

NILES-CASS-BUCHANAN AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

“What’s Important to You in Transportation Projects?”



Regional Priorities Study

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared by:

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

February 2010

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

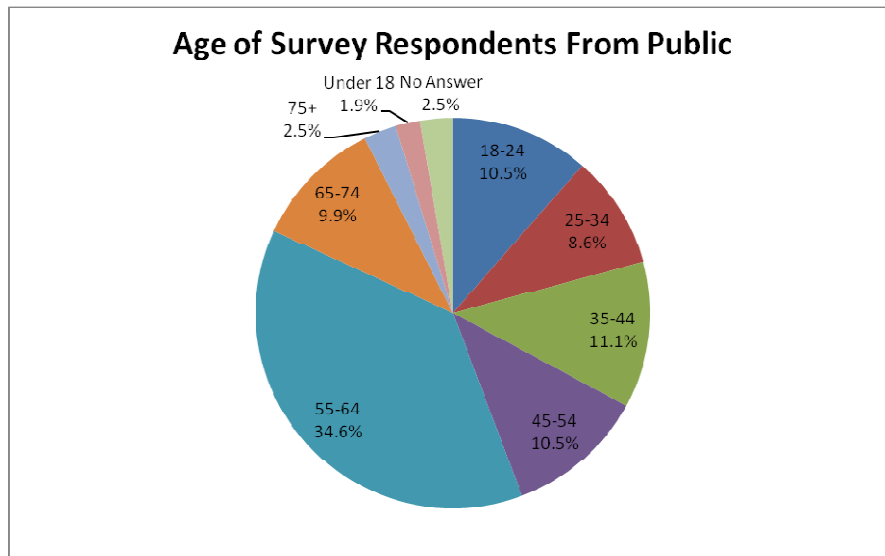
Every four years, the Niles-Cass-Buchanan Area Transportation Study (NATS) develops a five-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). A subcommittee made up of NATS representatives selects the transportation projects to receive federal funding and be included in the TIP. Because of the public participation requirements set out by federal legislation, this study was done as a way of increasing the level of public participation in the project selection process. The public is always invited to the project selection meeting and asked for comments on the draft TIP. Public representation has traditionally been scant, however, and until now there has not been a mechanism for prioritizing the goals of the long range plan according to the direct opinion of the region's residents.

Those surveyed were asked to (a) prioritize a list of categories derived from the list above, (b) prioritize modes of transportation, and (c) indicate whether they would pay a local tax to help their communities provide a necessary local match to use federal transportation funding.

Survey Administration. The survey was open from mid-December 2009 through the end of January 2010. Residents could access it online at <http://swmpc.org/transporturvey.asp> in English and at <http://swmpc.org/cuestionario.asp> in Spanish. Paper copies were displayed in English and Spanish with survey boxes at the following locations: the Four Flags Council on Tourism, Buchanan Public Library, Edwardsburg Public Library, Howard Branch Public Library, Mason-Union Branch Public Library, Niles Public Library, and Southwest Michigan College. The survey was also advertised online; in an article in the Niles Daily Star; and through the NATS members.

Survey Analysis. The survey had a total of 162 respondents from the public, as well as 15 NATS committee representatives. Of the public responses, 81 respondents answered on paper and 81 answered online.

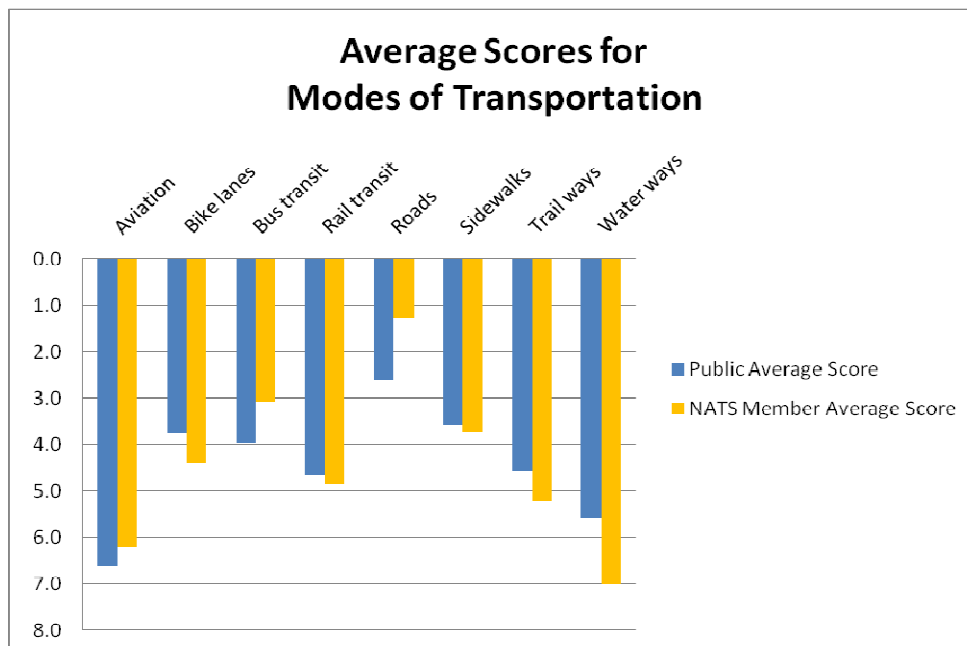
The chart below shows the largest portion of survey respondents from the public (not counting NATS members) were between the ages of 55 and 64.



