

2005 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Traveler Opinion & Perception (TOP) Study

SPONSOR:

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OVERALL STUDY PURPOSE:

- ☞ The 2005 Traveler Opinion & Perception (TOP) Survey was conducted on behalf of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and individual states that elected to participate.
- ☞ The research is designed to understand the needs and expectations of users of the nation's comprehensive transportation system and to determine the extent to which the existing transportation system meets those needs.
- ☞ Results are used to identify possible areas where improvements can be made to increase traveler satisfaction.
- ☞ As a participating state, a state-specific survey was conducted on behalf of Virginia. This Virginia-specific survey focused on project selection, public outreach, safety, and travelers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the state's management of transportation projects.
- ☞ For Arlington County, this study provides insight on how Northern Virginia compares to other regions around the Commonwealth.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- ☞ Understand needs and expectations of travelers of Virginia's transportation system
- ☞ Measure the extent to which existing transportation system meets those needs
- ☞ Identify travelers' priorities for system improvement
- ☞ Establish key benchmarks for system performance
- ☞ Provide specific measures for travelers' perceptions of
 - Safety and changes in safety while driving
 - Management of transportation improvement projects
 - Interest in public participation and traveler information

METHODOLOGY:

Mode of Data Collection	Interviews - Telephone Surveys
Completed Surveys	1,254 interviews completed <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Central Virginia: n = 315- Hampton Roads: n = 315- North: n = 313- Southwest: n = 311
Survey Population	Virginia residents representing all districts of the Virginia Department of Transportation
Survey Instrument	Questionnaire administered by telephone interviewers
Criteria for Participation	18 years of age and older and have some recent experience traveling on Virginia's transportation system. The transportation system includes highways, roads, public transportation, bikeways, walkways, and sidewalks.

SELECTED KEY FINDINGS:

Virginia is a State on the Move

- ☞ Virtually all Virginia adults 18 years of age and older travel, using some part of the state's transportation system: driving, walking, bicycling, and public transportation.
 - Nearly all respondents (96%) said they have access to a personal vehicle that they use on a nearly daily basis.
 - However, a significant percentage (23%) of Virginians said they use public transportation. This is notable in Northern Virginia where nearly half (48%) of Virginians said they use public transportation, at least occasionally.
- ☞ Nearly two out of three (65%) Virginia residents commute to work, generally following the traditional commute pattern of five days per week. Ten percent (10%) commute to school. This equates to more than 195 million commute trips per week.
- ☞ Overall, Virginians were neutral-to-moderately satisfied with the state's transportation system.
- ☞ Highway and roadway safety was cited as the most important characteristic of Virginia's transportation system.
- ☞ Travelers graded individual aspects of the state's transportation infrastructure. Consistent with overall satisfaction scores, Virginia residents gave the state an overall grade of C plus for its transportation system.
- ☞ The overall grades and the grades for individual system attributes varied significantly by region, suggesting that a statewide strategy is not ideal. Instead, improvements and investments need to be targeted to meet the specific needs of a region.

Perception of Projects

- ☞ Virginia travelers expressed concerns about the management of construction projects.
- ☞ Travelers were more likely to feel there has been improvement in projects being completed on time rather than within budget.
- ☞ Overall, there is strong support for future transportation projects – 23% of travelers were extremely likely to support future projects and an additional 34% were likely to support additional projects.
- ☞ When asked what improvements would serve the needs of their community, Virginia's travelers agreed most strongly that the transportation system would serve their needs better if more roadway construction was completed at night.
- ☞ While Virginia travelers were at least moderately satisfied with the state's transportation system, there is clear room for improvement.

Virginia's Strengths

- ☞ Virginia's primary strengths include: bridge conditions and the setup of work zones to maximize safety and traffic flow.
- ☞ Highway safety should also be considered a system strength. However, the gap between what is expected and what is delivered is significant. Moreover, the majority (71%) of Virginians felt that Virginia's roads and highways are becoming less safe.
- ☞ Four areas were identified as secondary strengths of the system (i.e., they received above-average grades but were less important to the traveler): visual appeal, highway amenities, traveler information, and consideration for the environment.
- ☞ Travelers felt they have adequate access to transportation information and wish to continue to receive that information, primarily through mainstream media – newspaper, radio, and television. However, there is a specific segment that uses the internet, and Virginia should continue its efforts to provide additional traveler information via the internet.

Critical Weaknesses

- ☞ Five critical issues emerged. They are listed in order of the size of the gap between what was considered most important to customers (i.e. what they required from the system and what was being delivered): pedestrian safety and mobility, reducing delays from roadwork, pavement conditions, improving traffic flow and reducing congestion, and planning for future transportation needs.
- ☞ Virginia should continue its efforts to improve its management of transportation projects to ensure they are completed on-time and on-budget. Moreover, Virginia may wish to more widely communicate its successes in terms of project management. While VDOT does publish *The Dashboard Report*, this may need to be distributed more widely. This report, published quarterly, provides updates on the status of all state construction and maintenance projects. It is widely distributed and has received positive reviews from the public and other stakeholders.
- ☞ There are two areas that could become critical weaknesses if importance increases and/or performance decreases: maintenance response times and bicycle safety and mobility.

OTHER FINDINGS:

- ☞ Support for future transportation projects is linked to the extent to which travelers feel they are getting their money's worth for the current tax dollars spent on building and maintaining the transportation system. Moreover, the extent to which travelers feel they are getting value for their tax dollar is tied to their perceptions of the current quality of the system.
- ☞ Travelers were most supportive of projects to expand public transportation services.
- ☞ Most residents would prefer getting their transportation-related news via radio, television, and/or internet.

OTHER RELATED STUDIES, PLANS & DOCUMENTS:

2006 Arlington County Residents' Satisfaction with Transportation Telephone Study

AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS:

PowerPoint Presentation Final Report (pdf file)
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Key Words:

Federal Highway Administration, FHWA, Northern Virginia, planning, project management, public transportation, Traveler Opinion and Perception, TOP, safety, satisfaction, system quality, transportation projects, travelers, VDOT, work zones