



American Attitudes on Transportation Spending

SURVEY FINDINGS REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Smart Growth America partnered with Hattaway Communications, a strategic communications firm based in Washington D.C., to test American voters' attitudes about current approaches to transportation and potential options for altering the status quo to prioritize people over highways.

This report outlines findings and insights from a nationwide online survey as part of this partnership and was developed in collaboration with Smart Growth America, Hattaway Communications, and the Natural Resources Defense Council. This survey was supported by a grant from the Summit Foundation.

The survey tested Americans' awareness of, attitudes toward, and aspirations for smart, sustainable transportation projects, as well as their levels of trust in transportation decision-makers. The survey also tested messages, visions, and stories about neighborhood reconnection and highway expansion opposition efforts.

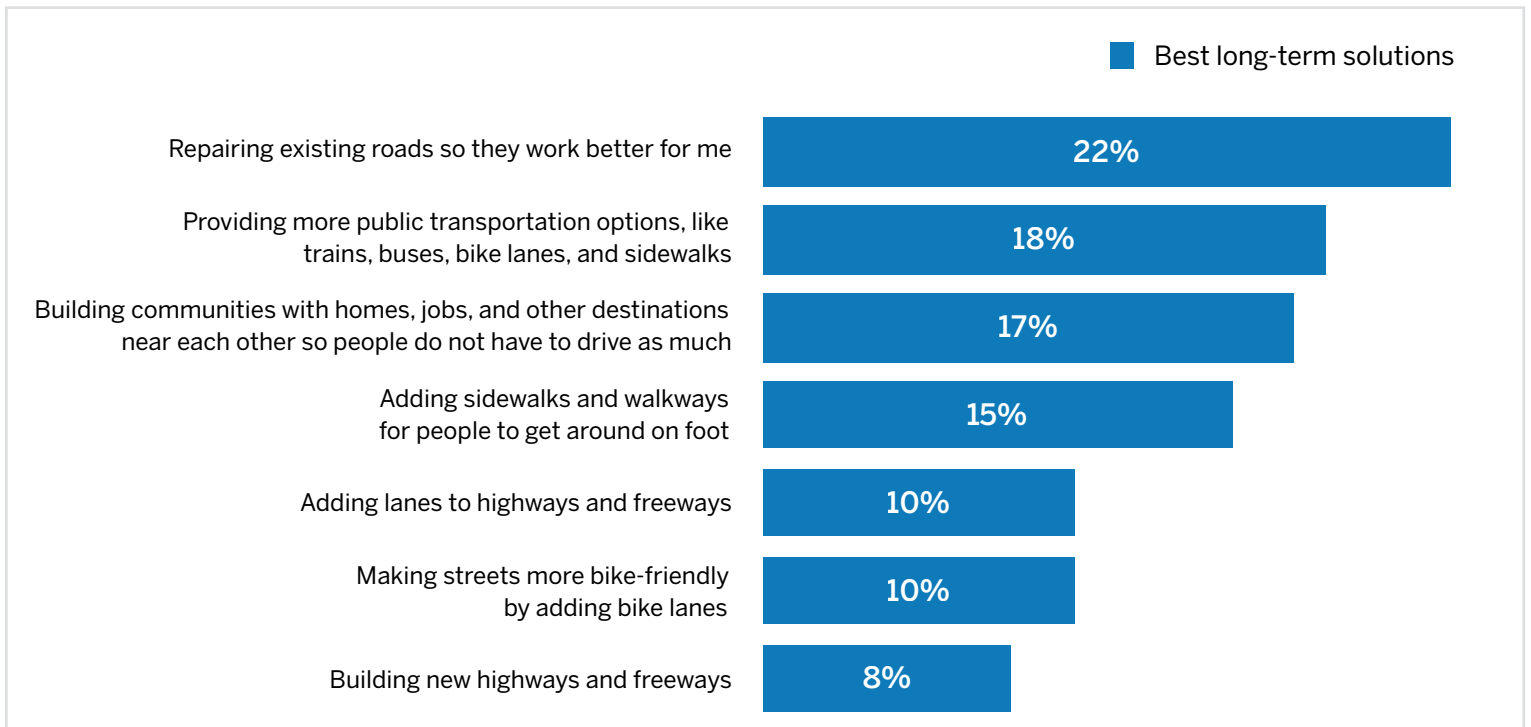
The survey was fielded online, with a nationwide sample of 2,001 registered voters, between February 23 and March 7, 2023, and reflects the overall race, age, gender, and geographic composition of the United States.

Note: Some charts do not add up to 100% due to answer choices such as “don't know” or “prefer not to answer” being left out of the analysis.

Note: Some questions in the survey use a methodology that helps us understand how people prioritize different aspects of transportation. By asking people to choose the most and least important features from a group of options, we are able to find out what people like best and least.

IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO REDUCE TRAFFIC

Below are some ways that your community could reduce traffic. In your opinion, which of the following approaches would be the best and worst long-term solutions to reducing traffic in your area?

