



MOORE INFORMATION

OPINION RESEARCH • STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

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TO: Mark Carnopis
FROM: Bob Moore and Kelly Middendorff
RE: Idaho Voters and Transportation Issues

This memo contains results of a statewide telephone survey conducted by Moore Information, Inc. The survey was conducted among a representative sample of 600 voters in Idaho on September 11-13, 2007. The potential sampling error is plus or minus 4% at the 95% confidence level.

Overview

Transportation is a major issue concern among voters in the Treasure Valley, but voters elsewhere in the state are much less concerned.

Not surprisingly, tax increases are not popular anywhere in the state – the survey finds only a slim majority of voters statewide would support an increase in rental car taxes and development impact fees to fund transportation improvements, but majorities oppose a local sales tax, an increase in vehicle registration fees and a fuel tax increase.

However a majority of voters in the state are willing to consider a local sales tax to fund transportation improvements of three quarters of a cent or less, and support increases steadily as the tax rate decreases. Specifically;

- A three quarters of one cent sales tax is favored by a margin of 52-46%
- A one half cent sales tax was is favored 57-41%
- A quarter of one cent sales tax is favored 61-38%

These sales tax proposals are more popular in Ada County than elsewhere in the state, but even in Ada County, fewer than two-in-three voters currently support a quarter of one cent sales tax.

Use of local government property tax revenues to fund transportation improvements is opposed by a majority of Treasure Valley voters (55-40%).

There is plurality support statewide for continuing GARVEE funding – 49% favor continuation, while 34% are opposed and 18% have no opinion. This program is significantly more popular in the Treasure Valley than elsewhere in the state.

When it comes to voters' willingness to utilize public transportation, the survey finds fully 53% of voters statewide would likely consider using a local public transportation system, if a reliable system were available in their community.

- o Ada County voters are more willing to consider public transit than voters elsewhere in the state
- o Willingness to consider public transit increases with the price of gas; at \$4 per gallon gas, 58% would consider transit (vs. 53% at today's prices), at \$6 per gallon, 70% are willing to consider public transit

A majority of voters (58%) are more likely to support a dedicated funding source for public transportation in Idaho after hearing that most states do

A majority of voters statewide (55%) support using tax dollars to buy future transportation corridors, and in the Treasure Valley 65% support this type of plan.

More detailed findings follow.

Political Environment

The mood in Idaho is optimistic today. Indeed, by a margin of nearly two-to-one, Idahoans say things in their state are generally headed in the "right direction" (55%) as opposed to being off on the "wrong track" (30%). The remaining 16% has no opinion. The mood in Idaho has been optimistic for the past five years, although the margin of right direction has widened in the past two years.

As is typical, Idaho voters affiliated with the party in power are more optimistic than the out of power party – and Republican voters are widely positive (72% right direction, 17% wrong track), while Democrats are pessimistic and Independents are only marginally positive in their outlook.

The "mood" of the electorate is a key barometer for the tolerance for "change" – typically, an optimistic electorate is more content with the status quo, and less likely to be seeking change at the ballot box. Conversely, pessimistic voters are more likely to have an ax to grind, and tend to turn out to vote in disproportionately higher numbers to express their discontent. Generally speaking, voters who are optimistic are more likely to support tax increases.

Turning to issues, education and schools tops the list when voters are asked which of six major issues voters are most concerned about (for 27%). Health care and the economy/jobs are a close second and third (21% and 20% respectively), and voters are less concerned about taxes (12%). Transportation is the leading concern for only 10% of voters today. Another 5% say the environment is the leading concern, while 3% are concerned about some "other" issue and 2% have no opinion.

There are, however, some major differences in issue concerns by region and area of the state. In the Treasure Valley (Ada and Canyon Counties), transportation is one of the leading issue concerns, and a much higher concern than it is elsewhere in the state. Specifically, in Ada County, transportation is mentioned by 23%, and in Canyon it is mentioned by 21%. Elsewhere, only 3% say transportation is the leading issue concern. Furthermore, among voters who reside in suburban areas, 21% say transportation is the

leading concern, while in urban, rural and rural/suburban communities, transportation is mentioned by no more than 10%.

