Reducing Vehicle Miles Travelled: A Summary of National Perspectives

Key Findings From a National Survey Conducted June 24 – July 2, 2012

Dave Metz & Lori Weigel

NRDC
Natural Resources Defense Council
The Earth’s Best Defense

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates

FM3

220-3437
Methodology

- Telephone interviews with 800 likely voters nationwide with a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.0%
- Complementary samples in targeted regions:
  - 150 interviews in Cuyahoga County, OH
  - 150 interviews in Bucks and Montgomery Counties, PA
  - 200 interviews in Mecklenburg County, NC
- Interviews conducted June 24 – July 2, 2012
- Interviews on land lines and cellular phones
- Preceded by in-depth focus groups in Charlotte, NC; Raleigh, NC; Cleveland, OH; and suburban Philadelphia, PA
- Bipartisan research team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R)
How Americans Get Around
Most citizens have commutes of less than half an hour; one in five commute more than 45 minutes.

And if you had to estimate, how many minutes is your typical one way commute?

- Less than 15 minutes: 27%
- 15-29 minutes: 35%
- 30-44 minutes: 19%
- More than 45 minutes: 18%
- Don't know: 1%
Only one-third have used alternate transportation (biking, carpools, buses or trains) in the past month; two-thirds report ever having used it.

36% Have used carpool, taken a bus, ridden the train or biked in the past month

66% Have ever used one of these forms of transportation
Most citizens would like to drive less, but do not believe it is a realistic option for them.

- **I have no choice but to drive as much as I do.**
  - Total Agree: 72%
  - Total Disagree: 25%
  - 46% Strongly Agree
  - 26% Slightly Agree
  - 13% Slightly Disagree
  - 12% Strongly Disagree
  - 6% DK/NA

- **I avoid driving at certain times of the day just because of traffic congestion.**
  - Total Agree: 59%
  - Total Disagree: 35%
  - 34% Strongly Agree
  - 25% Slightly Agree
  - 17% Slightly Disagree
  - 18% Strongly Disagree
  - 6% DK/NA

- **I would like to spend less time in my car.**
  - Total Agree: 55%
  - Total Disagree: 35%
  - 29% Strongly Agree
  - 26% Slightly Agree
  - 17% Slightly Disagree
  - 18% Strongly Disagree
  - 9% DK/NA

8c/e/i. I'm going to read you a list of several statements. After I read each statement, I'd like you to tell me whether you generally agree or disagree. Split Sample.
Most Americans say that gas prices are already causing them to drive less; they are highly price sensitive.

“I am choosing to drive less due to gas prices.”

At what price per gallon of gasoline would you make significant changes in your routine in order to drive less?

- Already done all you can: 31%
- $4 per gallon: 29%
- $5 per gallon: 19%
- $6 per gallon: 5%
- $7 per gallon: 2%
- $8 per gallon: 2%
- More: 2%
Citizens express a clear preference for communities with short commutes and smaller homes and lots...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Mecklenburg County, NC</th>
<th>Cuyahoga County, OH</th>
<th>Suburban Philadelphia, PA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A community where the houses are smaller and on smaller lots, and you would have a shorter commute to work, 20 minutes or less</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A community where the houses are larger and on larger lots, and you would have a longer commute to work, 40 minutes or more</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both/Neither/Don’t know/NA</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
...but are more divided on whether they want to live in a community with houses only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Mecklenburg County, NC</th>
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<th>Suburban Philadelphia, PA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A community where the neighborhood has a mix of houses, apartments, townhouses, stores and other businesses that are easy to walk to</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A community where the neighborhood has houses only and you have to drive to stores and other businesses</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both/Neither/Don’t know/NA</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If citizens were able to drive less, they would spend that time with family or at home.

If you did not have to spend that time each day commuting, which of the following do you think you would be most likely to do with the extra time?

- Being with your family: 21%
- Cooking, gardening, or doing chores around the house: 20%
- Enjoying a hobby: 13%
- Exercising: 11%
- Sleeping: 9%
- Volunteering: 4%
- Working more: 3%
Perceptions of the Transportation System
Only one-third of Americans would grade the availability of public transportation in their community as an “A” or “B.”

How would you grade the availability of convenient public transportation in your community, including buses or trains – would you grade it an A, B, C, D, or F, with an “A” grade being excellent, and “F” being poor?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know/NA</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total A / B: 36%
Not surprisingly, residents of our more urban/suburban target communities are generally more pleased.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mecklenburg County, NC</th>
<th>Cuyahoga County, OH</th>
<th>Suburban Philadelphia, PA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 by target community. How would you grade the availability of convenient public transportation in your community, including buses or trains - would you grade it an A, B, C, D, or F, with an A grade being excellent, and F being poor?
Americans clearly believe that our current transportation infrastructure is outdated, and want improved public transportation.

My community would benefit from an expanded and improved public transportation system, such as rail and buses.

- **Total Agree**: 64%
- **Total Disagree**: 31%

I would like more transportation options, so I have the freedom to choose where I need to go.

