

Executive Summary

In general, we find the Michigan public to be fairly satisfied with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the information it provides. However, only a minority believes all or most of MDOT's projects were the right solutions to the state's transportation problems. As we have found in other states, those with the longest commutes tend to be the most critical of the Transportation Department and of transportation in the state.

Michigan residents are more likely to see transportation getting better than worse, and they overwhelmingly believe improving Michigan's transportation system is critical to improving the state's economy and job situation. However, they do not overwhelmingly believe that the economy would be better off with improved transportation rather than lower taxes. Still, a majority does believe Michigan should spend more on improving transportation.

The public's top agenda for transportation is better pavement, better traffic flow, and faster and more efficient completion of highway projects. Following that agenda, the public wants safer highways, greater availability of long-distance and public transportation options, and a greater effort to take the public's needs and views into consideration in transportation decision-making.

We do see some regional differences in opinion. Residents in the Metro Region are much less happy with the state of transportation, while residents in the Grand Region are the most satisfied. Agendas between some regions vary somewhat, but not dramatically. Overall, residents of the seven MDOT regions have agendas with more commonalities than differences.

Evaluations of MDOT: Tracker Measures

Michigan adults are generally satisfied with MDOT.

- Two-thirds (66%) of the public is satisfied with MDOT and 28% is dissatisfied. Overall, feelings in a positive or negative direction are not strong, with only 16% very satisfied and 9% very dissatisfied.
- Those under 30 years of age are the most satisfied; however, satisfaction drops dramatically for those just over 30. Respondents slowly become more satisfied as they get older.
- Residents in high density areas and who commute more than one hour are more likely to be dissatisfied.
- Less than one-half (42%) said all or most of MDOT's projects were the right solution to Michigan's transportation problems, while 33% said some, and 15% said few or none.

Perception of Transportation in Michigan

Michigan adults overwhelmingly believe improving Michigan's transportation system is critical to improving the economy and job situation in the state ...

... but they do not overwhelmingly believe that the economy is better off with improved transportation rather than lower taxes.

A majority believe Michigan should spend more on improving transportation.

- Considerably more Michigan adults think transportation quality is better than think it is worse (34% versus 20%) than it was five years ago, although the plurality (38%) sees no change.
- Three-quarters (76%) of Michigan adults agree with the statement "Improving Michigan's transportation system is critical to improving the economy and job situation in the state" (26% strongly), while only 17% disagree (five percent strongly).
- However, only one-half (49%) of Michigan adults agree and 38% disagree with the statement that "when it comes to attracting businesses and improving the economy in Michigan, a better transportation system is more important than lower taxes."
- The higher one's household income, the more likely one is to agree with the statement.
- Two-thirds (67%) of Michigan adults agree with the statement "Tolls are a fair way to collect revenues for transportation because those who use the roads pay for them," while 28% disagree.
- Slightly over one-half (52%) of Michigan adults agree with the statement that "Michigan uses its transportation money efficiently and effectively," while slightly more than one-quarter (28%) disagree.
- Over one-half (56%) believe Michigan should spend more to maintain and improve the quality of transportation systems in the state (ten percent much more) and only four percent say Michigan should spend less.
- Respondents with higher incomes are more likely to believe Michigan should spend more on transportation...
- Overwhelmingly, Michigan adults prefer that the state emphasize building and maintaining highways (61%) over developing alternative modes of transportation such as buses, vans for senior citizens, trains, or bike lanes (27%).
- Lower income residents and residents in high population density areas are more likely to support alternative modes of transportation than are their higher income or lower density counterparts.

Improving Transportation: First Tier

We gave respondents a list of 19 aspects of transportation in the state and asked (1) how satisfied they were with them and (2) how important a priority they were for receiving greater resources to improve them. Four items stand out as being at the top of the public's agenda on the basis of these two measures combined:

The public's agenda is better pavement, better traffic flow, and faster and more efficient completion of highway projects.

- **Better pavement conditions:** The most important (number one) priority and the third to last in public satisfaction.
- **Better flow of traffic during highway construction:** The third most important priority and last in public satisfaction.
- **Better flow of traffic during rush hour:** Tied for the fourth most important priority and the second to last in public satisfaction.
- **Faster and more efficient completion of state highway projects:** Tied for the fourth most important priority and tied for sixth to last in public satisfaction.