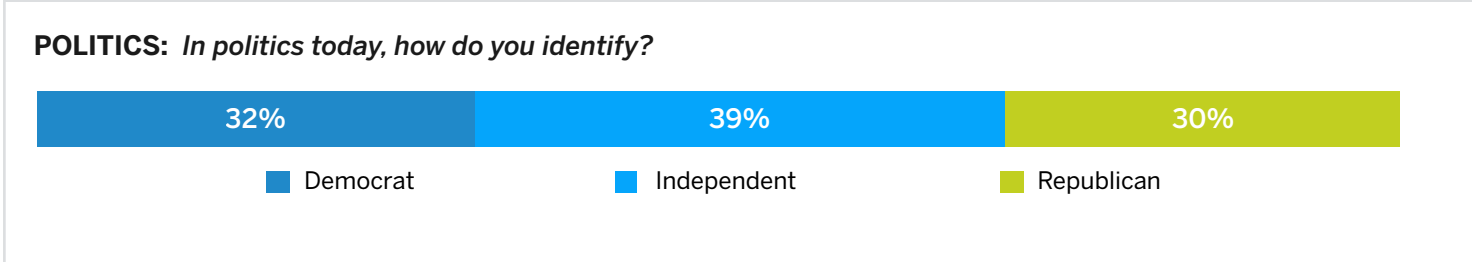
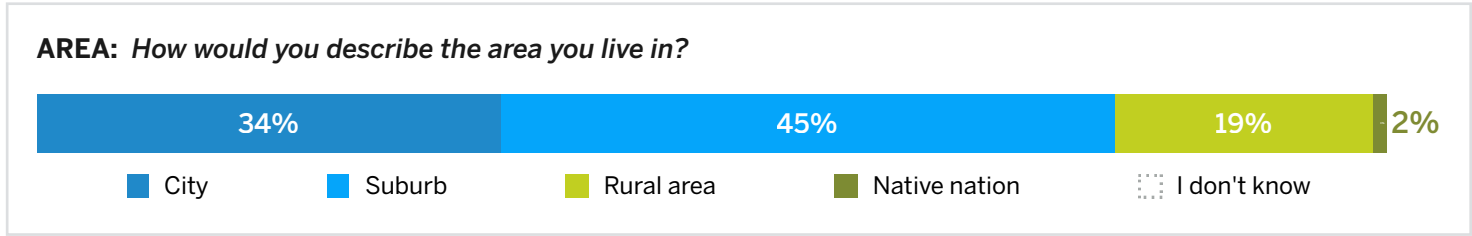
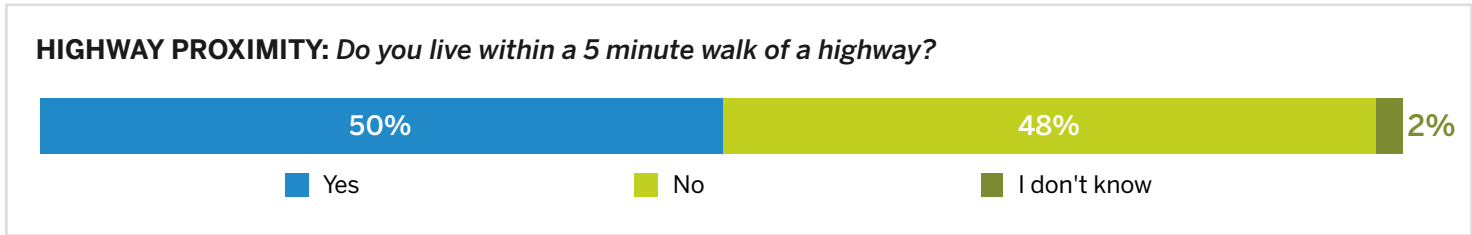
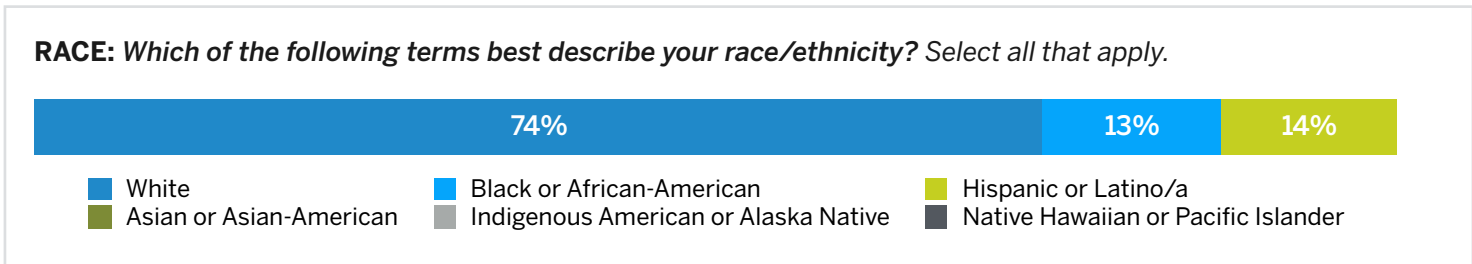
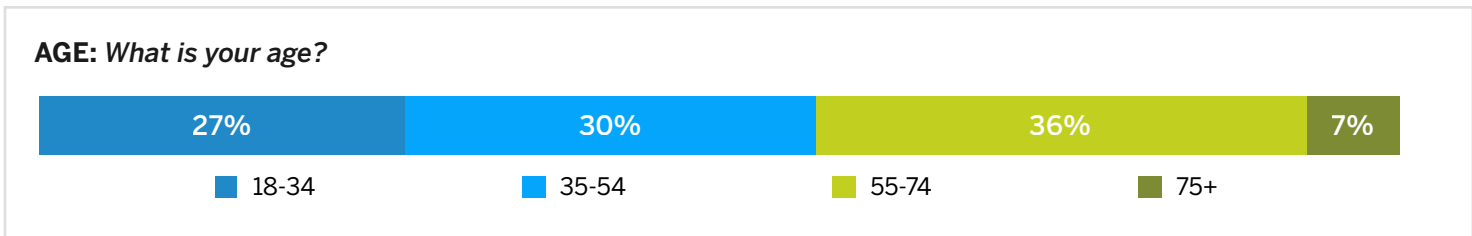
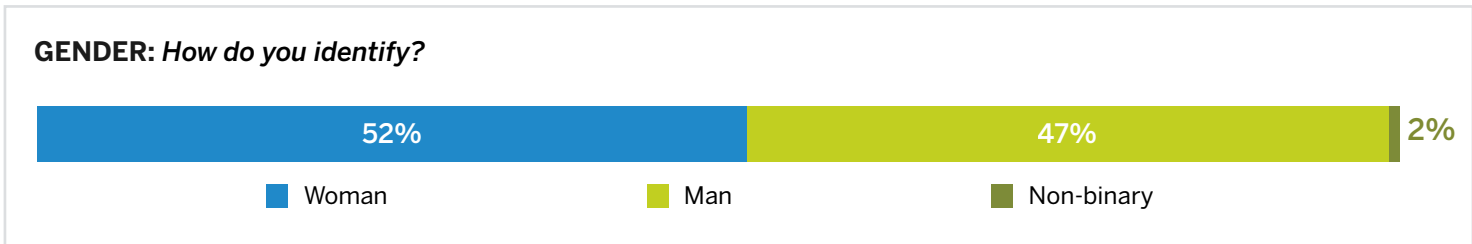




