



Florida Opinion Research

TAMPA, FL: 813-283-2665 COLUMBUS, OH: 614-341-7005

WASHINGTON, DC: 202-263-7292 FAX: 202-318-0346

ON THE WEB: www.FloridaOpinionResearch.com

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TO: Interested Parties

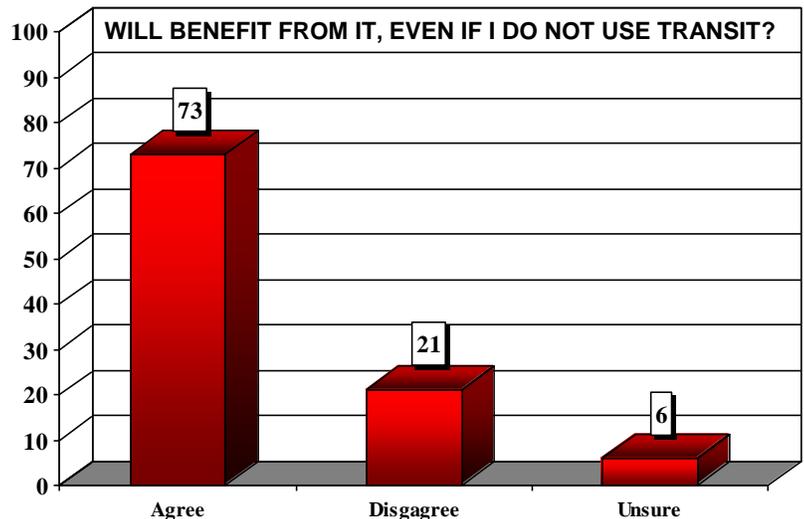
FR: Paul Fallon

RE: Current Public Opinion Data on Public Transit

As many types of transit systems throughout the country are being considered and, in some cases embattled, I thought it might be insightful to look at views of public transit from a broader perspective, rather than through the confining prism of specific proposals and systems, which have their own unique features and flaws. Survey topics from a recent nationwide poll of adults in the United States conducted by Florida Opinion Research explored some general and philosophical attitudes that Americans have toward public transit.

Most Think They Benefit from the Existence of Public Transit

Since ridership for public transit tends to be low and often times such systems need subsidization, it is surprising to learn that 73% of the survey respondents agreed that, in some way, they will benefit from having expanded and improved public transit systems in their communities, even if they never use them for their own travel and commuting needs, while only 21% disagreed and 6% were unsure. Despite the rather rancorous and polarizing campaigns that are waged over transit referendums and funding, it seems to be a widely-shared opinion that is consistent among many segments of society. For example, agreement ranges from 83% for 18 to 29 year-olds to 68% for those 60 or older. Although agreement is higher among respondents in suburban (77%) and urban areas (76%), even a vast majority of rural residents agree (67%). This indicates that support for such systems may have nothing to do with ridership intentions, and public agencies seeking voter approval for transit funding should not try to lure people onto buses and trains, when they are trying to lure them to vote for their funding requests!

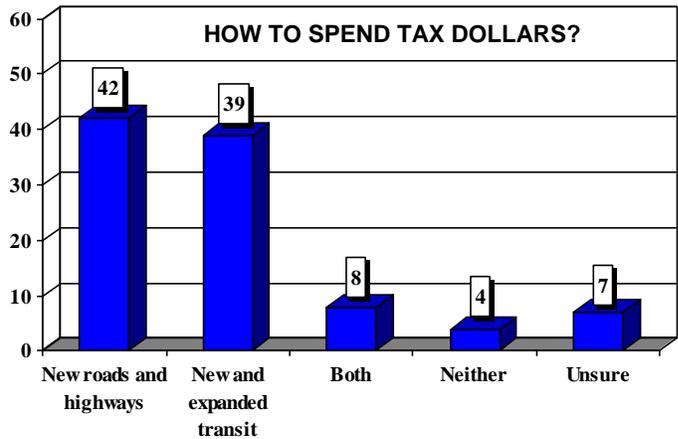


In trying to deconstruct why people might think they will benefit from having expanded and improved public transit systems in their communities, even if they never personally use them, it is not surprising to know that 82% of such people also agreed that expanding public transit systems and making them available in more major cities is necessary to protect the environment and improve air quality. In fact, a total of 72% of respondents overall agreed that expanding public transit systems and making them available in more major cities is necessary to protect the environment and improve air quality, while just 20% disagreed and 8% were unsure. This robust sentiment suggests that the benefits of such

systems which may need to be touted are ones that can appeal to a broader cross-section of the public beyond potential riders and environmentalists. Frankly, in my experience, it is also more effective when campaigns make people feel good about doing something virtuous for their communities and the environment, rather than the brow-beating that is sometimes used to try to shame people into voting for transit projects and tax levies.

Funding is A Different Story!

Despite clear recognition of the intrinsic benefits of public transit, respondents were torn about how state and local governments should use tax dollars for transportation in the future. A narrow plurality (42%) favor using available tax dollars to expand and build new roads and highways, with the highest support coming from 30 to 44 year-olds (49%), rural residents (48%), people who live in the central part of the U.S. (52%) and Republicans (54%), who favored road funding much more than Democrats (33%). By contrast, using available tax dollars to expand and build new public transit systems was favored by 39% overall, and most popular with urban residents (45%) and Democrats (51%, compared to 32% of Republicans). In an era of limited availability of tax dollars, this presages some of the internal conflicts that may weigh on people when deciding how they will vote on transit funding.



How Transit Could Affect Future Growth & Housing

A slight majority (50%) favored building future housing near developed areas and where public transit is located, in order to reduce commuting and traffic congestion. This was most popular with 45 to 59 year-olds (55%), Democrats (56%), people who live in the western part of the U.S. (57%) and residents of urban areas (56%). By comparison, only 31% favor building future housing away from developed areas and public transit systems, in order to prevent too much density and give people more choices about where to live, although it was somewhat more appealing to 18 to 29 year-olds (38%), women (33%, compared to just 28% of men), Republicans (35%) and individuals in the central U.S. (37%).

Please call me at 813-283-2665, if you want to discuss this information in greater detail. Feel free to share it with anyone who may have an interest in the topic.

This information is based on survey research that was conducted through telephone interviews of 1,006 randomly-selected adults in the United States. The interviews were performed over land-line and cellular telephones during the period of February 1, 2011 to February 8, 2011. The overall estimated margin of sampling error is +/- 3.1%, based on a confidence level of 95%, although it varies for each individual question. This means that if this survey was repeated, 95 times out of 100 the results would be within plus or minus 3.1% of those provided herein. Adjustments were made to proportionately weight the results to ensure each area of the country is represented in proportion to its percentage of the U.S. population.

About Paul Fallon...



Paul Fallon is a public opinion researcher, political pollster and advisor for levy committees, local government agencies, school districts, interest groups, political candidates and trade associations. He specializes in land-use policy research, education, transit and public funding ballot issues, and referendums. He has worked on issues and campaigns in more than 34 different states throughout the country. He has served as the pollster for numerous campaigns to get voter approval for public funding requests for transit services, school districts and government agencies of all sizes, ranging from Florida to California.