Funding Transportation Improvements

Idahoans are not overly impressed with the job Idaho is doing funding the state's transportation system – only 10% give the state an “excellent” or “above average” rating, while 40% say the state is doing an “average” job in this area, and 41% give the state a below average/poor rating. The remaining 9% have no opinion. Here, too, we see notable differences of opinion along party lines – Republicans are less critical of the state’s efforts to fund transportation (11% excellent/above average, 43% average and 35% below average/poor), than Independents 13%/38%/42%) and Democrats are largely unimpressed (7%/36%/52%).

In exploring reactions to potential funding options to pay for transportation improvements in the state, we find voters most receptive to an increase in rental car taxes and impact fees on commercial residential and industrial development. However, there is majority opposition today to three other potential funding options, including a local sales tax, an increase in vehicle registration fees, and a fuel tax increase. The following table illustrates voters’ reactions to each of these five potential funding options.

Potential Funding Options

	Support	Oppose	Net support
An increase in the tax on rental cars	54%	33%	+21%
Impact fees on commercial, residential and industrial development	54%	36%	+18%
A local sales tax approved by voters	41%	55%	-14%
An increase in vehicle registration fees	36%	61%	-25%
A fuel tax increase	15%	84%	-69%

Impact fees find majority support throughout the state; however, Ada County voters are most likely to favor this mechanism. In suburban and rural changing to suburban areas, impact fees are widely popular, however, there is only marginal support for this option in urban areas, and in rural communities, voters are divided about impact fees on commercial, residential and industrial development. By party, we find Democrats widely supportive of impact fees, but Republicans and Independents are only marginally supportive of this option.

Rental car tax increases also find majority support throughout the state. However, by area, again we find this option more popular in suburban and rural changing to suburban communities. Voters in rural and urban areas are less enthused about rental car tax increases. Democrats are more supportive of rental car tax increases than Republicans or Independents.

As previously mentioned, the concept of an increase in the state gas tax as a means of funding transportation improvements in the state generates majority opposition today (55% oppose, 41% support). However, in further discussion about the gas tax, we find voter

opposition is quick to rise upon learning a few key facts about this form of taxation. For example;

- 78% of Idaho voters are less likely to support an increase in the state gas tax when they learn “Idaho has the 12th highest gas tax in the nation”
- 63% are less likely to support a gas tax increase upon learning “the state fuel tax on a gallon of gasoline is currently 25 cents and has not been increased since 1996”
- Voters are divided when they hear “38% of the tax revenues generated by Idaho’s gas tax go to local governments to fund road improvements” (47% more likely, 48% less likely)

Similarly, voters were also widely opposed to a possible increase in vehicle registration fees (36% support, 61% oppose), and after learning the average state vehicle registration fee in the state is \$46 per year, the 30th highest in the nation, 64% are less likely to support this option for funding transportation projects, while 34% are more likely and 2% have no opinion.

When it comes to arguing the merits of higher taxes, the survey finds increasing taxes to reduce “traffic congestion” is as equally unpopular as higher taxes to “reduce air pollution.” Indeed, 35% support and 60% oppose higher taxes to reduce traffic congestion, while 36% support and 59% oppose higher taxes to reduce air pollution. However, there are some major difference of opinion by region and area of the state. Most notably, in Ada County, reactions to higher taxes to reduce traffic congestion are mixed (47% support, 52% oppose), and Ada County voters are much more likely to support higher taxes to reduce air pollution (59% support, 38% oppose). In the rest of the state, there is majority opposition to higher taxes for either purpose.