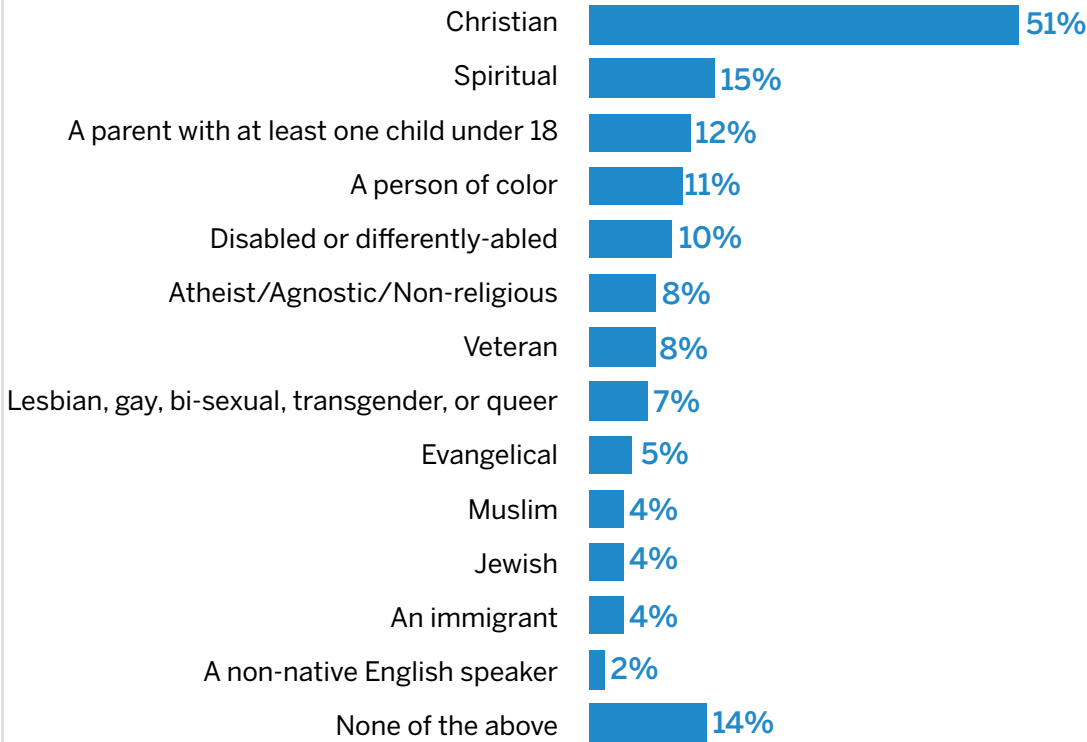
Demographics

The survey was fielded online, with a nationwide sample of 2,001 registered voters, between February 23 and March 7, 2023, and reflects the overall race, age, gender, and geographic composition of the United States.

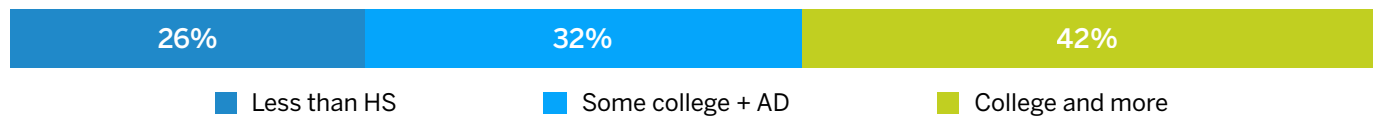
The following charts show the demographic breakdowns of the survey sample.



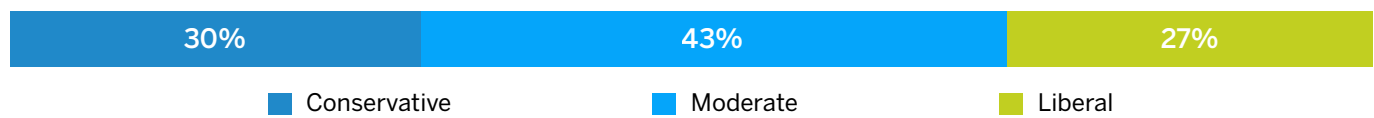
Do you identify as any of the following? Select all that apply.



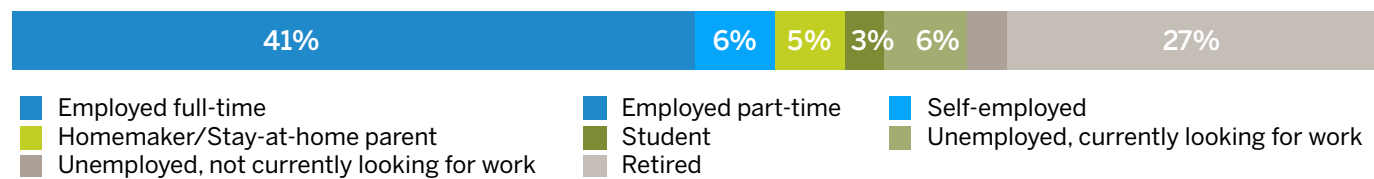
EDUCATION: What is the highest level of education you have completed?

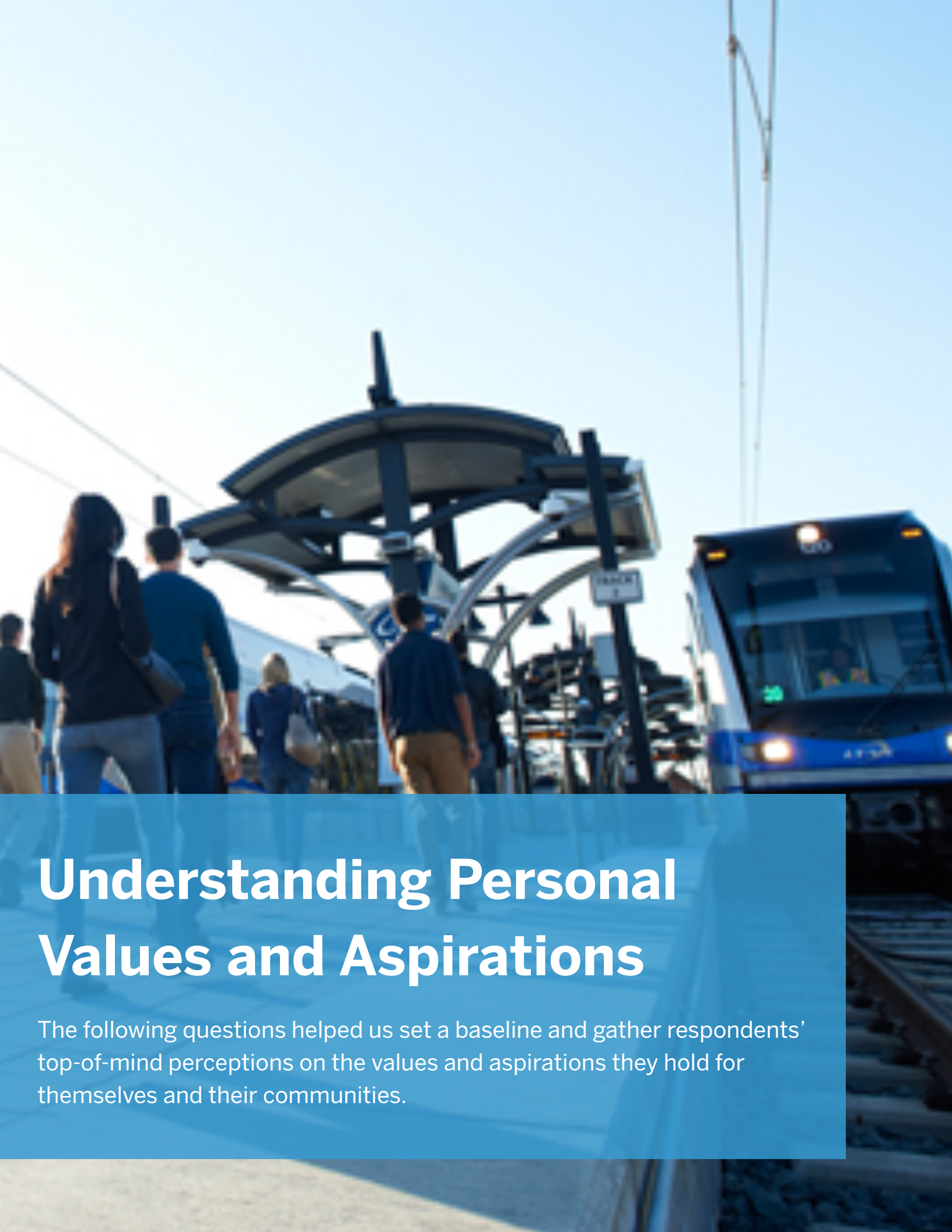


IDEOLOGY: When it comes to your views on most issues, would you say that you are:



EMPLOYMENT: Which of the following best describes your current employment status?



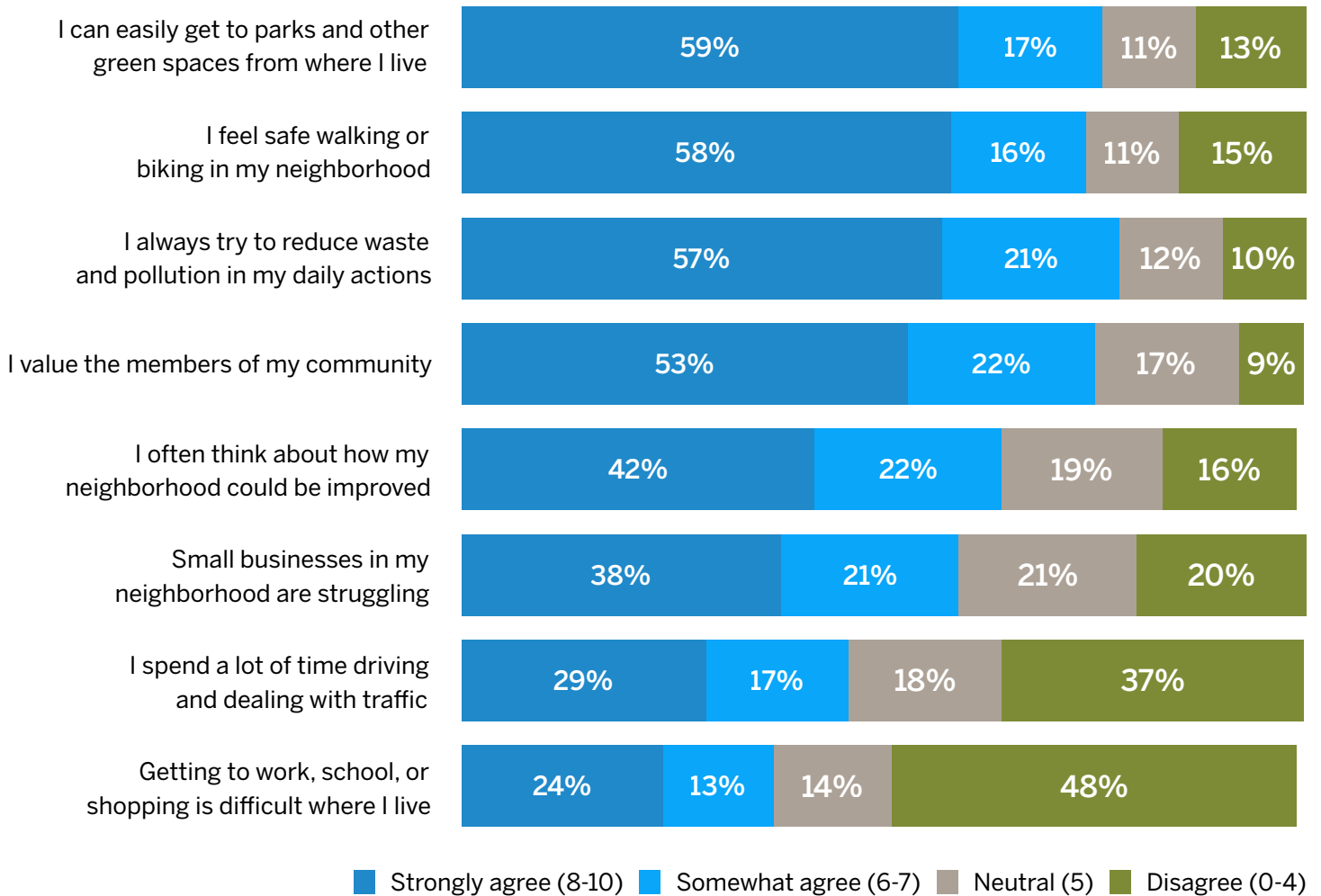


Understanding Personal Values and Aspirations

The following questions helped us set a baseline and gather respondents' top-of-mind perceptions on the values and aspirations they hold for themselves and their communities.

VOTERS' ATTITUDES ABOUT THEIR COMMUNITIES

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Respond using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means **STRONGLY DISAGREE**, 10 means **STRONGLY AGREE**, and 5 means **COMPLETELY NEUTRAL**.



A person wearing a black helmet and a dark backpack is riding a bicycle on a city street. The person is wearing a light blue shirt and dark blue jeans. The background shows a cityscape with buildings and a clear sky with some clouds. The person is riding away from the camera, and their shadow is cast on the pavement.

Mapping Satisfaction in Transportation Options

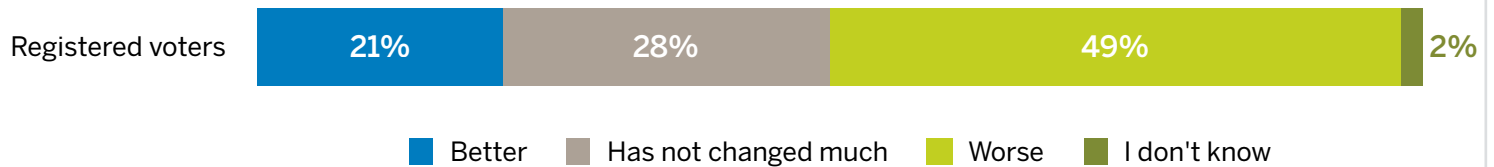
This section maps Americans' attitudes and familiarity toward smart, sustainable transportation projects, while identifying audience segments with different mindsets toward transportation issues.

OPINIONS ON TRAFFIC

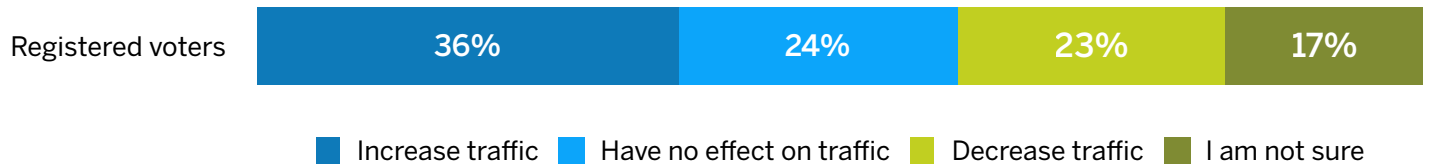
In your opinion, how much of a problem is traffic in your area?



In your lifetime, would you say traffic in your area has gotten:



In your opinion, does building new roads and highways, or adding lanes to existing roads and highways...



CAR OWNERSHIP & USAGE

Do you currently own a car?

Registered voters



■ Yes

■ No

At what age did you first get a car?

Average

5th Percentile

25th Percentile

Median

75th Percentile

95th Percentile

20.6

15

17

18

22

33

About how much does it cost you to own and maintain your car per year? Think about insurance, maintenance, loan payments, gas, and other costs.

Asked of those who selected 'Yes' to Do you currently own a car?

Registered voters



■ Less than \$5,000

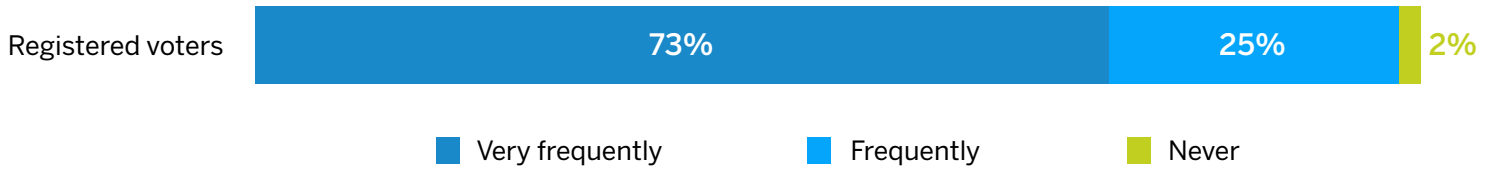
■ \$5,000-\$15,000

■ More than \$15,000

GETTING AROUND

How frequently do you use your car to get to where you need to go?

Asked of those who selected "Yes" to "Do you currently own a car?"



If you could, would you like to use your car ...

Asked of those who selected "Yes" to "Do you currently own a car?"



GETTING AROUND

Which of the following statements comes closer to your view?

*I usually **don't have to leave** my neighborhood to get most of my everyday needs.*

Neither

*On most days, I **need to travel** to other neighborhoods to get to work, school, or do my shopping.*

Registered voters



Imagine you did not have access to a car. Would getting to a doctor where you live be ...

Registered voters



■ Difficult

■ Not difficult

Imagine you did not have access to a car. Would getting to a grocery store where you live be ...

Registered voters



■ Difficult

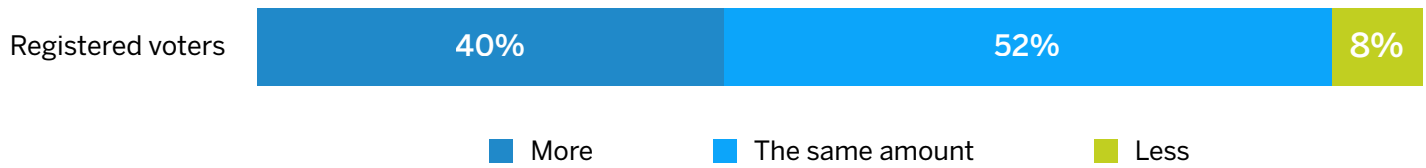
■ Not difficult

ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

How frequently do you take trains or buses, ride a bike, or walk to get to where you need to go?



If you had safe and reliable options to do so, would you use trains, buses, bike lanes, or sidewalks...



Which of the following statements comes closer to your view?

*Adding more transportation options [such as trains, buses, bike lanes, and sidewalks] will **grow my local economy.***