FINDINGS

Importance of Types of Transportation Projects

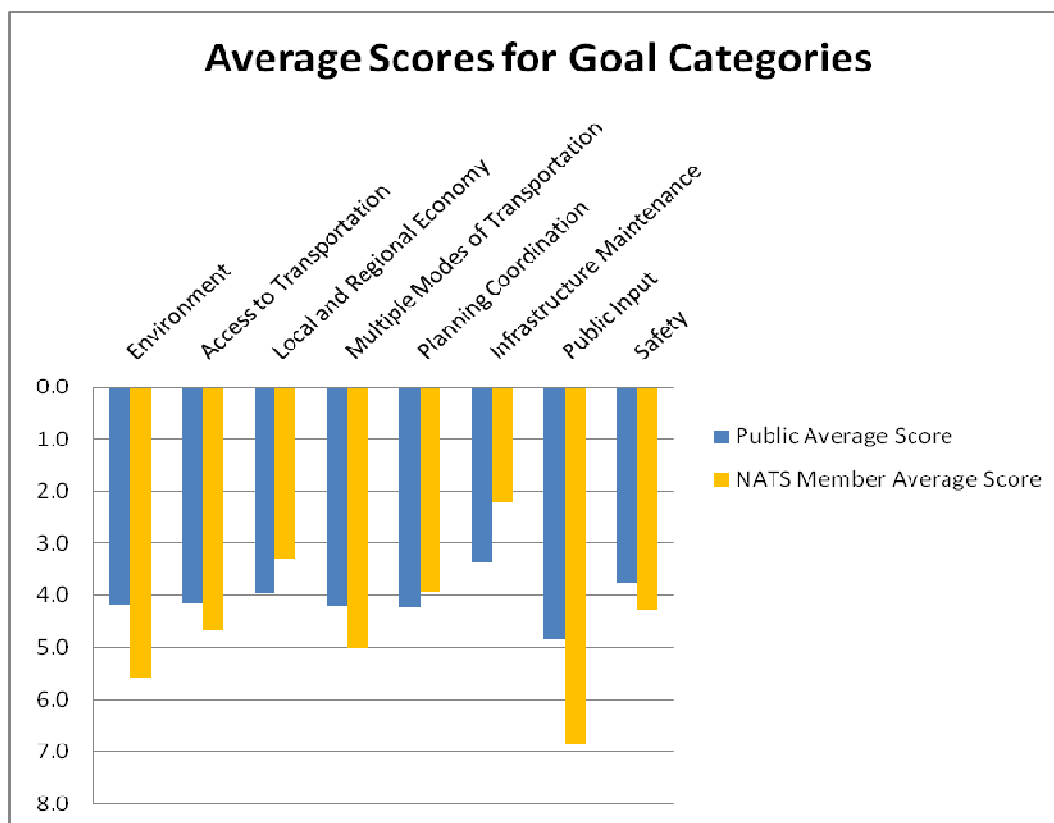
The chart below shows the average scores given to each mode of transportation by the overall public and the NATS representatives. (The average is the mean score for each category, calculated by adding the total scores for each category and dividing by the 162 respondents).



The average scores (with 1 being the highest score) range from 2.6 to 6.6 for the public and from 1.3 to 7.0 for the NATS members. Roads are the highest-ranking mode of transportation for both groups. Aviation is the lowest-ranking mode for the public, and water ways are the lowest-ranking mode for the NATS representatives.