Local Sales Tax for Transportation Improvements

A proposal to change Idaho state law to allow voters in urban or more densely populated areas to impose a local sales tax for transportation improvements finds 46% support and 47% opposition today with 7% having no opinion. This reaction is less negative than results of the previously discussed question when voters were asked whether they support or oppose simply “a local sales tax approved by voters” (41% support, 55% oppose), with no mention of limits to urban centers. Regionally, a local sales tax in urban or more densely populated areas finds support from a majority of Ada County voters (52% support, 42% oppose) but voters in Canyon County are opposed by nearly a two-to-one margin (36% to 61%), and elsewhere sentiment is divided. Note: In both Treasure Valley Counties (Ada and Canyon) 47% support and 47% oppose allowing voters in urban areas to impose a local sales tax for transportation improvements. Voters in urban areas of the state are marginally supportive of this proposal (51% to 41%), but voters in suburban and rural areas are divided.

In terms of voters’ priorities for potential funds generated by a local sales tax, Idaho voters are most supportive of using local sales tax dollars to fund road improvements (68% support, 29% oppose), and nearly as many are favor using such funds to fund a “combination of public transportation and road improvements” (63% support, 34% oppose). A majority still supports, but the margin is more narrow, using local sales tax revenues to pay for “public transportation improvements” (56% support, 40% oppose).

Today, a one-quarter of one-cent tax local sales tax to fund transportation improvements is the most viable of four potential options tested in the survey. Using a “stair-step” battery

of questions, starting with a one-cent local sales tax, the survey finds voters are divided (48% for, 49% against). When voters who were undecided or opposed to this proposal are asked whether they would vote for or against a three-quarters of one cent sales tax, support widens to a 52% for, 46% against margin. The gap widens further when the dollar amount is dropped to one-half of one percent (57% to 41%), and finally, a one-quarter of one-cent sales tax finds 61% support and 38% opposition today.

In looking at support for the one-quarter of one-cent sales tax proposal, we find majority support throughout the state; however, the widest margin comes from voters inside Ada County (65% for, 34% against). Further, this proposal finds majority support in urban, suburban and rural communities, and while Democrats are more supportive (68% to 32%) than both Republicans (57% to 41%) and Independents (62% to 38%), there is majority support across the partisan spectrum.

In terms of impacting support for a local sales tax to fund transportation improvements, the commonality of goals of the Treasure Valley Air Quality Council's plan to improve the quality of public transportation as part of their plan to improve air quality in the region does not improve support for a local sales tax proposal. After hearing the TVAQC's plan to improve air quality includes improving public transportation, 42% are more likely, but 47% are less likely to support a local option sales tax for transportation improvements. Voters in Ada County have a positive reaction to this information, but sentiment is divided in Canyon County and elsewhere in the state, the reaction is a net negative. Likewise, in urban areas reaction is divided, while in suburban areas there is a positive reaction to hearing about the TVAQC's plan from a plurality. In the state's rural communities, the reaction is negative.

Using local property tax revenues to improve and expand public transportation services in the Treasure Valley finds majority opposition from Ada and Canyon County voters – 40% would support government use of property tax revenues to improve and expand public transportation services, while 55% are opposed and 5% have no opinion.

GARVEE

Idaho voters are generally positive about the GARVEE program after hearing the following description:

“There is a new transportation funding mechanism being utilized in the state of Idaho called Grant Anticipated Revenue Vehicle, or GARVEE. This program is also known as the Connecting Idaho Plan. This program borrows against future federal transportation money coming to the state in an effort to get more projects completed in a shorter time frame and decreasing the inflationary costs of these projects.”

Based on this information, 49% of voters statewide believe the program should be continued, while 34% would discontinue GARVEE and 18% have no opinion. Continuation of GARVEE finds majority support in Ada and Canyon Counties, but outside the Treasure Valley region, sentiment about GARVEE is divided. By party, Democrats favor continuation of GARVEE (57% continue, 27% discontinue), but Independents are divided and a plurality of Republicans would continue the program (46% continue, 35% discontinue).

Information Sources

When it comes to transportation funding issues, Idahoans do not put a great deal of trust in any of the six individuals and organizations that might have something to say on the subject. In fact, none of the six groups or individuals was deemed credible by more than three-in-ten voters. The following table illustrates the perceived credibility of each of the groups tested in the survey.