Improving Transportation: Second Tier

Four other items stand out from the rest as forming a second tier of the public's agenda, again based on the two measures combined:

- **Safer highways:** Satisfaction is considerably higher with highway safety (tied for ninth out of the 19 items), but this item ranks as the second most important priority for improving in the future.
- **Greater availability of long-distance transportation options, such as intercity passenger rail and buses:** Not necessarily the highest priority for the future (tied for eighth), but satisfaction with this item is very low (fourth lowest).
- **More availability of public transportation options:** Tied for the sixth most important priority and tied for fifth lowest in public satisfaction.
- **A greater effort to take the public's needs and views into consideration in transportation decision-making:** Tied for the sixth most important priority and tied for eighth to last in public satisfaction.

MDOT Regional Summaries

While regional differences are not dramatic, they do exist. The following is a summary of how each region distinguishes itself when it comes to public attitudes toward transportation in Michigan.

Metro

People in this region are the least satisfied with MDOT and among the least likely to think that MDOT's projects were the right solutions to Michigan's transportation problems. People in this region are also among the least likely to believe that transportation has gotten better instead of worse in the past five years and the least likely to believe that Michigan uses its transportation money efficiently and effectively. Metro residents are among the most likely to support greater spending to improve transportation quality in the state and the region most supportive of an emphasis on alternative modes of transportation instead of an emphasis on highways (although, even in this region, building and maintaining highways receives far greater support). Overall, the state's transportation agenda reflects this region's transportation agenda.

University

Although they are among the most satisfied with MDOT and are generally more likely to believe that transportation has become better instead of worse over the past five years, this region's residents are the least likely to think that MDOT's projects are the right solutions to Michigan's transportation problems. University residents are the least likely to believe that tolls are a fair way to collect revenue. They are also the least likely to say that the state should spend more to improve the quality of transportation and among the most supportive of emphasizing building and maintaining highways over developing alternative modes of transportation. Faster and more efficient completion of state highway projects is slightly less important in this region, while building more state highways to meet traffic demands is more important.

Southwest

Residents in this region are among the most satisfied with MDOT and are more likely to say that transportation in the state has become better, not worse. They are the least likely to believe that improving Michigan's transportation system is crucial to improving the economy. Southwest is also the *only* region where more people disagree that a better transportation system is more important to attracting businesses and improving the economy than lower taxes. Better pavement conditions is clearly the biggest priority for residents in this region, while having faster and more efficient completion of state highway projects is slightly less important.

Bay

Residents in this region are almost equally likely to say transportation has become worse as to say it has become better—the only region so divided on this question. Residents in this region are the most supportive of more spending for improved quality of transportation. They are also among the most likely to agree that tolls are a fair way to collect revenue. Like the Southwest Region, better pavement conditions is the biggest issue here, while faster and more efficient completion of state highway projects is also a less important priority in this region. More availability of public transportation options is a greater priority in the Bay Region than it is in others. This is also the only region where more sidewalks for pedestrians and lanes and pathways for bicycles reaches the second tier of high priority items.

Grand

This region sets itself apart as the most satisfied with MDOT, the most likely to believe that MDOT's projects have been the right solution to the state's transportation problems, and the most likely to believe that transportation in the state has become better instead of worse. This region is also the most likely to say that improving Michigan's transportation system is critical to improving the economy and job situation in the state. Grand residents are also among the most likely to agree that tolls are a fair way to collect revenue. Again, better pavement conditions is the biggest issue here.

North

This region is among the most likely to say that improving Michigan's transportation system is critical to improving the economy and job situation in the state. However, North residents are the least likely to support the state's spending more to maintain and improve the quality of transportation. Residents in the North Region are the most supportive of emphasizing building and maintaining highways over developing alternative modes of transportation. *Better pavement conditions* is the biggest issue, but *more and faster snow and ice removal* is the second biggest priority item—the only region where snow and ice removal is among the first or second transportation priorities.

Superior

As different and isolated as this region is from the rest of the state, there are not too many items on which it stands out from the other regions. It is among those most likely to agree that tolls are a fair way to collect revenue and is among the least likely to believe that Michigan uses its transportation money efficiently and effectively. It is also among the most supportive of alternative modes of transportation. As in all of the other non-Metro regions, *better pavement conditions* is the clear top priority. *Faster and more efficient completion of state highway projects* is not among the top two tiers of priorities, most likely due to the lack of four lane highways in the region.