



## LOCALS WILLING TO OPEN WALLETS

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By KELLY HANNON

If new money is needed for transportation projects, a sizable number of Fredericksburg-area residents would be willing to pay for them through tolls, ticket fares or new taxes.

More than a third of area residents--35 percent--would support the introduction of tolls or fares as a way to raise money for transportation, according to a summer telephone survey of residents in Caroline, Fredericksburg, King George, Stafford and Spotsylvania.

Another large group of residents--26 percent--said transportation money could come from new taxes.

Raising money by cutting funding to other programs sounded like a good idea to 23 percent of residents.

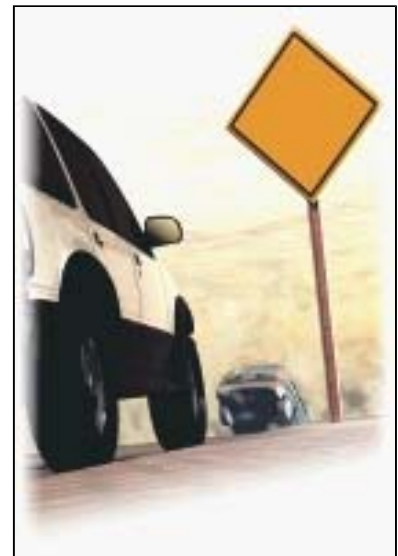
Another 15 percent of residents contributed a wide range of fundraising - ideas lumped together as "other," while 7 percent of residents said no new money should be given to transportation, and 5 percent said they didn't know which option they preferred.

Respondents were allowed to choose multiple responses, allowing for overlap.

The 22-minute telephone survey was conducted from July 16 to Aug. 2. Survey respondents included 450 Stafford residents and 450 Spotsylvania residents, and 200 residents each in Caroline, Fredericksburg and King George, selected at random.

It was done at the request of the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, a transportation planning group made up of staff and elected representatives from Fredericksburg, Stafford and Spotsylvania.

FAMPO paid the Southeastern Institute of Research to conduct the survey, mostly to gauge public awareness of a long-range transportation plan for the Fredericksburg area in 2035, published earlier this year.



But the survey's findings on transportation funding are timely. More than 800 new road construction projects were cut from the state budget this year, since there is less money being collected through taxes on automobile and gasoline sales, and other tax sources. The Virginia Department of Transportation is cutting hundreds of staff positions, closing rest areas and mowing road medians less often because of the funding shortage.

In this context, the FAMPO survey captures how local residents view the state of area transportation.

Satisfaction with the region's transportation system was lukewarm.

Residents were asked to rank their satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being "very satisfied" and 1 being "not very satisfied."

People living in Fredericksburg were happiest with local transportation. In the city, 38 percent of residents gave transportation a "4" or "5," indicating they were satisfied or very satisfied with transportation.

Regionwide, only 34 percent of respondents were satisfied, leaving the other two-thirds of residents not very satisfied or having a moderate opinion.

People were asked to say why they were happy or unhappy about transportation. Having a variety of transportation options--the ability to drive, ride a bus, bike or walk--was the biggest factor determining satisfaction level, said John Martin, a demographer and Southeastern Institute of Research's president.

Consequently, influencing people's understanding or access to transportation options will affect their satisfaction level, Martin said.

Martin advised FAMPO to consider if local residents know about FREDericksburg Regional Transit, Virginia Railway Express, and GWRideConnect, a free service that matches residents with shared rides to work and public transit.

"Does everyone know about all the options?" Martin asked.

The second-most-important factor influencing satisfaction was convenience, followed by the time required to make trips.

Three in four respondents (79 percent) said they would support at least a 10 percent funding increase for transportation.

People were asked how they would spend \$100 on transportation.

On average, \$33.70 went to roads and highways, \$19.90 to train service, \$16.90 to local bus service, \$15.20 to bicycle and pedestrian improvements and \$14.20 to commuter parking.

"It wasn't 75 dollars of roads," said Lloyd Robinson, FAMPO administrator. "People here are saying balance the system."

Complete survey results are posted online at [gwregion.org](http://gwregion.org), under the Sept. 2009 agenda and meeting materials link.

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