- **Total Agree**: 59%
- **Total Disagree**: 35%

Our nation's transportation infrastructure is outdated, unreliable and inefficient.

- **Total Agree**: 59%
- **Total Disagree**: 32%

8d/hj. I'm going to read you a list of several statements. After I read each statement, I'd like you to tell me whether you generally agree or disagree. Split Sample.
Willingness to Use Public Transportation
In principle, most Americans would like to use public transportation more often.

“I would like to use public transportation more often, but it is not convenient to or available from my home or work.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/NA</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Agree 2010: 59%
Total Disagree 2010: 38%

Total Agree 2012: 61%
Total Disagree 2012: 35%
A preference for driving and a lack of convenient stops are the main reasons for not using public transportation more often.

- **You prefer to drive**: 56% Major Factor, 18% Minor Factor, 26% Not a Factor/DK/Ref.
- **It stops too far from your home or destination**: 43% Major Factor, 15% Minor Factor, 42% Not a Factor/DK/Ref.
- **It takes too long**: 37% Major Factor, 20% Minor Factor, 43% Not a Factor/DK/Ref.
- **It doesn’t come often enough**: 37% Major Factor, 18% Minor Factor, 45% Not a Factor/DK/Ref.
- **You are concerned about safety**: 26% Major Factor, 29% Minor Factor, 44% Not a Factor/DK/Ref.
- **Your family and work commitments will not allow it**: 24% Major Factor, 15% Minor Factor, 61% Not a Factor/DK/Ref.
- **The weather makes it uncomfortable**: 21% Major Factor, 31% Minor Factor, 47% Not a Factor/DK/Ref.
- **It’s not clean**: 17% Major Factor, 21% Minor Factor, 62% Not a Factor/DK/Ref.
- **It costs too much**: 14% Major Factor, 24% Minor Factor, 63% Not a Factor/DK/Ref.

7. I am going to read you a list of factors that some people say keep them from using public transportation, like trains or buses, more often than they do. Please tell me whether it is a major factor that keeps you from using public transportation more often, a minor factor, or not a factor at all. *Not Part of a Split Sample.*
There are some differences among the target communities in their perceptions of these obstacles.

(\% Major Factor)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Mecklenburg County, NC</th>
<th>Cuyahoga County, OH</th>
<th>Suburban Philadelphia, PA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You Prefer To Drive</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^Stops Too Far From Home</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t Come Often Enough</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It Takes Too Long</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned About Safety</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Work Not Allow It</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather - Uncomfortable</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s Not Clean</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It Costs Too Much</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 by target community. I am going to read you a list of factors that some people say keep them from using public transportation, like trains or buses, more often than they do. Please tell me whether it is a major factor that keeps you from using public transportation more often, a minor factor, or not a factor at all. ^Not Part of a Split Sample.
Support for Policy Changes
Only one in five Americans backs building new roads as a solution for traffic congestion.

Which of the following proposals is the best long-term solution to reducing traffic in your area?

Improving public transportation
- 2012: 42%
- 2009: 47%
- 2007: 49%

Developing communities where people do not have to drive as much
- 2012: 21%
- 2009: 25%
- 2007: 26%

Building new roads
- 2012: 20%
- 2009: 20%
- 2007: 21%

All/None/DK/NA
- 2012: 17%
- 2009: 8%
- 2007: 4%
Focus group participants preferred expanding transit to widening roads to reduce traffic.

- Some participants instinctively thought that more space on key roads would ease congestion.
- But most quickly identified it as a temporary solution – one which would simply induce more demand, or move bottlenecks further down the highway.
- A greater number perceived that removing more cars from the road by offering more transit would have more impact.

**CHARLOTTE FEMALE:** They already have [the roads] in place, so it seems it would be an easier fix to go ahead and get what we’ve already got fixed up and better and more efficient, than add something new and start over again

**CHARLOTTE MALE:** It seems like every time they add a lane, it doesn’t improve the transportation that much. It might for a mile, and then it bottlenecks back up. Unless they expand it in a big way, it’s not going to do that much for it.
Americans of all ideological backgrounds favor public transportation.

Preferred Approach to Reducing Traffic, by Party and Ideology

10. Which of the following proposals is the best long-term solution to reducing traffic in your area?
Even rural residents see enhancing public transportation as the most effective approach.

Preferred Approach to Reducing Traffic, by Type of Area

- New Roads
- More Public Transit
- Communities with Less Driving

10. Which of the following proposals is the best long-term solution to reducing traffic in your area?
These same preferences apply in the target communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Mecklenburg County, NC</th>
<th>Cuyahoga County, OH</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving public transportation</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing communities where people do not have to drive as much</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building new roads</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All/None/DK/NA</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Citizens also like the idea of infill development, especially in the target communities...

Where do you think new development should be built in your community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Cuyahoga County, OH</th>
<th>Suburban Philadelphia, PA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within existing cities and suburbs</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside existing cities and suburbs on undeveloped lands</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both/Neither/DK/NA</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q4 by target community.
...and explicitly back policies to promote it.

