OSU poll: Ohioans want passenger trains!

COLUMBUS — More than eight of 10 Ohio adults want the state government to develop passenger rail service, as it does with highways. And, among the solutions for reducing highway and airport traffic, twice as many Ohioans favored developing high-speed rail services than their next favorite option — expanding highways or airports.

Those are just some of the results from a groundbreaking poll conducted by Ohio State University’s Center for Survey Research (OSU-CSR), requested by the Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers. The poll was funded by the George Gund Foundation of Cleveland and the Environmental Law & Policy Center of Chicago.

Details of the scientific poll, called Tracking Ohio, were announced March 8 by OARP President Bill Hutchison at a press conference in Columbus. See related articles about the poll elsewhere in this special issue. Poll details are available by visiting OARP’s web site at www.oarprail.org on the Internet.

The statewide Tracking Ohio survey was conducted Jan. 2-31, 2001 as part of the OSU-CSR’s monthly Buckeye State Poll in which 520 Ohio adults were randomly interviewed over the telephone. The margin of sampling error was no more than +/- 4.3 percent.

“What the people had to say should cause elected officials and other decision-makers to take a hard look at what we’re doing with transportation — including rail — today, and what we might be doing tomorrow,” a statement released by OARP said.

Support for state efforts to develop passenger train services in Ohio

- Favor 80.2%
- Oppose 5.8%
- Don’t know or refused 2.7%
- Neither favor nor oppose 11.3%

“Ohio officials have considered promoting the development of high-speed rail service, as well as developing commuter rail service,” the statement said. "We believe this poll shows there is an overwhelming support for bringing back passenger train services, including high-speed rail, in Ohio.”
tion in this state," Mr. Hutchison said. "The public is saying they want changes to our government's public policy toward transportation spending."

Hutchison was confident the poll would show a majority of Ohio adults favored taking a high-speed train as the best alternative to driving distances of 75-300 miles. However, it might be surprising that three times as many Ohioans preferred the train over their next-favored option — flying (59.6 percent to 18.8 percent). Yet, train service doesn't exist between most cities in Ohio and those in surrounding states. In fact, Ohio's largest city, Columbus, has no train service. Just as surprising was that only 4.3 percent of Ohioans said they wouldn't consider alternatives to driving their cars for trips of 75-300 miles.

"High-speed rail is good for the environment and good for the economy," observed Kevin Brubaker, ELPC's high-speed rail project manager. "Survey results demonstrate that the people of Ohio recognize that high-speed rail is the preferred method of solving airport and highway congestion. Ohio's elected officials should strive to establish this transportation network that the people desire."

Another telling response was that two out of every three (65 percent) Ohio adults say that, if federal funding is available for improving passenger rail services, state money should be used to attract these funds to Ohio. This is particularly relevant today, as Congress begins deliberations on the High Speed Rail Investment Act (Senate bill 250). This legis-

Ohio officials have considered promoting the development of passenger train services. Do you strongly favor, favor, neither favor nor oppose, oppose, or strongly oppose state efforts to develop passenger train service in Ohio?"

The Ohio State University - Center for Survey Research

Ticket revenues can cover all the operating costs of high-speed trains," Mr. Brubaker explained. "What is needed is a one-time federal investment to build the network. Just as with highways, bridges, airports and waterways, there is a role for federal funding. Much of Ohio's congressional delegation has already supported high-speed rail. We hope the rest of the delegation will join in working to bring federal high-speed rail funds to Ohio."

Congress also is considering Amtrak's 20-year, $30 billion improvement

— See "Survey", page two

What’s Inside...

This special issue of the Ohio Passenger Rail News is dedicated solely to the results of The Ohio State University's Buckeye State Poll which documents the huge support the public has for passenger rail.

Visit us on the web! www.oarprail.org

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OSU poll: Ohioans want passenger trains

"Survey", from page one —

The results of this poll show that Ohioans really have a love affair with mobility and not just a particular mode of transportation," Mr. Hutchison said. "Yet, that mobility is being threatened by a transportation system that has all the balance of a two-legged stool. A third leg needs to be added, that third leg is rail passenger service."

More than half (53.5 percent) of Ohio adults said road traffic congestion in their communities should be relieved by "improving other forms of transportation, such as mass transit and high-speed rail." That was nearly double the next most popular response, at 27.9 percent, which is to expand or add more highways and roads.

Meanwhile, the most popular solution to easing air travel congestion and delays at Ohio airports is to "build alternatives such as high-speed rail." More than 40 percent felt that way. But less than half as many Ohio adults (24 percent) said the best solution is to add more runways to existing airports.

