

## **Regional transit agencies can improve chances for public support on project proposals and funding**

*Free report focuses on SE Michigan but can apply elsewhere*

San Jose, CA – April 28, 2015 – How do regional transit agencies improve their chances for public support when it comes to project proposals and funding? A new peer-reviewed study from the Mineta Transit Research Consortium (MNTRC) addresses that issue. [Understanding Public Opinion Regarding Transit in Southeast Michigan](#) offers recommendations on how to enhance the success of campaign initiatives and public opinion efforts. It was written for the Metro Detroit region, but the information can be leveraged for other regions, as well. An interdisciplinary team at the University of Detroit Mercy spearheaded by principal investigator Claudia Bernasconi, MDes, conducted the research. The report is available for free download at <http://transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1236.html>.

Overall goals of this study were to assess the nature of public opinion regarding regional transit and to understand its relation to socio-demographic characteristics, political attitudes and orientations, and geographical characteristics of respondents. The study covered four counties now served by a new Regional Transit Authority (RTA) – Washtenaw, Oakland, Wayne, and Macomb Counties. Next year, voters will decide whether to fund the RTA.

Ms. Bernasconi said, “The report recommends certain key elements for supporting positive attitudes about transit. These include public education about transit, clarity about transit funds spending, accountability measures, and transparency of transit plans and decision-making processes. The report also includes specific recommendations for campaign messaging for Southeast Michigan.”

The project consisted of three phases – a pilot mail survey; an educational campaign; and a comprehensive phone and email survey. In the last phase, an *ad hoc* survey was designed based on the review of past public opinion surveys, local media coverage on public opinion about transit, and previous educational campaigns.

Research findings offered much insight that could be leveraged for future projects. For example:

- Overall, the majority of respondents support some form of funding. However, they are divided on the preferred method.
- Close to 30% of the people are unsure about potential benefits from the RTA. Among non-supporters, a top reason is distrust and lack of knowledge about how funds would be spent.
- This means that transparency in decision making and transit funds spending – including anticipated benefits and timelines, as well as clear accountability measures – are important.
- Campaign messaging should focus on the positive impact of transit for non-riders and on specific improvements the public desires.
- Swing groups will play an important role in securing support for regional transit, as they make up 45% of the total sample. Younger voters – specifically Young Swing Voters – are particularly important.
- Geographically, significant differences were found across the four counties.
- Support for transit is influenced by political and ideological orientation. Overall, liberals and Democrats are more supportive than Republicans and conservatives.

“As voters decide whether to fund the RTA, it will be important that those who are RTA advocates and local transit activists should strategically enact an effective educational campaign that resonates with public opinions, perceptions, and priorities,” Ms. Bernasconi said. “To reach different voter types, increase knowledge of transit benefits, and shape positive public opinion, the various stakeholder should employ a variety of communication tools to convey appropriate messages and strategically coordinate their efforts. A more positive public opinion will be a key factor to building support for transit in the region.”

For a free, no-registration download, go to <http://transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1236.html>

**Tweet this:** New MTI research: How to understand public opinions on #transit. It's key for successful funding. <http://ow.ly/LIxrV>

Besides Ms. Bernasconi, the research team included Xiaohui Zhong, PhD, Leo Hanifin, DE, Linda Slowik, PhD, and Megan Owens.

#### **ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM**

**CLAUDIA BERNASCONI** is an associate professor of architecture at the University of Detroit Mercy. She received her BSA and M.Arch at the University of Roma Tre in Rome, Italy and her post-professional master in design from the La Sapienza University in Rome, Italy.

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**LEO HANIFIN, DE**, is a professor of engineering at the University of Detroit Mercy. He holds BME, ME, and DE degrees from the University of Detroit. He retired as dean of the UDM College of Engineering & Science.

**LINDA SLOWIK, PHD**, teaches statistics, developmental psychology, and social psychology. She earned her BA in psychology from the University of Minnesota – Duluth, and her MA and PhD in industrial/organizational psychology from Wayne State University.

**MEGAN OWENS** is executive director of Transportation Riders United. She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan’s School of Natural Resources and the Environment.

#### **ABOUT THE MINETA NATIONAL TRANSIT RESEARCH CONSORTIUM**

The Mineta National Transit Research Consortium (MNTRC) is composed of nine university transportation centers led by the Mineta Transportation Institute at San Jose State University. The Consortium was organized in January 2012 after winning a competition sponsored by the US Department of Transportation (DOT) to create consortia tasked with “Delivering Solutions that Improve Public Transportation.” Member universities include Bowling Green State University, Grand Valley State University, Howard University, Penn State, Rutgers University, San Jose State University, University of Detroit Mercy, University of Nevada Las Vegas, and University of Toledo. Visit [transweb.sjsu.edu/mntrc](http://transweb.sjsu.edu/mntrc)

### **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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