

## Mineta Report Summarizes 56 US Public Opinion Polls about Transit

*One-stop resource is valuable for researchers, transit planners.*

**San Jose, CA – August 4, 2015** – Researchers and transit planners now have a one-stop report that assembles questions from 56 US public opinion polls asking respondents their views about public transit. The assembled set of questions can be used to inspire the design of future transit surveys. [\*What Do Americans Think about Public Transit? A Review of U.S. Public Opinion Polling Survey Questions\*](#) is published by the [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) (MTI). The author was Asha Weinstein Agrawal, PhD. The report is available for free download at <http://transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1132.html>

“Our objective was to help future researchers and transit planners,” said Dr. Agrawal. “We did this by identifying a large set of polls asking people their opinions about public transit, assembling a bank of questions that can help generate ideas for wording future questions, and summarizing the results of relevant poll questions to assess the state of public opinion about transit.”

Dr. Agrawal found that the surveys most commonly included questions on four themes: the reasons people support public transit; opinions about transit service quality; the extent to which people support improving transit as a general concept; and support levels for raising additional revenues to support transit.

Analysis of the responses to the poll questions found that strong majorities of people believe that transit brings a number of specific benefits to their community, especially congestion relief and accessibility for vulnerable residents. Strong majorities also support improvements to transit as a general concept.

However, Dr. Agrawal also found that support for transit as a concept did not always translate into support for increasing revenues for transit. “Less than half of people support the general concept of increased spending on transit, and considerably fewer than half support raising any specific tax to increase transit funding, except for sales taxes, which usually enjoy majority support.”

To build upon the study findings, Dr. Agrawal recommends future research to:

- Expand the range of surveys reviewed to include the household travel surveys conducted by regional and state agencies, as well as to include the National Household Travel Survey;
- Compile a set of transit passenger surveys, each of which includes opinion questions, to compare the views of transit riders with the views of the general public; and
- For the subset of polls for which data files or crosstabs are available, review how opinions vary by key socio-demographic and travel behavior factors (age, gender, transit use, etc.).

The findings from the current review also suggest some types of public opinion questions that have not been commonly asked but might fill important knowledge gaps, such as:

- More directly ask respondents *why* they support public transit. The existing polls typically break this information into two questions, one asking about benefits perceived, and another asking whether or not people support more or better transit.

- More directly ask respondents who say they would not support additional funding for transit *why* they hold this opinion.

The project excluded review of the transit passenger surveys that transit agencies routinely conduct, because the focus of the research was to ascertain the views of the American public at large rather than opinions from transit passengers only.

The opinion polls reviewed were conducted by a diverse set of government agencies, pollsters, academic research organizations, and other institutions from across the US, including the Kinder Institute for Urban Research, Pew Research Center, Rasmussen Reports, Lane Transit District, Reason Foundation, City of Colorado Springs, San Diego Association of Governments, Rockefeller Foundation, and the Indian Nations Council of Governments.

The report includes 12 tables summarizing the questions and responses to questions categorized into the four themes described above. The report is available for free download from <http://transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1132.html>

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#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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#### **ABOUT THE MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE**

The Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) conducts research, education, and information transfer programs regarding surface transportation policy and management issues, especially related to transit. Congress established MTI in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act. MTI won national re-designation competitions in 2002, 2006 and 2012. The Institute is funded through the US Department of Transportation, the US Department of Homeland Security, the California Department of Transportation, and public and private grants. The internationally respected members of the MTI Board of Trustees represent all major surface transportation modes. MTI, the lead institute for the nine-university Mineta National Transit Research Consortium, is affiliated with San Jose (CA) State University's College of Business. Visit [transweb.sjsu.edu](http://transweb.sjsu.edu)

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