

Which passenger survey modes are most effective for larger transit agencies?

Mineta report analyzes options, presents recommendations

San Jose, CA – June 9, 2015 – New research from the [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) (MTI) provides insight about the most effective passenger survey methods for larger transit agencies. The [Federal Transit Administration](#) (FTA) now requires these surveys every five years to ensure participation from under-represented populations. But which survey methods – paper, online, or computer tablet – are most reliable, efficient, and cost-effective? The new report, [Comparing Data Quality and Cost from Three Modes of On-Board Transit Passenger Surveys](#), tests each one and provides the data. Principal investigator was Hilary Nixon, PhD, working with Asha Weinstein Agrawal, PhD, Stephen Granger-Bevan, and Gregory Newmark, PhD. The report is available for free download at <http://transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1206.html>

“Because of the FTA directive, transit agencies have an even stronger interest than before in identifying which survey methods minimize costs while still gathering high-quality data,” said Dr. Nixon. “They have no reasonable way to determine the best method, so MTI took on that task. Although it might seem that online surveys could be a good method in a connected society, we found that paper surveys may still be the best option for most survey types.”

To design an appropriate experimental survey for this study, the research team conducted interviews with both transit survey experts and agency staff managing the surveys.

The 81-page report includes several tables that detail the results from each tested method, as well as copies of the survey instruments. The study findings suggest several general recommendations for current survey practice:

- Online surveys administered via an invitation distributed on the transit vehicle are not a good option.
- The old-fashioned, low-tech paper survey may still be the best option for many bus passenger surveys.
- Changes in survey results that accompany changes in survey methods should be interpreted with caution.
- Using a new survey method, especially one relying on more complex technologies, may create unexpected glitches.

The analysis focused on several key questions:

- Did return and completion rates vary by survey mode?
- Did the percentage of respondents skipping or providing unusable information for particular questions or question types vary by survey mode?
- Did responses vary across socio-demographic characteristics by survey mode?
- Did responses vary depending on passenger travel behavior by survey mode?
- Did customer satisfaction levels vary by survey mode?
- What was the cost per complete survey by mode?

For a free, no-registration download, go to <http://transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1206.html>

Tweet this: MinetaTrans report: The most effective #passenger survey modes for large #transit agencies. Free. <http://ow.ly/NfMfC>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM

Hilary Nixon, PhD, the principal investigator, is an associate professor of urban and regional planning at San José State University. She holds a BA from the University of Rochester in environmental management and a PhD in planning, policy, and design from the University of California, Irvine.

Asha Weinstein Agrawal, PhD, is director of the MTI National Transportation Finance Center and an associate professor of urban and regional planning at San José State University. She has a BA from Harvard University in folklore and mythology, an MSc from the London School of Economics and Political Science in urban and regional planning, and a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley, in city and regional planning.

Stephen Granger-Bevan is a Master of Urban Planning student at San José State University. He currently works for the San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission and holds an undergraduate MChem in chemistry from Oxford University.

Gregory Newmark, PhD, is a research fellow at the Chaddick Institute of Metropolitan Development and a senior research associate at the Center for Neighborhood Technology. He holds a PhD in city and regional planning from the University of California, Berkeley, an MSc in city and regional planning from the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology, and a BA in history and international studies from Yale University.

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

###

Contact: Donna Maurillo
MTI Communications Director
831-234-4009 (24 hours)
donna.maurillo (at) sjsu.edu