Importance of Transportation Goals

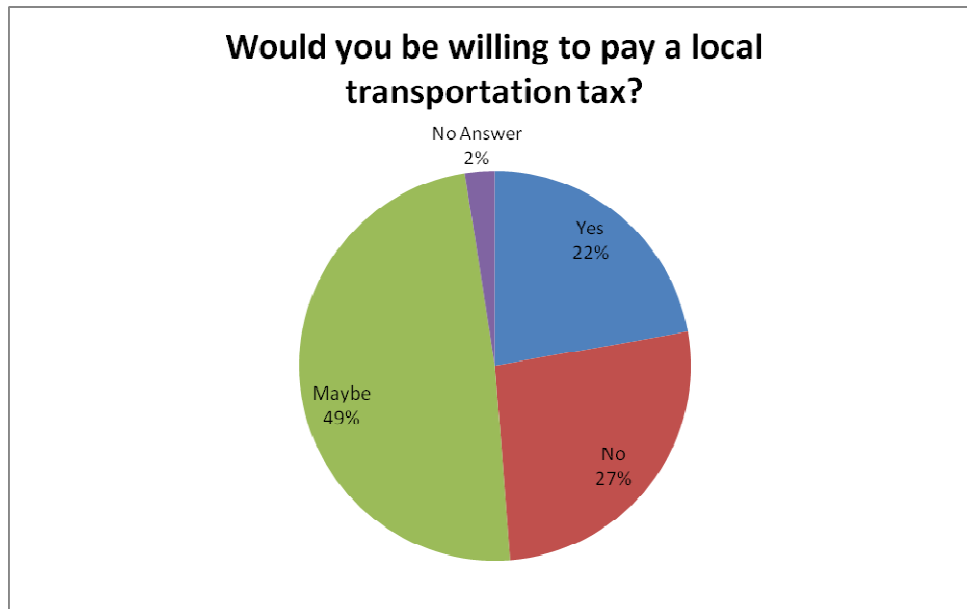
The chart below shows the average scores given to each transportation goal category by the overall public and the NATS representatives. (The average is the mean score for each category, calculated by adding the total scores for each category and dividing by the 162 respondents).



The average scores (with 1 being the highest score) range from 3.4 to 4.9 for the public and from 2.2 to 6.9 for the NATS members. This is a much smaller range than for the modes of transportation, indicating that there is less agreement amongst various individuals about which category is more important than another. Infrastructure Maintenance is the highest-ranking goal category for both groups. Public input is the lowest-ranking goal category for both groups.

Transportation Tax

Twenty-two percent of survey respondents from the public responded that they would be willing to pay an additional tax for transportation; 27 percent said "No," and 49 percent said "Maybe."



Open-Ended Responses

The survey results include 53 open-ended responses from the public in answer to the prompt: "Please provide any other comments you may have about what's important to you in transportation in your community." Responses to these comments from the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) transportation planning staff are provided below the comments. SWMPC staff included these responses, which are not formal justification for policies or initiatives. The NATS committees will receive copies of all of the comments for consideration in the transportation planning process.

The two categories that got the most responses were regional bus transit and pedestrian and bicycle facilities, as shown in the table below. Members of the public commented on their desire to have more of these facilities connected throughout Berrien County.

Open-Ended Responses from Public Survey Respondents

General Category	Number of Responses
Countywide Bus Transit	16
Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities	11
Infrastructure Maintenance / Preservation	10
Safety and Traffic Flow	10
Regional Rail	3
Geographic Inclusiveness	2
Economic Development	1
Total	53

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Following are the major findings from the survey results:

- The community with the largest number of respondents to the survey was the **City of Niles**, with 47. The age group with the most respondents to the survey was **55 to 64-year-olds**, with 34.6 percent of respondents.
- Both the public and the NATS representatives ranked **roads** as the most important mode of transportation on average. The public ranked aviation the lowest priority on average, and the NATS members ranked waterways the lowest priority.
- Responses to the goal categories showed much less range than the modes of transportation, indicating that both the public and the NATS members could not prioritize them as easily. Both groups ranked infrastructure maintenance the highest and public input the lowest.
- Around half (**49 percent**) of respondents said they would "**maybe**" pay a local tax for transportation, 22 percent said "yes," and 27 percent said "no".
- Sixteen respondents wrote open-ended comments suggesting the need for improved **bus transportation availability**, 11 wrote about the need for **pedestrian and bicycle facilities**, 10 wrote about the need for **infrastructure maintenance/preservation**, and 10 wrote about the need for projects to improve **safety and traffic flow**.