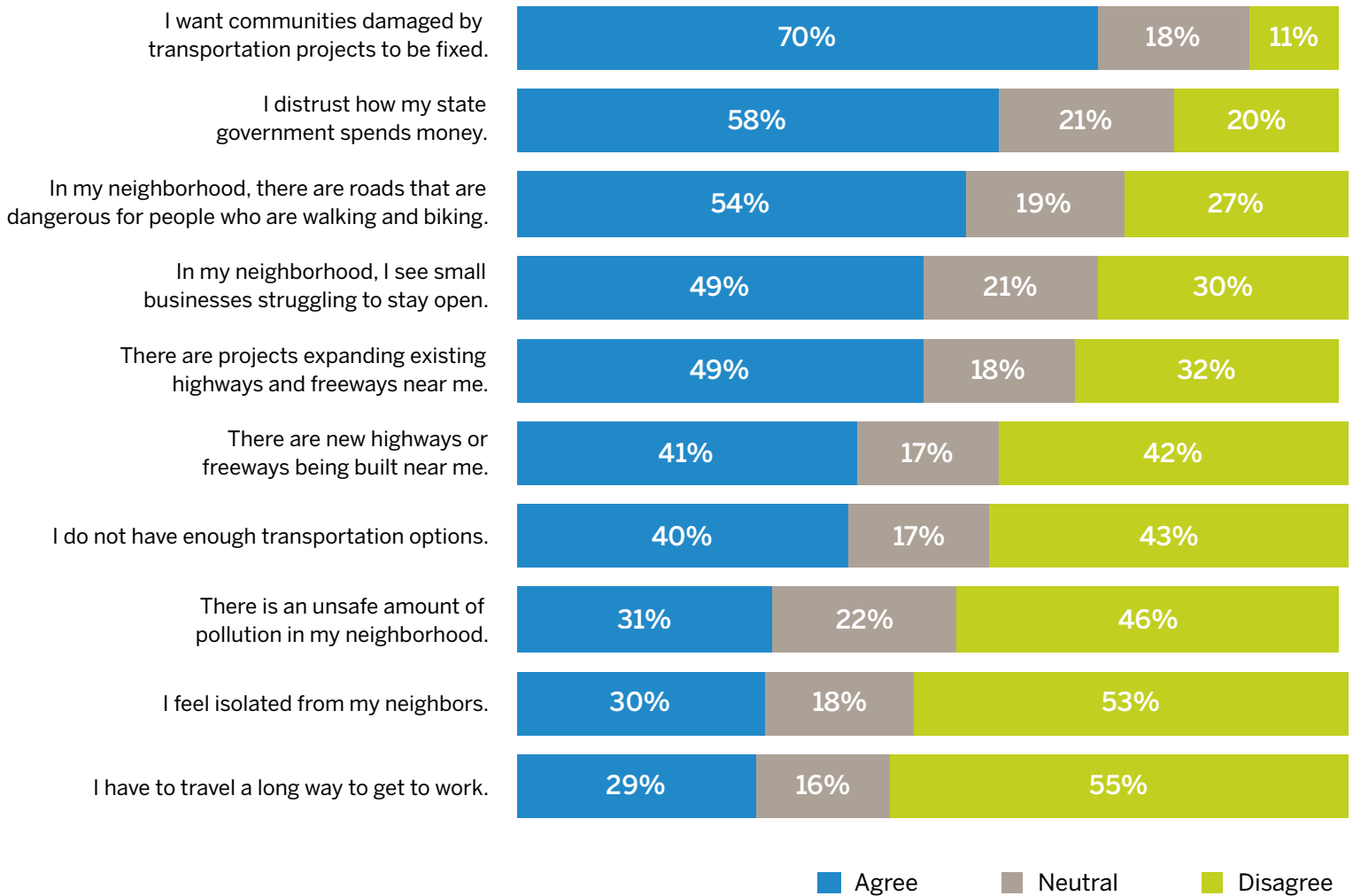
Neither

*Adding more transportation options [such as trains, buses, bike lanes, and sidewalks] will **do little to help my local economy.***



MINDSETS TOWARDS TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Use a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means **STRONGLY DISAGREE** and 5 means **STRONGLY AGREE**.



A young woman with dark hair is smiling broadly while riding a bicycle. She is wearing a dark green jacket over a light green top. The background is a blurred city street with buildings and other people. A semi-transparent blue rectangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the title and text.

Message Testing

After first testing existing attitudes, the survey also tested visions, messages, and stories about neighborhood reconnection and highway prevention projects, measuring voters' attitudes about the status quo and excite them about alternatives.

VISIONS ABOUT SMART, SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION

How convincing are each of the following statements as a reason to support better transportation options? Please rate each on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means it's NOT AT ALL CONVINCING, and 10 means VERY CONVINCING.

RESTORING COMMUNITIES

Dozens of U.S. cities are planning to provide better transportation options and create thriving neighborhoods.

Currently, states spend billions of tax dollars on highways that divide communities. Instead, residents want to remove a few miles of highway and build areas where people can live, work, play, and shop.

Providing people with more transportation options is better for our health, safety, and economy than building more highways.

■ Very ■ Somewhat ■ Neutral ■ Not at all



PROTECTING COMMUNITIES

Residents across the country are choosing to protect their neighborhoods and open spaces, rather than let states pave them over to expand highways.

It's more important to protect our quality of life than to spend billions of tax dollars on expanding highways. By removing a few miles of highway and adding more transportation options, like trains, buses, bike lanes, and sidewalks, we can have healthier communities.



(RE-)CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Dozens of cities across the country are planning to connect communities that are divided by highways.

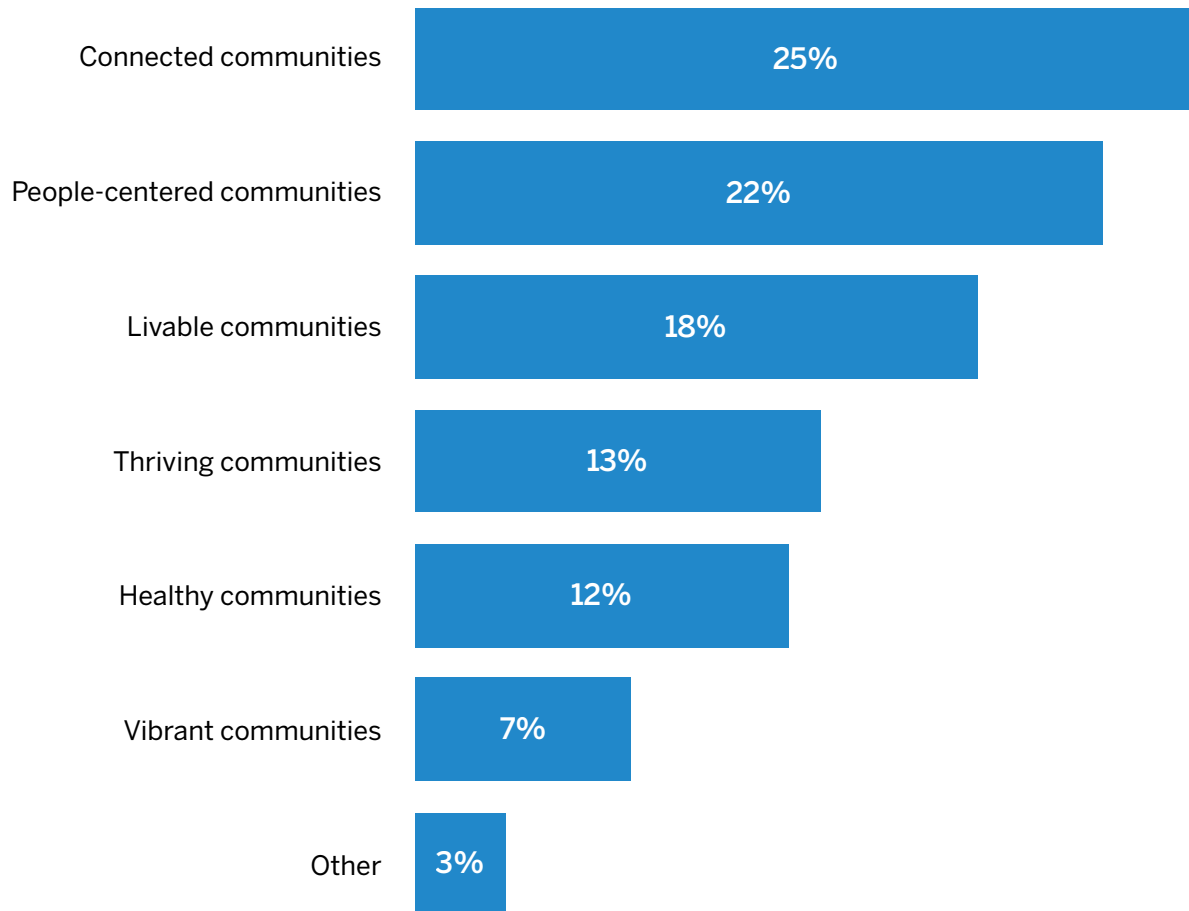
Highways can cut us off from work, school, stores, and our neighbors. They also make it dangerous to move around.