This flies in the face of a long-term plan to expand Cleveland Hopkins International Airport by bulldozing 1,500 homes in Brook Park and Berea, demolishing the massive International Exposition Center. A third of all flights go to destinations less than 400 miles away — where rail is competitive with flying. Further, tracks for the 3-C and CTC Corridors pass within 500 feet of Hopkins' long-term parking deck, which is linked to the airport terminals via moving walkways. Linking rail with the airport means high-speed trains can serve as short-distance, "connecting flights."

Which alternative would you prefer to driving 75 to 300 miles away from home?

High Speed train 59.6%
Airplane 18.8%
Bus 13.1%
Other 6.5%
Don't know or refused 1.9%

"Most trips in Ohio are made by car. Ohio is considering changes that may create alternatives to driving. Which one of the following alternatives would you prefer for making trips to places 75 to 300 miles away home? Would you prefer: bus, airplane or high-speed train?"

What level of passenger rail service is best for Ohio?

"There are several different levels of passenger rail services that Ohio could pursue. Higher levels of service provide more and faster trains, but also cost more to build. With that in mind, which of the following levels of service, do you think would be best for Ohio?"
OARP sought the poll

OARP members and others may be surprised to hear that the association's board of directors had been considering seeking a poll as far back as 1997. The reason for all the behind-the-scenes activity is that the board did not have any preconceived notions as to how the poll would turn out. After all, most Ohio citizens have been without passenger trains for more than two decades. While OARP was confident, we also were cautious.

The year 1997 was a benchmark. The trek to the survey began on board a Nov. 10 commuter train demonstration from Cleveland to Madison and back through a lake-effect snow storm. Then-OARP President Mark Carlson chatted with a state government official, who suggested a poll might be the best way to spur Ohio into pursuing investments in passenger rail.

Also, in 1997, the Empire State Passengers Association (ESPA) in New York state hired Marist College to conduct a scientific, statewide survey. While Marist's survey results were similar to those in the Ohio State University's sample, New York's elected officials responded by putting together a $185 million passenger rail improvement program. It remains to be seen whether Ohio's officials will similarly respond to their own constituents' wishes.

After seeing ESPA's success with its survey, Mr. Carlson led the charge to convince OARP board members that we, too, needed to conduct a survey of public attitudes toward passenger rail service in particular, and transportation in general. Since universities having survey operations charge for their poll services, OARP needed to come up with funding to pay their fees.

OARP pledged $800 to the survey project, which involved sending OARP Government Affairs Director Christine Vineis to Washington D.C. to distribute poll results to Ohio's congressional delegation. OARP's funding leveraged additional dollars. In September 2000, OARP Northeast Ohio Director Dominic Liberatore secured a $5,000 grant from the George Gund Foundation in Cleveland.

However, more funding was needed. OARP Vice President Ken Prendergast got a $4,535 grant from the Environmental Law & Policy Center in Chicago and researched Ohio universities which might be willing and able to conduct the poll. The Ohio State University's Center for Survey Research proved to be the best research entity, given its fee schedule, respectability and scope of work.

Mr. Prendergast conducted most of the day-to-day survey activities. These included securing a contract, reviewed by OARP General Counsel Ben Farah, and writing the poll questions. Writing fair and accurate poll questions proved tougher than it first seemed. Input was sought from numerous sources, such as OARP President Bill Hutchison, all OARP Board members plus several transit agencies and metropolitan planning organizations. Further, Dan Innis, an OARP member and an Ohio University marketing professor, provided invaluable assistance in refining the questions.

Finally, Mr. Prendergast worked with Lewis Horner, project director at Ohio State University's Center for Survey Research, to finalize the wording of the questions and to prepare the survey for inclusion in the Buckeye State Poll.

Once the poll was conducted and the results delivered to OARP, Messrs. Prendergast, Hutchison, Carlson, Liberatore and others coordinated the press announcement. Mr. Hutchison arranged the March 8 press conference at the State House Atrium in Columbus. Mr. Prendergast wrote and distributed nearly 1,000 press releases by fax, e-mail and regular mail.

Mr. Carlson produced attractive pie-chart posters for the press conference and other future events. Dan Roberts, OARP webmaster, posted the poll results on the association's Web site (www.oarprail.org). Last but certainly not least, Mr. Liberatore assembled 120 survey packets for the media, Congress, state officials and members of OARP's newly created corridor campaigns.

It truly was a team effort to develop, carry out and follow up on the Tracking Ohio survey. But the hard work is just beginning -- getting state and federal officials to act on what Ohioans really want: more and better passenger trains.

Source: Buckeye State Poll, Jan. 2001
The Ohio State University Center for Survey Research

All graphics on these pages by Mark Carlson
The results speak for themselves

Would passenger rail improve the quality of life in Ohio?

- Improve 74.1%
- No effect 16.5%
- Don't know 5.2%
- Depends 4.2%

"If Ohio had a modern, convenient and efficient passenger rail network, do you think it would improve the quality of life in Ohio or would it have no effect?"

Should state funds be used to attract federal dollars for Ohio passenger rail improvements?

- Favor 65.0%
- Oppose 13.7%
- No opinion or don't know 21.3%

How do you think we can best relieve traffic congestion?

- Improve all forms of transportation including high-speed rail 53.4%
- Build & expand roads 27.9%
- Change land use 10.2%
- Don't know or refused 8.5%

"Some people have suggested different ways to relieve congestion on Ohio's highways.
Do you think we can best relieve traffic congestion by continuing to build and expand Ohio's highways and roads, changing land use patterns such as reducing urban sprawl, or improve all forms of transportation including mass transit and high-speed rail?"

We're in good company

One of the main reasons for selecting the Ohio State University's Center for Survey Research for our poll was their credibility. We needed to be certain that not only would the survey results be accurate, they had to be accepted by government officials and the public.

The OSU-CSR is highly respected and used by both government and private entities. Their clientele list includes:

- American Red Cross
- American Lung Association
- Amnesty International
If federal funding is available for improving passenger rail services, Ohio may try to attract these rail improvement funds by pledging to pay for a portion of the project with state money. Is this something you definitely favor, somewhat favor, neither favor nor oppose, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose as a way to raise money to develop passenger rail service in Ohio?

**Tracking Ohio summary**

Here is a quick-look summary of the statewide Tracking Ohio survey, which was conducted as part of the Ohio State University's Center for Survey Research's monthly Buckeye State Poll. The margin of sampling error was no more than +/- 4.3 percent.

1. A supermajority of Ohioans — four out of five (80.2%) — said they favored or strongly favored state-supported efforts to develop passenger rail services in Ohio. Only 5.8% said they opposed or strongly opposed those efforts.

2. If federal funding is available for improving passenger rail services, two of every three (65%) Ohioans said state money should be used to attract these funds to Ohio, while fewer than one out of five (18.1%) neither favored nor opposed the state doing that. Only 13.7% of Ohioans opposed using state funds to attract federal dollars for Ohio passenger rail improvements.

3. More than half of Ohioans — 53.5% — said the best way to relieve road traffic congestion is to "improve all forms of transportation including mass transit and high-speed rail." Another 10.2% said traffic congestion should be reduced by changing land use patterns, such as curbing urban sprawl. A clear minority — only about one out of four Ohioans (27.9%) — said the solution is to expand or build more highways and roads.

4. Slightly less than half (48.1%) of Ohioans believed road traffic congestion in their communities was getting somewhat worse or much worse. Only two out of five (42.3%) said it was staying the same, and far fewer people — just 8.8% — said things were getting better.

5. The best way to relieve congestion and delays at Ohio's airports is to "build alternatives such as high-speed rail systems," said two of five Ohioans (41%), making it the most popular solution to airport gridlock. Fewer than one of five Ohioans (only 19.4%) said the best solution is to add more runways to existing airports, while only about one of seven people (15.2%) said no changes should be made to Ohio airports. Fewer than one out of 12 people (8.5%) felt that the best solution is to construct new airports.

6. If a system of fast, modern passenger trains was available to Ohioans, more than four out of five of them (83.8%) said it was somewhat likely or very likely they would consider taking a train to a destination 75-300 miles from home.

7. For trips of 75-300 miles away from home, a majority of Ohioans — or six out of 10 (59.6%) — said they would prefer taking a high-speed train to/from their destination. Next on their list of favorites, at a distant second place, was to fly, with fewer than two out of 10 (18.8%), followed by bus (13.1%) and car (4.2%) for trips of that distance.

8. Three out of four Ohioans, or 74%, said they believed a modern, convenient and efficient passenger rail network would improve the quality of life in Ohio. Only three out of 20 people (15.5%) said it would not.

9. Among cities in Ohio or in adjoining states, Ohioans ranked Columbus (14.8%) as their most popular destination, yet Columbus has no rail passenger service. Ohio's capital city was followed by Cleveland (8.9%), Cincinnati (7.3%), Dayton (5.6%), Toledo (3.3%), Akron (3.1%), Chicago (2.5%) and Pittsburgh (2.5%) as Ohioans' most popular destinations in the region.

10. Of the different levels of rail passenger service which Ohio might build, nearly half of all Ohioans (46.7%) said they preferred 110 mph passenger trains, running on rebuilt tracks. This is the level of service being planned by Ohio. At a distant second place was a more basic level of service operating below 80 mph on existing freight tracks, with about one out of four Ohioans (26.2%) desiring that level. One of five (21.5%) wanted a more elaborate version, like those proposed in the 1980s, in which trains would operate at 180 mph or faster using totally new tracks.

11. Among the most frequently discussed methods of financing an Ohio passenger rail system, one out of four Ohioans (24.4%) said they favored using state general funds such as sales taxes, followed by borrowing money via a bond issue (23.5%), raising the gas tax a penny per gallon (21%), or taking the money from existing highway/transportation funds (19%).
Poll got good coverage

The Tracking Ohio poll got extensive media attention in Central Ohio, with scattered coverage statewide and even nationally. Central Ohio media covering the poll's release included the Columbus Dispatch, Daily Reporter, Business First, Suburban Newspapers, WTVN-610AM Columbus, WCMH-TV4 (NBC) Columbus and WSYX-TV6 (ABC) Columbus.

Elsewhere in Ohio, coverage was given by the Dayton Daily News, Ohio News Network (TV and radio), Ohio Public Radio and Television, Youngstown Business Journal, the Sun Newspapers chain in Greater Cleveland, WTAM-1100AM Cleveland and others. Some of the best coverage came from Ohio News Network television, which broadcast the poll results statewide twice every hour all day March 8 and in the morning of March 9.

The Columbus Dispatch

Nationally, Metro magazine, Passenger Transport (publication of the American Public Transportation Association), and other media outlets gave the Tracking Ohio poll results good publicity.

How the OSU poll was conducted

By Lewis Horner
Project Director,
The Ohio State University
Center for Survey Research

This survey of Ohioans is based on telephone interviews conducted January 2, 2001 through January 31, 2001, with 520 randomly selected adults throughout the state. Each telephone interview involved a randomly selected Ohioan, one English-speaking adult was selected by a random procedure to be the respondent for the survey. All interviewing was completed from the OSU survey center.

Special Thanks!

Without the financial support of two organizations, the Tracking Ohio poll wouldn't have happened. OARP thanks the George Gund Foundation of Cleveland for its $5,000 grant, and Environmental Law & Policy Center of Champaign-Urbana for its $4,535 contribution. A special note of thanks goes to Jon Jensen at Gund, and to Jesse Auerbach and Kevin Brubaker at ELPC.

Together, those donations to OARP provided a majority of the funding that allowed us to commission the poll. The contributions also allow OARP to set up the press conference, buy materials for press packets, design and print a membership brochure that includes the poll results and to pay administrative costs.

New brochures

OARP has a large quantity of new membership brochures that are also excellent educational tools. They contain details from the OSU poll, presented in an illustrated format. You will be able to pick up copies of the brochure at the Annual Meeting in March 19 in Columbus. To order a quantity of these brochures, contact OARP Vice President Ken Prendergast at KJPrendergast@core.com or call (216) 529-7677.

known that interviewers actually spoke with 473 eligible adult respondent, interviews were completed in 77 percent of the cases.

The results have been weighted to take account the number of telephone lines in each household and to adjust for variations in Ohioans support more rail service, poll finds
The Buckeye State Poll (BSP) is a monthly sample survey of Ohio residents conducted by the Ohio State University's Center for Survey Research. It is cosponsored by the OSU's College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, the Columbus Dispatch, WBNS-TV and the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland. Each month's questionnaire contains a standard set of economic indicator questions and demographic/background questions. Questions for the Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers were asked after the economic indicator questions and before the demographic/background questions.

For this survey, a random sample of computer-generated telephone numbers was used to interview all adults in the state.

A total of 2,499 randomly-generated telephone numbers was used for this survey, with many being called as many as 10 times to try to reach a respondent at a time that was convenient for her or him to be interviewed. Of these numbers, 1,352 were presumed to reach a household in Ohio with an eligible respondent. From these households, interviews were completed in 38 percent of the cases. Among those households in which it was possible, 20 percent contained at least two persons, 37 percent contained adults, and 30 percent contained children. Interviews were conducted in 38 percent of all eligible households.

In theory, in 19 cases of 20, the results for this weighted sample of Ohioans for the economic measures will differ due to sampling error by more than 4.3 percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by interviewing all adults in the state.

Additionally, all surveys are subject to other potential sources of imprecision and bias which may be associated with the question wording and/or ordering, the response rate, and the quality of the interviewers, for example, and which could lead to somewhat different results from the present findings.

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2001 OARP Annual Meeting
Columbus Athenaeum
32 North 4th Street (one block north of E. Broad St.)
Due to changed traffic patterns for the Race for the Cure Walk/Run you may wish to allow additional time to reach the Athenaeum and to avoid driving in the area between High and 3rd Sts. south of East Broad St. OARP suggests that out-of-town visitors take Greyhound, if possible. The bus station is located about five blocks south of the Columbus Athenaeum.

Meeting registration information:
The meeting/registration fee is $25 per person, including lunch. Send a check or money order (payable to OARP) to:

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% to David Lebold
5003 Arbor Village Dr #C-39
Columbus OH 43214-1667

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An introductory one-year membership in the Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers includes a subscription to the Ohio Passenger Rail News, plus alerts, notice of rail-oriented events, and board meetings. (Contributions to OARP may be tax deductible.)

Mail this application with a check or money order to:
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