000 Texans, to assess public opinion surrounding the following transportation issues: travel behavior, travel solutions, transportation funding, and customer satisfaction with governmental agencies. The survey will be conducted every two years to allow researchers to track changes in public perceptions over time.

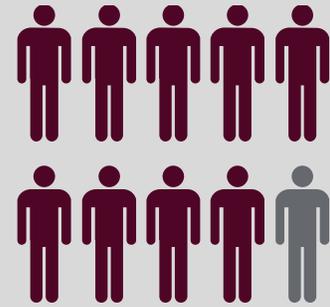
This executive summary presents a top-level synopsis of the inaugural 2014 survey findings.

Travel Behavior

How Do Texans Travel?



One-third of Texans reported walking to make a non-recreational trip in the last 30 days. One-fourth reported using public transit to make a trip. One-tenth reported using a bicycle for a non-recreational trip.



9 out of 10

respondents said they own or lease a personal vehicle, relying on that vehicle as their primary means of travel.

Texans are heavily reliant on a personal auto as their primary means of travel. Ninety percent of total respondents reported owning or leasing a personal vehicle, with nine out of 10 using it as their primary means of travel. Travel behavior research suggests a correlation between income and personal mobility as measured by personal vehicle miles traveled. The cost of travel is a larger proportion of the household budget for low-income households when compared to that of high-income households. This survey research makes similar findings, with low-income Texans reporting fewer annual miles traveled in their personal vehicles than Texans with higher incomes. Young respondents (18–24 years old) are less likely to use a personal auto; non-white, minority respondents (particularly Hispanics and African Americans) and low-income respondents (less than a \$25,000 annual household income) have the heaviest reliance on public transportation.

One-third of Texans reported walking to make a non-



What Do Texans Believe and Do about Congestion?

Three-fourths of Texans experience congestion while traveling in their region. Not surprisingly, Texans living in survey regions with major metropolitan areas were more likely to experience congestion in their region than respondents living in less urbanized areas. Furthermore, young and minority populations were less likely to experience congestion, although the reasons are unclear.

The findings suggest that most Texans have yet to make significant lifestyle changes, such as moving or

changing vehicles, to manage congestion. This is because either congestion has not yet reached a point where Texans may feel compelled to make lifestyle choice changes, or congestion has become such an integral part of Texans' lives that they may perceive more significant lifestyle changes as futile and simply deal with the congestion.

A majority of Texans agreed that congestion is the byproduct of a strong economy and the growing population. Respondents living in survey regions with major metropolitan areas and those that reported experiencing congestion were more likely to agree with these sentiments than respondents living in less urbanized areas.

A majority of Texans who primarily use personal autos did not feel that congestion is caused by an under-investment in roads but instead by a growing economy. A majority of those who use transit and other means of transportation *did* believe that congestion is caused by an under-investment in public transportation. These findings suggest that Texas' public transportation users believe that increased funding of public transportation will help manage congestion, but Texans that primarily use autos believe that increased investment in strategies, such as traffic signal timing and incident clearance, may be more effective in resolving transportation issues.

Travel Solutions

Who Should Have the Most Influence on Transportation Policy?

Texans believe that auto drivers and state departments of transportation should have the most influence on transportation policy. The data suggest that one's mode of primary travel has an impact on one's perception of the influence each of the user groups should have on transportation policy. For example, Texans that identified personal auto as their primary means of travel rated themselves most highly as the group that should have the most influence on transportation policy, while Texans that identified other modes as their primary means of travel rated state departments of transportation most highly.

The data also suggest that those who primarily use autos, roughly 90 percent of Texans, may have a challenge seeing themselves as merely *one of many* user groups for whom the system was



From a list of 15 ways to improve transportation in the state, better traffic signal timing and clearing accidents more quickly were

more popular ideas
than adding more highway lanes.

Building more toll roads was the
least popular idea.

designed. Rather, they see themselves as *the* user group for whom the system was designed. Furthermore, they may view the primary role of state departments of transportation—but also to a lesser extent municipal and county government—as facilitating their system needs.

What Strategies Do Texans Believe Will Most Effectively Help Reduce Congestion?

A majority of Texans feel public transit is not convenient in their region. This was true in all regions of the state including metropolitan areas and rural areas. The data suggest a high level of skepticism about the ability of other modes to reduce congestion relative to personal auto. This is an important finding since the state will continue to see population growth concentrated in urban areas, where transit will need to support mobility as a viable option.

Texans are most supportive of timing traffic signals more effectively and doing a better job of managing accidents as strategies to help resolve regional transportation issues. Timing traffic signals more effectively was clearly identified as the highest-rated strategy. Building more toll roads was, by far, the least-supported strategy. The lack of support held true in both metropolitan areas and rural areas, as well as areas with and without toll roads. The data suggest that demographic and geographic characteristics influence not only travel behavior but also one's perception of the utility of transportation management strategies.