Residents want to remove a few miles of highway and add better transportation options to create thriving, connected neighborhoods.



DESCRIBING COMMUNITIES

After reading these three statements, what best describes the kinds of communities you just read about?



TESTING SUPPORTING MESSAGES

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement. Respond using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means **STRONGLY DISAGREE**, 10 means **STRONGLY AGREE**, and 5 means **COMPLETELY NEUTRAL**.

■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neutral ■ Strongly disagree

SAFETY

Reconnecting neighborhoods with streets, sidewalks, bike lanes, and bus routes makes it safer and easier to get around. That saves lives.



FREEDOM TO MOVE

No matter where you live, you should have the freedom to easily get where you need to go. Almost all government spending on transportation goes to highways. Instead, states should fund more options, like trains, buses, bike lanes, and sidewalks.



TIME FOR BETTER OPTIONS

For nearly 70 years, the United States has had one transportation strategy: build bigger roads. It's time to invest in better options that work for you.



SAVE TIME AND EFFORT

Getting where you need to go shouldn't be difficult. When you have easy access to trains, buses, and other transportation options, it's easier to get where you need to go. You can save time and effort that goes into driving.



BETTER TRANSPORTATION PLANS

It's time to create better transportation options for our residents. Your state's department of transportation spends billions of tax dollars on highway projects. They almost always run over budget, cause headaches, and fail to deliver on the promise of reducing traffic.



■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neutral ■ Strongly disagree

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Replacing a few miles of highway with thriving neighborhoods reduces air, noise, and water pollution. We need healthy communities, not bigger highways.



HIGHWAY EXPANSION DOESN'T WORK

Expanding highways takes years, causes delays, and costs billions of dollars. After all that, your commute might only be a minute or two faster. We know that widening highways attracts more people to drive, which creates more traffic in the long run.



WASTE OF TAXPAYER MONEY

Widening highways almost never speeds up traffic. After states spent more than \$500 billion on highways, people actually spent twice as much time in traffic. Research shows that widening highways leads more people to drive, which creates more traffic. That's a waste of taxpayer money.



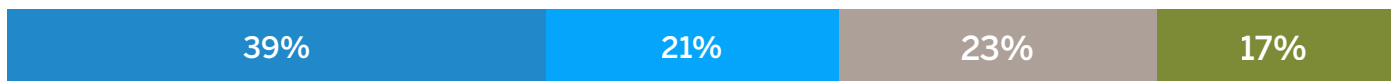
ECONOMIC GROWTH

States spend billions of tax dollars on expanding highways. That money could be used to create more jobs and economic growth by funding other transportation options, like trains, buses, bike lanes, and sidewalks. This creates more vibrant neighborhoods with all kinds of jobs.



REDRESSING DISCRIMINATION

Highway projects in the 1950s and 1960s targeted areas that were home to Asian, Black, and Latino families. Their neighborhoods were destroyed. Today, states can redress this discrimination by reconnecting and restoring these neighborhoods so no one is left behind.



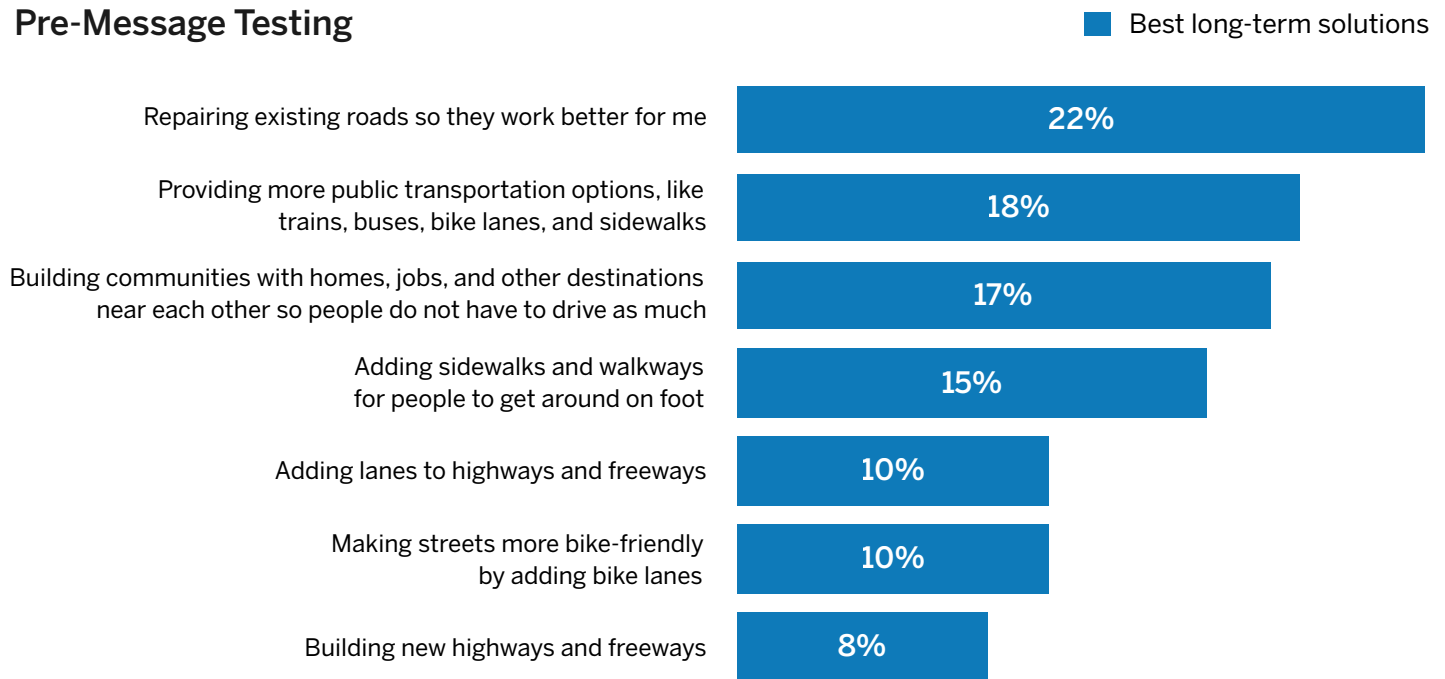
IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO REDUCE TRAFFIC