Setting new standards for local planning that guide new development into existing cities and or near public transportation.

- Strongly support: 37%
- Somewhat support: 40%
- Somewhat oppose: 8%
- Strongly oppose: 7%
- DK/NA: 8%

Total Support: 67%
Total Oppose: 15%
Citizens also strongly endorse policies that would connect outlying areas with public transportation.

Building new public transportation routes that connect suburbs and other communities to each other, rather than just to downtown areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly support</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat support</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat oppose</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly oppose</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Support</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Oppose</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/NA</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14b. Now I am going to read you a list of specific proposals that have been made for improving transportation in your community. Please tell me whether it sounds like something you would support or oppose.
Citizens are more likely to support express bus systems if the vehicles themselves are upgraded.

- **Providing newer, nicer buses** that run in express bus lanes to speed up bus service:
  - Total Support: 69%
  - Total Oppose: 26%
  - Support: 37%
  - Oppose: 14%
  - DK/NA: 6%

- **Creating more express bus lanes to speed up bus service**:
  - Total Support: 58%
  - Total Oppose: 31%
  - Support: 27%
  - Oppose: 15%
  - DK/NA: 11%
Funding Transportation Improvements
Americans over-estimate what their state spends on public transportation...

If you had to guess, what proportion of every dollar your state spends on transportation would you estimate currently goes to improving and maintaining public transportation – like buses or trains?

0-10% 35%
11-20% 14%
21-30% 8%
31-40% 3%
41-50% 3%
51-60% 1%
61-70% 1%
71-80% 1%
81-90% 0%
91-100% 0%
DK/NA/Ref 36%

Average amount among those offering an opinion 16.2%
...and still would like that proportion nearly doubled.

If you were in charge of your state’s transportation budget, what proportion of every dollar would you spend on improving and maintaining public transportation – like buses or trains?

- 28.1% Average amount among those offering an opinion
- 34% DK/NA/Ref
Citizens also offer a wide range of estimates of how much their states bring in in gas taxes.

If you had to guess, how much of the cost of every gallon of gas in your state would you say goes to taxes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Price Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$0.00-$0.25</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$0.26-$0.50</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$0.51-$0.75</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$0.76-$1.00</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1.01-$1.25</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1.26-$1.50</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1.51-$1.99</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2.00+</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DK/NA/Ref: 32%

Average amount among those offering an opinion: $1.10
Americans strongly support more local investment in improvements to public transportation.

In order to reduce traffic congestion and provide more transportation choices, would you support or oppose local governments in your area investing more to expand and improve public transportation, including buses, trains, and light rail?

- **Strongly support**: 39%
- **Somewhat support**: 29%
- **Somewhat oppose**: 10%
- **Strongly oppose**: 15%
- **DK/NA**: 7%

**Total Support**: 68%

**Total Oppose**: 25%
Non-users of transit are nearly as supportive as users.

Support for Local Transportation Investment by Alternative Transportation Use

- **Total Support**: 75%
- **Total Oppose**: 20%
- **DK/NA**: 5%

(36% of Sample)

- **Used in the last month**
  - Total Support: 65%
  - Total Oppose: 28%
  - DK/NA: 7%

(64% of Sample)

- **None in the last month**
  - Total Support: 71%
  - Total Oppose: 23%
  - DK/NA: 6%

(65% of Sample)

- **Ever Used**
  - Total Support: 63%
  - Total Oppose: 30%
  - DK/NA: 7%

(34% of Sample)

**Never Used**
A majority of conservative Republicans back these investments.

Support for Local Transportation Investment by Party and Ideology

- Liberal Democrat: 91% Support, 4% Total Oppose, 5% DK/NA
- Moderate Democrat: 81% Support, 15% Total Oppose, 4% DK/NA
- Independent: 65% Support, 27% Total Oppose, 8% DK/NA
- Moderate/Liberal Republican: 60% Support, 33% Total Oppose, 7% DK/NA
- Conservative Republican: 51% Support, 42% Total Oppose, 8% DK/NA

11. In order to reduce traffic congestion and provide more transportation choices, would you support or oppose local governments in your area investing more to expand and improve public transportation, including buses, trains, and light rail?
Even rural citizens support investment in public transportation by a 20-point margin.

Support for Local Transportation Investment by Type of Area

- **Big City**: 86% Support, 12% Oppose, 2% DK/NA
- **Small/Medium City**: 71% Support, 21% Oppose, 7% DK/NA
- **Suburb**: 68% Support, 27% Oppose, 5% DK/NA
- **Small Town**: 68% Support, 21% Oppose, 10% DK/NA
- **Rural**: 56% Support, 36% Oppose, 9% DK/NA

11. In order to reduce traffic congestion and provide more transportation choices, would you support or oppose local governments in your area investing more to expand and improve public transportation, including buses, trains, and light rail?
For more information, contact:

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