



Understanding Public Opinion Regarding Transit in Southeast Michigan

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Study Methods

An *ad hoc* survey was designed and administered to a sample of 799 likely-voters in four counties of Southeast Michigan. Cluster analysis was utilized to identify respondents with similar views on orientation toward public funding for transit, willingness to take action to support transit, and satisfaction with current systems.

Findings

Results provide insight on how public opinion relates to respondents' socio-demographic, political, and geographical characteristics and identifies transit preferences and needs. Top desired transit improvements in the region included:

- The addition of rapid transit;
- Improved safety on buses, at stops and at stations;
- Improved routes to better connect home, work and key entertainment destinations; and
- More convenient and reliable bus service.

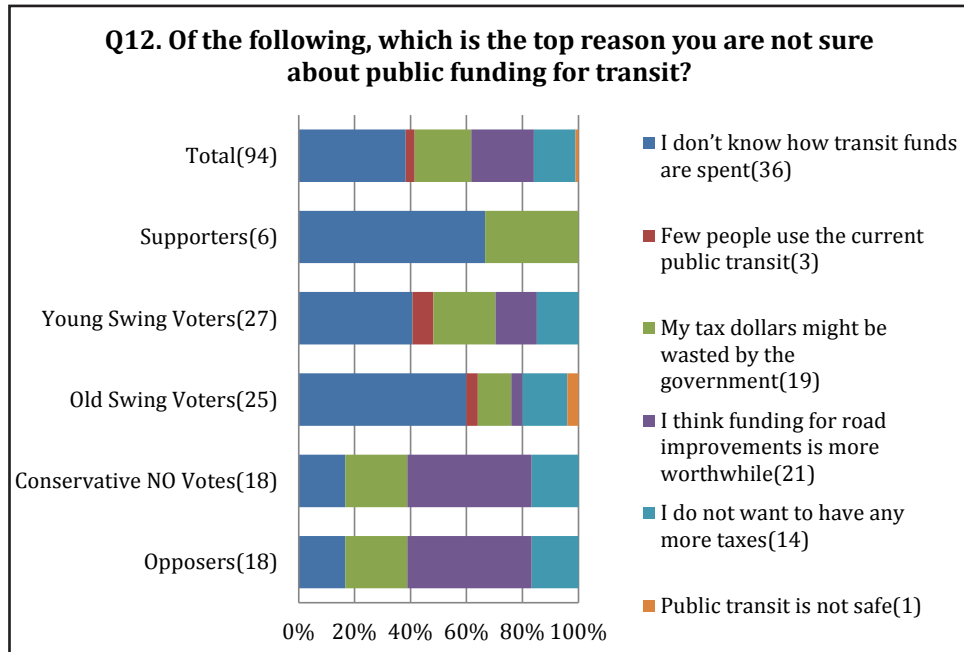
As regions move toward improved transit service, enacting an effective educational campaign that resonates with opinions, perceptions, and priorities of the public will be a key factor. Strategic coordination among the region's stakeholder groups and the use of varied communication tools to convey consistent and appropriate messages to the voter groups are crucial for successful transit funding initiatives.

Policy Recommendations

The authors identified the following key recommendations for building positive public opinion and securing support for transit in Southeast Michigan and comparable regions:

- Educate voters about Regional Transit Authority's (RTA) purpose and plans;
- Clearly communicate how transit funds will be spent, including anticipated benefits and timelines. Such communication is critical to success as study results revealed that lack of knowledge about how transit funds are spent is the main reason that voters are unsure about supporting transit;
- Transparency in decision making and clear accountability measures are important, as a significant number of voters expressed distrust in the wisdom of government spending of tax dollars and in the efficiency of having an additional governing body, such as the RTA;

- Campaign messaging should focus on the positive impact of transit for non-riders (e.g., job access and economic development) and on specific improvements the public desires;
- Campaign messages and efforts should concentrate on specific voter groups (in this case Swing Voters) while also solidifying the commitment of Supporters. In particular, Young Swing Voters were found to be more willing to support transit financially; and
- Educational and advocacy efforts should strategically segment messaging across counties. Significant differences in voter groups were found across the four counties.



Top Reasons Likely-voters May Not Support Public Funding for Transit

About the Authors

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To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1236.html