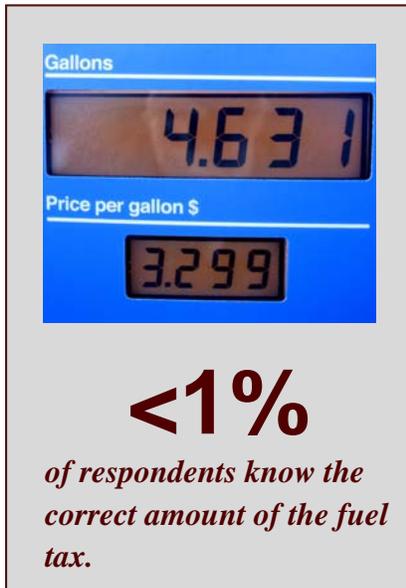
Transportation Funding

Does Texas Need to Increase Transportation Funding?

Nearly two-thirds of Texans believe there is a need to increase transportation funding in Texas. The data suggest a majority agreement on this sentiment across all socio-economic groups. Support was strongest among more highly educated Texans and Texans that primarily use modes other than the personal auto.



Nearly 2/3 (64%)
of respondents said they support increased funding for transportation statewide.



What Do Texans Know about the Fuel Tax?

The data indicate that less than 1 percent of all Texans know the correct amount of the fuel tax and how it is assessed. A slight majority of Texans correctly identified the fuel tax as a flat tax on each gallon of gasoline purchased; however, a near majority of Texans either incorrectly identified the fuel tax as a sales tax or did not know what type of tax it was (flat or sales).

What Do Texans Know about Other Transportation Funding Sources?

A majority of Texans identified vehicle registration fees, tolls, and driver license fees as sources of revenue used to fund transportation, in addition to the fuel tax. There were high levels of uncertainty regarding the use of general sales taxes, federal income taxes, and property taxes for funding

transportation. The data also suggest that funding mechanisms that are perceived as being directly associated with transportation (fees or taxes associated with drivers, driving, or roads) are easier for respondents to identify as being used for funding transportation in Texas than those that are not directly associated with transportation.

Texans were not overly supportive of any potential transportation funding mechanism offered. Among those mechanisms offered, respondents were most supportive of dedicating the state sales tax on vehicles to transportation and least supportive of increasing vehicle registration fees from \$65 per year to \$115 per year. The data may suggest that Texans are more comfortable with transportation funding mechanisms that do not require any perceived additional spending on their part (such as dedicating to transportation an existing tax that will be paid regardless of how the funding is allocated) than those that do (such as increasing vehicle registration fees or the state fuel tax).

What Do Texans Think about Investing More Public Dollars in Public Transportation?

A majority of Texans agreed with investing more public tax dollars in public transportation, either regionally or statewide. The data suggest that support increases as respondent income and education increase. Texans in metropolitan areas and those not primarily using an auto also support investing more in public transportation because they believe it will reduce congestion.



A majority
said they support increased funding for public transportation; this was particularly true for those with higher educations and higher incomes.

How Do Texans Feel about Specific Transportation Funding Mechanisms and Their Characteristics?

Respondents were asked to evaluate specific transportation funding mechanisms such as “increasing the state fuel tax by 5 cents per gallon.” The data suggest that the least attractive mechanisms are those that are more likely to require additional spending on the part of Texans, such as those mechanisms that are linked to inflation and funded by system users. The most attractive mechanisms are those associated with fees already being paid, such as the state vehicle sales tax, but are not currently dedicated to transportation funding.

Respondents were also asked to evaluate *characteristics* of transportation funding mechanisms, such as “assuring a long-term solution” or “reducing dependency on foreign oil.” Texans prefer funding mechanisms that ensure long-term, predictable solutions, reduce dependency on foreign oil, and prevent funding diversions.

Texans generally reacted more positively toward funding mechanism *characteristics* than to the funding mechanisms themselves. Political affiliation slightly influenced respondent perception of transportation funding characteristics. While self-identified Republicans ranked “assuring a long-term solution” most highly, self-identified Democrats ranked “promotion of clean energy” most highly.

Customer Satisfaction in Governmental Agencies

What Are Texans’ Beliefs about Local, State, and Federal Government’s Role and Government’s Ability to Address Transportation Issues in Their Region?

The data suggest that Texans perceive state and local elected officials as not truly understanding their expectations of the transportation system. However, they favor state and local government over the federal government when it comes to addressing regional transportation issues.

What Are Texans’ Views about Public-Private Partnerships?

While Texans believe private corporations should have very little influence on transportation policy, they are supportive of transportation agencies partnering with private corporations, when they can, to help find solutions to transportation issues. The data may suggest that Texans perceive a need for transportation agencies to work in partnership with private corporations while ensuring the partnerships are equitable and in the best interest of citizens.

How Well Are Transportation Agencies Performing?

Texans believe transportation agencies are doing above average in some areas, such as maintaining a safe system, doing the best they can with the budget they have, and connecting communities. Texans also believe transportation agencies are doing below average in many areas, including providing good customer service, being innovative in finding solutions to transportation issues, working efficiently to complete projects, understanding respondent expectations of the transportation system, and maintaining financial transparency.