



Transportation Needs and Funding Alternatives: A Survey

REPORT SUMMARY

This report is the first of a series of three reports to address the issue of funding transportation infrastructure needs in South Carolina from the Jim Self Center on the Future at Clemson University's Strom Thurmond Institute. The report summarizes the results of a telephone survey of 1,000 households in South Carolina to identify issues of particular concern and to determine the level of acceptance of alternative funding strategies for transportation infrastructure.

The state was divided by geographic region into Coastal, Midlands and Upstate counties and by population into Urban, Next to Urban, and Rural counties to allow comparison between different population segments. Respondents were asked to rate a series of questions on a scale of 1 to 5. Answers of '1' and '2' were considered unfavorable while answers of '4' and '5' were considered favorable.

Respondents were asked about key transportation issues, funding alternatives, and multi-modal transportation options. When respondents were asked to rate the condition of South Carolina roads and highways, the overall mean response was 2.9. But responses varied by region, with Coastal respondents indicating a nearly two-to-one margin of unfavorable to favorable responses relative to other regions. Rural residents gave higher ratings than the other geographic groupings.

Mean responses to issues of road maintenance, congestion/traffic flow, and safety were slightly below mid-range (2.73-2.93) while appearance was slightly above mid-range (3.12). When asked whether they supported increased funding in these areas, at least two-thirds of respondents responded favorably for spending on maintenance, congestion, and safety, while about 42 percent responded favorably to spending on road appearance.

When asked to rate transportation funding alternatives, the most favorable ratings were given for highway impact fees (3.53) and general fund expenditures (3.51). Mid-range responses were for a state loan pool targeted for transportation needs (3.17) and tolls on high volume roads and bridges (2.98). The least favorable responses were for taxes on new car purchases (2.59), state income taxes (2.34), gasoline/fuel taxes (2.25), and property taxes on automobiles (2.02). Note that the top four options in terms of respondent preferences are either fees or state revenue expenditures; the four lowest-ranking options are taxes of various types. Despite the aversion to taxes, 67.1 percent of respondents indicated that fees and taxes should be tied to the use of highways.

Most multi-modal transportation programs fared well in the survey, with more than half of respondents answering favorably to increased funding for inner city buses, pedestrian walkways, and high speed rail. Mean responses to all transportation mode options were near the mid-point or higher. Mean responses to different transportation modes varied considerably by county size and geographic region.

These findings shed light on the public perception of transportation needs and at least to some degree on funding options. It is clear that the demand for transportation infrastructure to meet basic concerns of safety, maintenance and congestion exists now and is likely to increase due to both growth pressures and higher expectations on the part of the public at large. Yet, at the same time, the public is strongly averse to taxes and to a lesser extent to fees to pay for transportation improvements. This disconnect between needs and funding base is likely to become more serious still as revenues are projected to increase far more gradually than expenditure requirements. It is important that states begin now to reassess transportation funding alternatives. The next two reports in this series will attempt to provide background information for that assessment.

This report is the first phase of Research Project No. SPR 622, "Funding Options For Meeting Transportation Infrastructure Needs in the State of South Carolina." This project is being conducted in cooperation with the South Carolina Department of Transportation and the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration.

South Carolina Department of Transportation
955 Park Street
P.O. Box 191
Columbia, SC 29202

The Strom Thurmond Institute of
Government and Public Affairs
Clemson University
Perimeter Road
Clemson, SC 29634-0125

For a copy of the report or for further information, contact Terry Swygert at SCDOT: 803 737-6652; swygertti@dot.state.sc.us
The report may be viewed online at: <http://www.scfuture.clemson.edu/today&tomorrow/transportation/>