Credibility of Information Sources on Transportation Funding Issues

	Great deal/quite a bit	Some/very little	Net great deal/quite a bit
Your local elected officials	29%	66%	-37%
Idaho Transportation Department	28%	62%	-34%
Governor Butch Otter	27%	67%	-40%
Your local state legislators	25%	68%	-43%
The Idaho State Legislature	19%	75%	-56%
Your regional transportation planning organization	19%	62%	-43%

Local Public Transportation Services

Nearly half (46%) of Idaho voters believe their local community has some form of public transportation service – this sentiment is most pronounced among voters who describe their community as “urban” (72%) or “suburban” (62%), although 22% of those in rural and 46% of those in rural changing to suburban areas say their community offers public transportation. For the most part, those who say their community does offer public transportation are not overly impressed with those offerings – just 12% give their local public transportation system an “excellent/above average” rating, while 41% give it an “average” rating and 35% say the public transportation system in their area is “below average/poor.” Likewise, looking to the future, the vast majority (72%) of voters in the state who believe their community currently offers public transportation believe that system will need improvements in the near future. Just 24% say current public transportation in their community is adequate to meet future needs and 4% are unsure.

In looking at the potential use of alternative forms of transportation, from a list of nine options, “driving alone in a car” is the most popular of the nine options tested (for 37%), distantly followed by carpooling with a family member (19%), taking the bus (10%), light rail (8%), carpooling with a non-family member (7%), biking (6%), bus rapid transit (4%), walking (3%) or vanpool (2%). For residents of rural and rural/changing to suburban communities, driving alone is the most popular alternate form of transportation, and while this is also the leading option in urban and suburban communities, it is less popular in these areas. By party, Democrats are less likely to choose driving alone than Independents or Republicans.

When asked specifically about their willingness to use public transportation if a reliable system were available in their area, one-in-four (26%) say they are “very” likely to do so, and another 27% are “fairly” likely. For purposes of predicting future behavior, those who indicate they are “very” likely are most likely to actually do so. Willingness to use public transportation is highest in Ada County, however, there is a major difference of opinion among Canyon County residents (64% are willing in Ada County, compared to just 45% in Canyon County). Elsewhere in the state, fewer than half are willing to use public transportation. Again we find significant differences by partisanship – Democrats are willing to use public transportation by a nearly two-to-one margin (64% likely, 35% not likely), as are a majority of Independents (58%/42%). Among Republicans, however, the majority (52%) say they are not likely to use public transportation, but still, another 45% are likely.

Rising gas prices do appear to be a motivating factor in voters' willingness to explore public transportation options. If gas prices were to reach \$4 per gallon, 58% of Idaho voters say they would likely consider using public transportation, and if gas prices reach \$5 per gallon, this percentage jumps to 65%. At \$6 per gallon, fully 70% would consider public transportation.

Dedicated Funding for Public Transportation

Knowledge that Idaho is only one-of-four states in the nation that does not provide state funding or a dedicated local funding source for public transportation is effective in prompting 58% of Idaho voters to support such a dedicated funding source. Just 32% are less likely to support a dedicated funding source and 10% have no opinion. Reaction to this information is positive throughout the state; however, residents of Ada and Canyon Counties are most positive (66% more likely, 26% less likely). By party, majorities of Republicans, Independents and Democrats alike are more likely to support a dedicated local funding source for public transportation, but this sentiment is most pronounced among Democrats.

Purchasing Future Transportation Corridors

Today, 55% support, while 36% oppose governmental entities and transportation planning organizations using tax dollars to purchase land for future planned roadways and/or public transit. The remaining 10% are undecided. Regionally, there is majority support for this proposal among residents of both Ada and Canyon Counties, as well as other Boise TV market counties, but voters residing in the Twin Falls TV market counties are divided, and support in the rest of the state is only marginal. There is also majority support among Democrats, Republicans and Independents alike, but Democrats are most likely to feel this way.