After hearing the visions and messages on pages 19–22, respondents were asked again the same core question about strategies for reducing traffic:

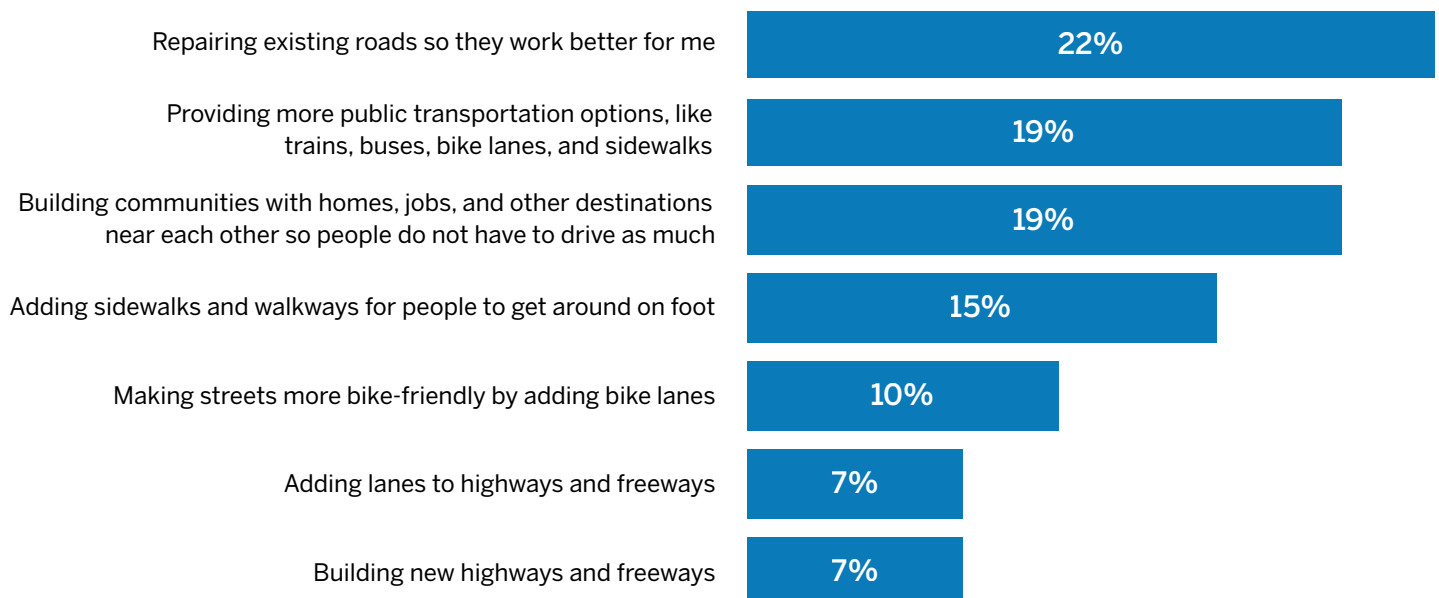
“Below are some ways that your community could reduce traffic. In your opinion, which of the following approaches would be the best and worst long-term solutions to reducing traffic in your area?”

Post-message testing, support for both building new or adding/expanding highways dropped further.

Pre-Message Testing

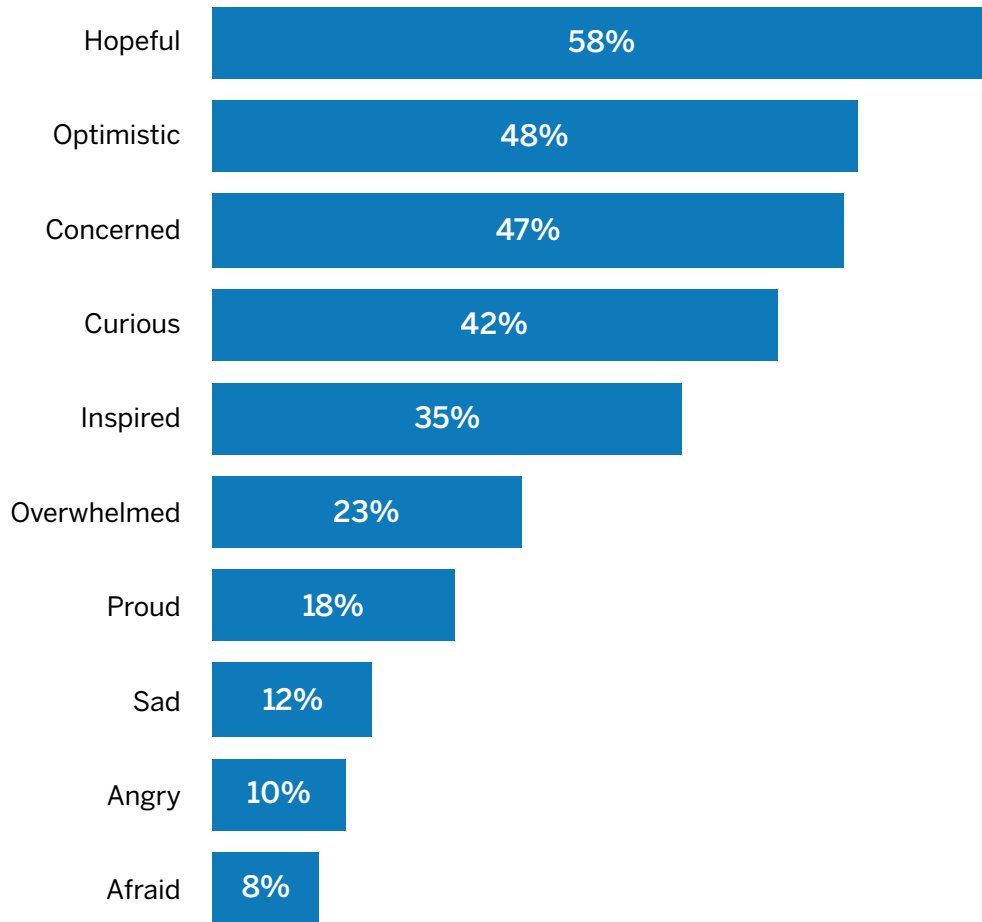


Post-Message Testing



HOW OUR MESSAGES MAKE VOTERS FEEL

Thinking about everything you just read and saw about transportation projects and options, do you feel:
Select top 3.





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