

NEWS

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POLL: MORE MONEY NEEDED FOR TRANSPORTATION
Respondents call traffic congestion “a big problem in my community;” FBT launches campaign to bring attention to lack of transportation funding

TALLAHASSEE – Three-fourths of Florida voters believe our elected leaders should put more money into transportation and these same voters said lawmakers need not fear voter retribution if they raise motorists’ fees to do it.

Those are some of the key findings of a new Mason-Dixon survey commissioned by Floridians for Better Transportation (FBT), a statewide transportation advocacy organization. The group released the results of the poll and announced a Web-based campaign to encourage Florida lawmakers to support more money for transportation.

“Based on numbers from the Department of Transportation, our state has a \$23 billion ‘pothole’ in the road to our future,” said Doug Callaway, president of FBT. “Given the size of the need, it might be better described as a ‘sinkhole.’ And, if we don’t act soon, it could easily become a crater.”

Callaway said that figure represents the amount of additional money that will be needed over the next 10 years simply to keep Florida’s congested highways from getting worse.

The FBT survey found that motorists are keenly aware of Florida’s transportation problems because most drivers experience those problems firsthand. On average, 76 percent of voters polled spend 30 minutes or more in an automobile each day, while two-thirds of them spend at least 15 minutes of their days stuck in congested traffic. Such conditions led 60 percent of them to agree with the statement, “Traffic flow is a big problem in my community.”

The poll also found 57 percent of voters would support increasing fees paid by motorists in order to provide better roads in Florida. Fifty-one percent would be more likely to vote for a politician who supports increased user fees for road construction. And 43 percent of the voters polled strongly *disagree* that Florida’s elected officials are working to resolve our state’s transportation problems. And that’s bad business for the state of Florida.

Investments in transportation can reduce the cost of doing business. In this era of just-in-time delivery, every minute spent stuck in traffic literally costs Florida businesses millions.

“People hear a lot about the money it will take to build new roads,” said Fred Leonhardt, past chairman of the Florida Chamber of Commerce and current chair of the policy board at Gray-Robinson in Orlando, “but I think it’s important also to understand we *lose* money by not building and improving them.”

Bad roads are not only inconvenient, they also can be deadly.

“Congestion leads to anger, aggressive driving and worse,” said Joe Mosca, a 19-year veteran of the Florida Highway Patrol and vice chairman of the International Union of Police Associations (IUPA). “Poorly maintained roads can turn minor incidents into deadly crashes. These conditions put troopers in even more danger than average drivers.”

The study’s other findings include:

- Seventy-nine percent of the registered voters polled would support a proposal that would require all gas tax revenue be used only for transportation funding.
- Forty-five percent polled often miss or are late to a meeting or appointment due to traffic.
- On average, 35 percent of voters take three or more round-trips in their automobile a day.

FBT intends to put pressure on legislators to address Florida’s significant road needs. The group has launched a Web site (www.getfloridamoving.org) that will allow Floridians to voice their frustrations. GetFloridaMoving.org will enable drivers to describe their own experiences and submit photos of poor traffic conditions. Motorists also will be able to stay informed by signing up for e-mails to receive updates and read transportation news.

“Time spent in traffic is time we’ll never get back,” said Doug Callaway. “And, it’s high time Florida’s elected officials do something about it.”

Mason-Dixon Polling & Research interviewed 625 registered voters statewide. The poll, conducted March 1-2, 2005, has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent.