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SDDOT 2006 Statewide Customer Satisfaction Assessment

Study SD2006-03 Final Report

Prepared by
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

In 2006, the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) conducted a Customer Satisfaction Assessment of residents and key customer groups, including senior citizens, truckers, farmers/ranchers and emergency vehicle operators. The purpose of the assessment was to gather statistically valid data from residents and persons who impact transportation decisions in the State of South Dakota to help identify short-term and long-term transportation priorities for the Department. The assessment findings presented in this report will be used as part of SDDOT's on-going strategic planning process. SDDOT previously completed statewide Customer Satisfaction Assessments in 1997, 1999, 2002, and 2004.

OBJECTIVES

The 2006 SDDOT Customer Satisfaction Assessment had three primary objectives.

- to assess the opinions of the public and key customer groups regarding the composition, importance, and quality of the Department of Transportation's key products and services;
- to assess the Department's progress in addressing customer concerns;
- to identify specific actions that the Department can take to improve its performance and the perception its customers have of the Department.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The 2006 SDDOT Customer Satisfaction Assessment involved numerous data collection elements. The survey design process was composed of interviews with internal and external stakeholders and focus groups with residents and key customers groups. Quantitative input was obtained through statistically valid surveys that were administered to senior citizens, shippers/truckers, emergency vehicle operators, and farmers/ranchers. Qualitative input was obtained from contractors who do business with the Department via a short on-line survey.

The major components of the Customer Satisfaction Assessment are described below.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The purpose of the internal and external stakeholder interviews was to assess the perceptions that senior SDDOT managers and external stakeholders have about the delivery of services provided by the South Dakota Department of Transportation. A total of 53 interviews were conducted during June 2006. The information from the internal and external interviews was used to develop questions for the focus groups that were administered in July 2006.

FOCUS GROUPS

During July 2006, ETC Institute facilitated a total of 12 focus groups with residents and key customer groups of the SDDOT. The focus groups were conducted with transportation stakeholders at four sites across the State of South Dakota including Aberdeen, Pierre, Rapid City, and Sioux Falls. Each city

hosted three focus groups. The purpose of the focus groups was three-fold: (1) to identify the core expectations residents and key customer groups have with regard to the delivery of transportation services; (2) to understand how residents and key customer groups evaluate the SDDOT's performance in different areas; and (3) to identify ways that residents and key customer groups think the SDDOT could improve the delivery of specific services.

SURVEYS

The South Dakota Department of Transportation conducted a survey of residents and key customer groups during the fall of 2006. The purpose of the surveys was to gather statistically valid data from residents and transportation stakeholders to objectively assess the relative importance of a wide range of issues that were identified during the survey design process.

The methodology for each survey is briefly described below.

Stakeholder Survey

The stakeholder surveys were administered to a stratified random sample of persons who influence transportation decisions in the State of South Dakota. The sample was designed to obtain data from four major customer groups, including: (1) senior citizens (2) truckers/shippers, (3) emergency vehicle operators, and (4) farmers/ranchers. The goal was to obtain a total of 600 completed surveys from persons in these five groups. The actual number of completed surveys was 859, including 42 contractors, 145 truckers/shippers, 101 emergency vehicle operators, 215 farmers, and 356 senior citizens.

Resident Survey

The resident survey was administered to a stratified random sample of 1004 South Dakota residents during the months of September and October 2006. The sample was stratified to ensure the completion of at least 200 surveys in each of the four SDDOT regions. The survey was administered by phone and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The statewide sample of 1004 residents has a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/- 3.1%.

Benchmarking Survey

In addition to the surveys that were administered to residents and key customer groups in South Dakota, ETC Institute also administered a regional Benchmarking Survey to residents of other North Central States, including North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming and Montana. The benchmarking survey contained many of the same questions that were asked of residents in South Dakota to allow valid comparisons of the results of the 2006 resident survey to the results from other states.

Survey of Contractors

A separate online survey was administered to contractors who do business with the Department. The survey was designed to gather qualitative input from contractors regarding the perceptions of working with the Department. A total of 42 contractors completed the on-line survey, which was not a scientifically valid sample. The results of the contractor survey are provided in Appendix I (published separately).

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

Major findings of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment are provided below. The findings are grouped according to the topic areas that were addressed on the survey.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

- Forty-seven percent (47%) of the *residents* surveyed indicated that South Dakota highways were “much safer” or “somewhat safer” than they were five years ago; 41% rated highways safety “about the same”; 8% thought highways were “more dangerous” and 5% did not have an opinion.

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

- Overall satisfaction increased significantly in 7 of the 13 highway maintenance activities that were rated. (Changes of 3% or more were statistically significant.) There were no significant decreases in any of the activities that were rated.
- The highway maintenance activities that had the highest levels of satisfaction were maintaining guard rails, visibility of signs, cleaning rest areas, and maintaining bridges.
- The maintenance activities that had the lowest levels of satisfaction were removing debris from roadways, maintaining the surface of highways, striping on the sides of road, and snow removal. Although these activities had the lowest levels of satisfaction, the Department’s performance in each improved significantly since 2004.
- Maintenance activities that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next two years were (1) removing debris from roadways, (2) maintaining road surfaces, (3) snow removal, (4) maintaining shoulders, and (5) striping on the sides of roads.

HIGHWAY DESIGN

- Overall satisfaction increased significantly in 6 of the 12 highway design features that were rated. (Changes of 3% or more were statistically significant.) The only significant decrease involved satisfaction with lighting at rural Interstate interchanges.
- Highway features that had the **highest** levels of satisfaction from residents were: the adequacy of shoulders on Interstate, flow of traffic on highways, and the adequacy of lighting at interchanges along Interstates in urban areas.
- Highway features that had the **lowest** levels of satisfaction among residents were: the frequency of roadside rest areas on non-Interstate highways, the adequacy of shoulders on rural 2-lane highways, the smoothness of rural 2-lane highways, and lighting on rural Interstate interchanges.
- The two highway features that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next two years were (1) the adequacy of shoulders on rural 2-lane highways and (2) the smoothness of rural 2-lane highways.

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM PRIORITIES

- The transportation system priorities that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next five years were maintaining existing highways (48%), widening highways (32%),

expanding transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities (31%), adding shoulders to highways (28%), and adding passing lanes to highways (26%).

- More than one-third (39%) of the residents surveyed thought that funding for state highways should be “increased”, 44% thought it should “stay the same,” and 14% did not have an opinion. Only 3% indicated that the current level of funding should be “reduced”.

COMMUNICATION

- Nearly three-fourths (71%) of the residents surveyed thought that SDDOT considers and values the opinions of the public.
- Three-fourths (74%) of the residents surveyed thought SDDOT adequately involved their community during the planning of highway improvements in their area.
- Less than half (49%) of the residents surveyed knew that SDDOT had a website. Among those who knew about the Department’s website, 39% indicated that they had used the website in the past year. The percentage of residents who had used the Department’s website was up 7% from 2004.
- Four-fifths (81%) of the residents surveyed are familiar with the *511 Traveler Information System*. Of those residents who are familiar with *511*, 47% indicated that they have actually called the service.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Among residents who had contacted SDDOT during the past two years, 84% indicated that it was “easy” or “very easy” to contact the right person the last time they contacted the SDDOT.
- Among residents who had contacted SDDOT during the past two years, 80% reported that they were able to get their question answered or get the information needed the last time they contacted the SDDOT.

OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF SDDOT

- Eighty-four percent (84%) of the residents surveyed thought that SDDOT designed safe highways.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of the residents surveyed thought that SDDOT does a good job planning for the future.
- Nearly three-quarters (71%) of the residents surveyed thought that SDDOT is an efficient organization.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were made based on the results of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment. The supporting evidence and rationale for each conclusion is provided in the main body of this report.

- SDDOT has made substantial progress in the overall maintenance of the state’s highway system.

- SDDOT’s capital improvement program has generally been responsive to the needs of residents, but the Department will need to continue assessing customer expectations to ensure future investments are targeted in the appropriate areas.
- SDDOT has enhanced perceptions of highway safety, but there are opportunities to enhance perceptions of travel safety, particularly in rural areas.
- Although most customers think SDDOT is easy to contact and responsive to their needs, the Department should continue to identify ways to enhance its ability to be responsive to the public and key customer groups.
- SDDOT efforts to communicate with the public have improved, but there is a need to do more and target information to specific customer groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The results of the surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews provide SDDOT with a comprehensive set of information to identify and manage customer-oriented improvements over the next two years. Although there are many applications for the data from the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment, the Executive Team identified four “Priority Areas for Action” based on the results of the survey and feedback from members of the Executive Team. The four “Priority Areas for Action” are listed below.

MAINTENANCE & PRESERVATION OF EXISTING HIGHWAY SYSTEM

SDDOT should emphasize the maintenance and preservation of the existing highway system. Specific actions that would support this recommendation include:

- Completing the pavement management research project that is currently being conducted by the Department and implementing the recommendations.
- Increasing funding for resurfacing projects.
- Ensuring that projects that support the preservation of the existing system are given a high priority in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.

LONG-RANGE SAFETY PLAN

SDDOT should develop a long-range plan to address safety concerns related to travel on highways in rural areas of South Dakota. Specific issues that should be addressed in this plan would include:

- Ways to address and fund investments related to the public’s concern about the lack of lighting at interchanges in rural areas and the need for night-time visibility enhancements at rural Interstate interchanges.
- Ways to address and fund improvements that will address the public’s concern about narrow lanes and the lack of shoulders on many two-lane highways in rural areas.
- The need to give SDDOT Regions some flexibility in the planning and implementation of safety-related projects, such as the ability to make some shoulder improvements.

OPERATIONAL SAFETY INVESTMENTS

SDDOT should continue to make operational investments that support travel safety on all highways in South Dakota a top priority. Specific operational activities that should be emphasized by the Department include:

- Removing debris from state highways. The Department has made significant progress in this area, but there is still room for improvement.
- Clearing snow and ice during winter storms. Overall satisfaction with snow and ice removal efforts was high among all customer groups, but the Department's ability to respond to major storms could be enhanced with (1) the development of a plan for extended hours during major storms and (2) the enhancement of the Department's winter reserve program that recruits and retains additional operators who can assist with snow removal operations during a major storm.
- Enhancing the quality of roadside striping. Although satisfaction with roadside striping increased significantly from 2004 to 2006, this issue continues to be a high priority of residents and key customer groups.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

SDDOT should enhance the quality of external communication with customers. Specific actions that would support this recommendation include:

- SDDOT should proactively educate the public and key customer groups about initiatives that have been implemented to respond to concerns that were identified on previous customer satisfaction surveys, such as the debris removal initiatives that were started in response to the results of the 2004 survey.
- The Department's should enhance efforts to communicate SDDOT priorities and the rationale for these priorities to the public and key customer groups. This should include information about the costs associated with major investments and the tradeoffs between investments.
- Increasing awareness and use of the Department's website. Although use of the Department's website increased from 2004 to 2006, fewer than half of the residents surveyed knew that SDDOT had a website.
- SDDOT should review its process for assigning communication responsibilities during major construction projects. The person who is responsible for communication efforts should be clearly identified at the beginning of each project.
- SDDOT should continue to actively communicate with key customer groups. As part of this effort, the Department should begin tailoring both the content and method of communication the Department uses to communicate with each key customer group.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

- By March 1, 2007, SDDOT should issue press releases to the media and informational notices to leaders of key customer groups to report the findings of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment and announce the Department's plans to respond to the findings.

- By April 1, 2007, SDDOT should ensure that the results of the survey are communicated to all employees in the Department.
- By May 1, 2007, the Executive Team should require subordinate managers from the Area Engineer level and above to identify specific ways that they will use the results of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment to improve organizational performance over the next two years.
- By November 1, 2007, SDDOT managers from the Area Engineer level and above should provide an update to their immediate supervisor regarding how they have used the results of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment to improve their work unit's performance as part of their performance review process.
- In the spring of 2008, SDDOT should begin the process of reassessing its performance again.

SUMMARY

Although the short-term benefits of customer surveys and strategic planning initiatives are difficult to measure, the long-term impact of such processes can have a dramatic and lasting impact on an organization. The results of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment clearly demonstrate that SDDOT's commitment to its Strategic Plan and the Department's on-going efforts to gather input from customers have had a very positive impact on public perceptions of the Department. The Department's priorities are generally aligned with the needs of its customers, and overall satisfaction ratings have improved in almost every area that has been rated over the past five years.

Despite significant progress, the Department still has room for improvement. To continue achieving success, SDDOT will need to respond to the priorities that were identified during this assessment and be prepared to respond to new issues that will emerge in the years ahead.

PURPOSE

In 2006, the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) conducted a Customer Satisfaction Assessment of residents and key customer groups, including senior citizens, truckers, farmers/ranchers and emergency vehicle operators. The purpose of the assessment was to gather statistically valid data from residents and persons who impact transportation decisions in the State of South Dakota to help identify short-term and long-term transportation priorities for the Department. The assessment findings presented in this report will be used as part of SDDOT's on-going strategic planning process. SDDOT previously completed statewide Customer Satisfaction Assessments in 1997, 1999, 2002, and 2004.

OBJECTIVES

The 2006 SDDOT Customer Satisfaction Assessment had three primary objectives.

1. *To assess the opinions of the public and key customer groups regarding the composition, importance, and quality of the Department of Transportation's key products and services.* This objective was addressed by asking customers to objectively assess the Department's performance in key areas of service delivery. Stakeholder interviews and focus groups were used to identify the expectations and concerns of external customers. Internal interviews with SDDOT managers were implemented to identify the informational needs of SDDOT employees. The "Findings" section of this report has been developed to address this objective.
2. *To assess the Department's progress in addressing customer concerns through the development and execution of its strategic plan.* This objective was accomplished by linking each question on the survey to specific elements in the Department's Strategic Plan. By identifying the relationship between survey questions and the Strategic Plan prior to the administration of the survey, SDDOT was able to link the results of the survey to specific components of the Strategic Plan. The "Conclusions" Section of this report has been developed to address this objective.
3. *To identify specific actions that the Department can take to improve its performance and the perception its customers have of the Department.* This objective was addressed by using the results of the survey to identify the areas that should be priorities for the Department over the next two years. The "Recommendations" Section of this report has been developed to address this objective.

TASK DESCRIPTIONS

The 2006 SDDOT Customer Satisfaction Assessment consisted of eleven major tasks. Each of these tasks is described below.

TASK 1: INITIAL PANEL MEETING

Meet with the project's technical panel to review the project's scope and work plan, and provide minutes upon conclusion of the meeting.

During May 2006, ETC Institute met with members of the project's technical panel and the Executive Team to ensure that all members of the project team had the same understanding of the goals and objectives for the project. At this meeting, the details of the research design strategy were discussed and the research objectives were finalized. A list of transportation stakeholders and the SDDOT managers to be interviewed was also developed along with a list of questions that should be asked of these individuals. In addition, ETC Institute began reviewing prior surveys and research administered previously by the SDDOT to ensure that the research efforts for this project would build on previous studies.

TASK 2: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Interview selected managers and staff of SDDOT to identify important issues related to customer service and to identify actions taken in response to the Department's prior customer surveys.

Based on issues identified at the initial planning meeting, ETC Institute designed and administered a short open-ended interview to internal stakeholders (SDDOT managers) and external stakeholders throughout the state. The purpose of the internal and external stakeholder interviews was to assess the perceptions that senior SDDOT managers and external stakeholders have about the delivery of services provided by the South Dakota Department of Transportation. A total of 53 interviews were conducted in June 2006. The information from the internal and external interviews was used to develop questions for the focus groups that were administered during July 2006.

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

ETC Institute conducted 13 one-on-one interviews with members of the Executive Team on May 31 and June 1, 2006. The purpose of the senior manager interviews was to gather input about a wide range of issues related to SDDOT's external customer survey. Some of the findings are listed below:

- Every member of the Executive Team rated the overall quality of the state's transportation system as good or excellent.
- All members of the Executive Team thought the survey was valuable to the Department and most thought the results of the survey should be openly shared with employees.
- Most members of the Executive Team thought the quality of the state's Transportation system had improved compared to five years ago.
- Winter snow removal operations was the most frequently mentioned strength of SDDOT by the members of the Executive Team who were interviewed. Other strengths that were mentioned by a

majority of those interviewed included maintenance of roadway surfaces, highway striping, signage, and the *511 Traveler Information System*.

- When asked where the Department needed to improve most, members of the Executive Team offered a diverse set of responses. Items mentioned most frequently as areas for improvement included safety improvements, pavement management, communication, timeliness of projects, and debris removal.
- Most members of the Executive Team thought it would be a good idea to promote awareness about the survey.

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWS

ETC Institute conducted 40 one-on-one interviews by phone with leaders of organizations outside the Department of Transportation who use transportation services or influence transportation decisions in the State of South Dakota. The interviews were conducted June 5-16, 2006. The purpose of the external stakeholder interviews was twofold. First, they were designed to help identify issues that should be addressed in the 2004 External Customer Survey. Second, they were designed to involve external customers in the survey development process to educate key customer groups about the Department's process for gathering customer input. Some of the findings from the interviews conducted with external stakeholders are listed below.

- Thirty-three (33) of the external stakeholders interviewed rated the state's transportation system as "good" or "excellent." Six (6) rated the system as "average" and one (1) rated the system as "poor."
- Compared to five years ago, most external stakeholders thought the quality of the state's transportation system had improved. Twenty-six (26) thought it had gotten "somewhat better" or "much better." Eleven (11) thought it had stayed "about the same." Two (2) of the 40 stakeholders thought the quality of the state's transportation system had gotten worse, and one (1) did not have an opinion.
- When asked what they thought the South Dakota Department of Transportation does best, a wide range of responses was provided. Areas that were mentioned most frequently included maintenance of highways, communication, signage, snow removal, long-term planning, management of traffic flow, and the overall responsiveness of personnel.
- Areas for improvement that were suggested by external stakeholders included improving the Department's website, collaborating more with county/city agencies regarding safety issues, continuing to improve public information processes to ensure residents and businesses are informed about SDDOT's plans and current activities, improving the surface and shoulders on secondary highways, reducing the length of work zones, increasing opportunities for public involvement, and reducing the time it takes to complete major construction projects.
- Approximately one-third (12 of 40) of the external stakeholders who were interviewed had specific concerns about travel safety on state highways in South Dakota.

- More than half (21 of 40) of the external stakeholders who were interviewed did not think funding for transportation was adequate in South Dakota. Eleven (11) thought it was adequate and eight (8) did not have an opinion.
- Almost all (35 of 40) of the external stakeholders who were interviewed thought the South Dakota Department of Transportation uses the resources it has wisely. Two (2) thought SDDOT did not use the resources it has wisely and three (3) did not have an opinion.

TASK 3: FOCUS GROUPS

Conduct focus groups or interviews with members of the general public and key customer groups, which may include commercial vehicle drivers, older drivers, the agricultural industry, and emergency vehicle operators to identify significant issues that should be addressed quantitatively through a statewide survey.

During July 2006, ETC Institute facilitated a total of 12 focus groups with residents and key customer groups of the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT). These key customer groups included residents, farmers, emergency vehicle operators, truckers/shippers and senior citizens. The focus groups were conducted with transportation stakeholders at four sites across the State of South Dakota including Aberdeen, Pierre, Rapid City and Sioux Falls. Each city hosted three focus groups. Focus group were designed and administered to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Identify the core expectations of residents and key customer groups with regard to the delivery of transportation services. This involved a discussion about which services are most important and why. Since expectations for transportation services change over time, the focus groups were used to validate the types of information that would be gathered on the survey and to measure satisfaction with services that had not been assessed in previous surveys.
2. Understand how residents and key customer groups evaluate the SDDOT's performance in different areas. This involved a discussion about what constitutes good (or bad) service delivery to identify performance indicators that can assist SDDOT in better evaluating the delivery of specific services.
3. Identify ways that residents and core customer groups think the SDDOT could improve the delivery of specific services. This involved the solicitation of ideas regarding improvements to existing services as well as a discussion regarding the need for services that are not currently provided.

To ensure that the focus groups met their intended purposes, the following steps were carried out:

- A moderator's script was developed by ETC Institute based on input from SDDOT staff and others as appropriate. Moderators met with SDDOT staff to ensure that the project's goals were understood and achieved.
- A time line was developed for the focus groups ensuring that each of the major topic areas was covered in the 90-minute period. The moderators rehearsed the script with a test audience at ETC Institute's focus group facility before the focus groups were conducted.

- A notebook was developed to ensure that note-taking efforts were uniform. The notebook contained an outline of the moderator's script and provided ample room to write comments. Different notebooks were used to record comments from each of the focus groups.
- Debriefings were conducted at the end of each focus group to ensure that all pertinent points were captured and recorded.
- Notes from the completed focus group sessions were compiled and reviewed by the senior staff at ETC Institute for content and accuracy. The notes were compared to audio recordings of each meeting to ensure that all the information was accurate.

A total of 131 persons attended the 12 focus groups. Four focus groups were conducted with residents while two focus groups were conducted with each of the other groups. Of the 131 individuals who attended the focus groups, there were 20 emergency vehicle operators, 23 farmer/agriculture participants, 24 seniors, 18 truckers/shippers, and 46 residents. A breakdown of attendance by location is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Focus Group Attendance

Customer Group	Sessions	Participants				
		Aberdeen	Pierre	Rapid City	Sioux Falls	Total
Emergency Vehicle Operators	2			8	12	20
Farmers/Ranchers	2	12	11			23
Seniors	2	11	13			24
Truckers/Shippers	2			8	10	18
Residents	4	8	14	13	11	46
Total	12	31	38	29	33	131

A wide range of topics was covered during the focus groups. These topics were grouped into the nine major areas of discussion listed below.

- First, participants were asked a series of questions about their general perceptions of SDDOT.
- Second, they were asked questions specifically dealing with construction and detours.
- Third, they were asked to discuss how well SDDOT interacts with local communities
- Fourth, participants were asked to discuss various issues regarding urban/rural transportation.
- Fifth, they were asked to discuss economic development and more specifically airport and rail service adequacy.
- Sixth, they were asked a series of questions dealing with the environment.
- The seventh area dealt with how well SDDOT keeps the public informed.
- The eighth area covered issues and concerns with funding in South Dakota.
- Finally, the ninth area focused on overall priorities for SDDOT.

At the end of each focus group, all participants were given an opportunity to make closing comments on any topic.

Four major issues were discussed during each focus group:

- First, participants were asked a series of questions about their general perceptions of SDDOT.
- Second, they were asked to discuss which SDDOT services are most important.
- Third, they were asked to provide their opinion of specific SDDOT services.
- Fourth, they were asked to identify ways the SDDOT could improve the delivery of specific services.

TASK 4: SUMMARIZE FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Summarize the findings of interviews and focus groups and present them to the technical panel and the Department's Executive Team.

Once the interviews and focus groups had been completed, ETC Institute prepared a report that summarized the methodology for gathering the data and the major findings. A copy of the Summary Report for the focus groups is provided in Appendix D. Some of the major findings from the focus groups are provided below.

GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF SDDOT

Seventy-three percent (95 out of 131) of the people who attended the focus groups thought the quality of the transportation system in the state of South Dakota was either “good” or “excellent;” 22% (29 out of 131) of the participants gave a rating of “average” and 5% (7 out of 131) rated the transportation system as “poor.”

Many of the concerns that focus group participants had about the state transportation system related to the length of construction projects, limited shoulder widths, poor striping, and lane width. Several participants commented that they thought SDDOT did an excellent job with the budget they have available. Only seven of the 131 participants thought the value received from their transportation dollars in South Dakota was poor.

Most Important Transportation Issues in South Dakota

Participants were asked to make a list of the most important transportation issues in South Dakota. After participants had recorded their ideas, they shared their ideas with other members of the group. The moderator wrote the ideas on a large piece of paper for everyone in the room to see. Once everyone's ideas had been presented, the moderator asked each member of the group to identify the three most important issues for SDDOT to address over the next five to ten years.

The top issues that were identified by all respondents are listed in Table 2. They are based on the number of participants who selected the item as one of their top three issues.

Table 2: Top Focus Group Issues

Rank	Issue
1	Maintenance to existing highways
2	Safety upgrades
3	Wider lanes and shoulders
4	More four-lane highways
5	Better striping/markings/signage
6	Reduced construction time/length of construction zones
7	Improvements to traffic flow in construction zones
8	Keeping the public informed

Funding for SDDOT Services

Focus group participants were asked a number of questions regarding funding issues. As previously mentioned, nearly all of the participants indicated that they trusted the South Dakota Department of Transportation and believed the organization provided good services given the resources available. When asked if they thought funding for transportation in South Dakota is adequate sixty-three percent (83 out of 131) of participants indicated “yes;” 22% (28 out of 131) thought “no,” and 15% (20 out of 131) did not have an opinion. Some of the specific comments that were provided are listed below:

- Compared to other states our funds are adequate.
- SDDOT is able to provide quality services which indicate to me that funds are adequate.
- From a trucking standpoint, I think transportation funds are adequate and are used wisely.
- Roads are deteriorating quicker and quicker now days...we don't have the necessary funds to maintain them.
- The gas tax isn't going to keep up with the cost of building and maintaining roads.
- The quality of roads I see each day is very good so I am inclined to say yeah, funds must be adequate.
- Given our population and the fact that we get back more money than we put in I think funds are plenty adequate.
- I think our funding would be adequate if we stopped performing unnecessary projects.
- Funds must be adequate to achieve smooth and safe roads.
- There are many necessary safety upgrades that need to be made to certain intersections in my area...hopefully they are not happening because funds aren't adequate.

TASK 5: DEVELOP SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

Based on interviews, focus groups, and feedback from the technical panel and Executive Team, develop survey instrument(s) to be used in quantitative survey(s) and submit them for approval of the technical panel.

Based on the results of the interviews, focus groups, and feedback from the Executive Team, ETC Institute designed multiple survey instruments. One survey was designed to gather input from residents. In addition, ETC Institute developed and refined survey instrument(s) for key customer groups including truckers/shippers, emergency vehicle operators, farmers, contractors, and senior citizens. After several drafts of each survey were developed, ETC Institute provided the Technical Panel with copies for review. Based on the comments received from the Technical Panel, ETC Institute submitted a revised draft of each survey instrument to the SDDOT for approval.

The resident survey was approximately 20 minutes in length and was administered by phone. The surveys for key customer groups varied in length and were administered by a combination of mail, phone, and fax.

TASK 6: CONDUCT SURVEYS

Upon approval of the survey instrument(s), conduct quantitative survey(s) to assess perceptions and opinions concerning the composition, importance, and quality of SDDOT's products and services.

ETC Institute conducted a survey of key stakeholder groups and a statewide survey of residents during the fall of 2006. The purpose of the surveys was to gather statistically valid data from transportation stakeholders and residents to objectively assess the relative importance of a wide range of issues that were identified during the survey design process.

STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

The stakeholder surveys were administered to a stratified random sample of persons who influence transportation decisions in the State of South Dakota. The sample was designed to obtain data from the following major customer groups: (1) senior citizens (2) truckers/shippers, (3) emergency vehicle operators, and (4) farmers/ranchers. The goal was to obtain a total of 600 completed surveys from persons in these five groups. The actual number of completed surveys was 859, including 42 contractors, 145 truckers/shippers, 101 emergency vehicle operators, 215 farmers, and 356 senior citizens. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the external surveys by customer group.

RESIDENT SURVEY

The resident survey was administered to a stratified random sample of 1004 South Dakota residents during the months of September and October 2006. The sample was stratified to ensure the completion of at least 200 surveys in each of the four SDDOT regions.

The survey was administered by phone and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The statewide sample of 1004 residents has a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/- 3.1. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the resident survey by region

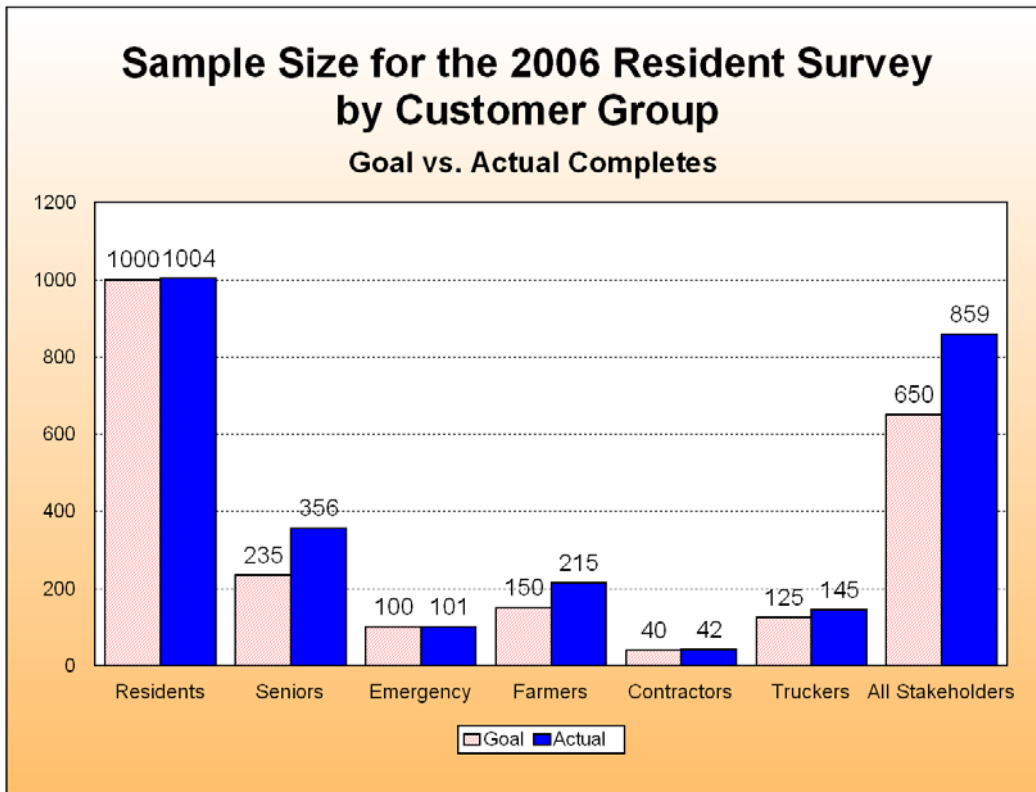


Figure 1: Resident Sample Survey Size by Customer Group

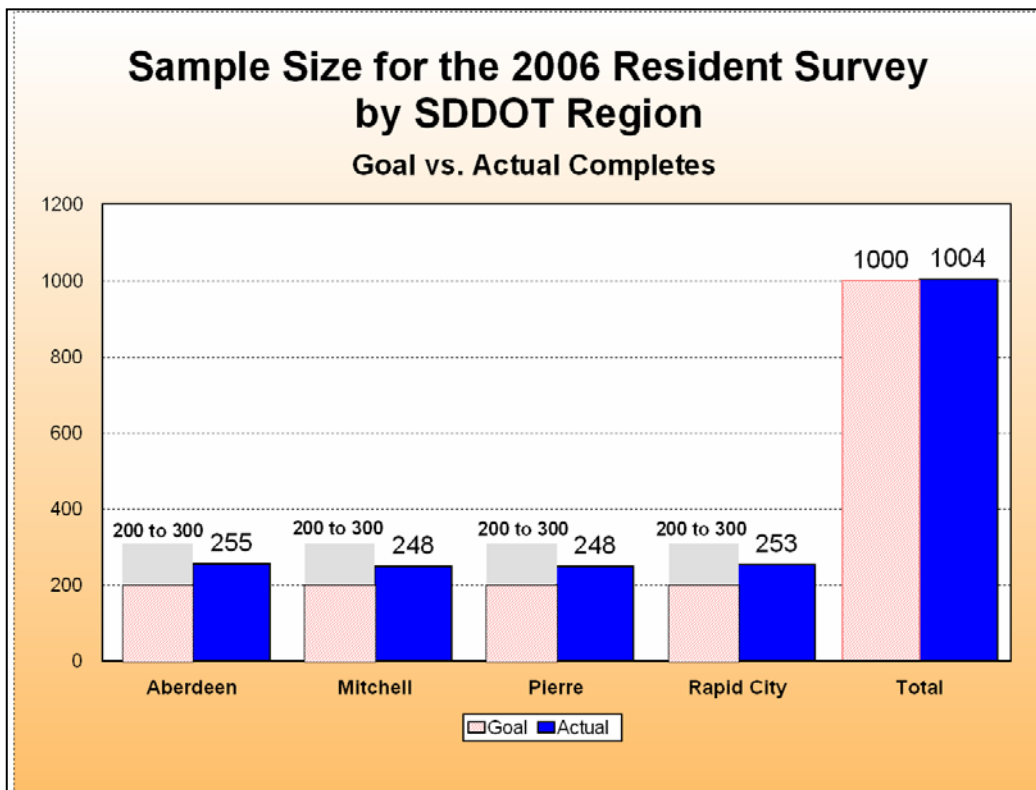


Figure 2: Resident Survey Sample Size by Region

BENCHMARKING SURVEY

In addition to the surveys that were administered to residents and key customer groups in South Dakota, ETC Institute also administered a benchmarking survey to a stratified random sample of 400 residents in the six states that border South Dakota. Approximately 70 surveys were administered to residents in each of the following states: North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming and Montana. The purpose of the survey was to have residents in bordering states rate the quality of transportation services in the state where they live to assess whether the quality of service provided by TDOT was better, worse, or about the same as other Department's of Transportation.

The benchmarking survey was approximately 10 minutes in length and was administered by phone September 2006. The overall results of the benchmarking survey have a precision of at least +/-5% at the 95% level of confidence.

Areas Where South Dakota Performed BETTER than Neighboring States

South Dakota rated better than neighboring states in 21 of the 25 areas that were assessed, including:

- maintaining guard rails
- visibility of signs
- cleaning rest areas
- maintaining bridges
- frequency of signs
- center line striping
- roadside mowing
- snow removal
- striping sides of roads
- maintaining road surface
- overflow of traffic on highways
- shoulders on Interstate
- lighting at urban Interstate interchanges
- frequency of Interstate rest areas
- stormwater runoff from highways
- regulation of billboards along highways
- smoothness on Interstate
- landscaping/snow fences along highways
- smoothness on rural two-lane highways
- shoulders on rural two-lane highways
- frequency of rest areas on other highways

Areas Where South Dakota Rated WORSE than Neighboring States

South Dakota rated worse than neighboring states in four of the 25 areas that were assessed, including:

- removing debris
- maintaining shoulders
- posting of speed zones
- lighting at rural Interstate interchanges

TASK 7: TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

Prepare and submit for approval of the technical panel a technical memorandum that summarizes survey results, compares them to prior assessments, and identifies important issues deserving the Department's action.

ETC Institute prepared and submitted a technical memorandum that summarized the survey results, compared the results to previous assessments and identified issues that are most deserving of action by the SDDOT.

TASK 8: EXECUTIVE TEAM WORKSHOP

Conduct a workshop with the Department's Executive Team to identify possible actions for responding to the survey findings.

In December 2006 ETC Institute facilitated a workshop with members of the Department's Executive Team comprising the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, three Division Directors, four Region Engineers, 3 at-large members, and the Human Resource Manager. The purpose of the workshop was to present the results of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment to senior leaders of the Department and solicit feedback regarding how the results of the survey should be used to set priorities for the Department. Using the results of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment as a guide, members of the Executive Team were asked to provide the following feedback on the following topics:

- potential priorities of the Department
- specific actions for the Department to take in response to the survey over the next two years

Following a presentation of the survey results, members of the Executive Team were divided into two breakout groups. The facilitator gave the participants five minutes to brainstorm a list of potential priorities for SDDOT over the next 2-3 years. The facilitator emphasized that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers. After five minutes, the facilitator asked each of the participants to share at least one issue from his or her list. The participants were asked to explain the reason they thought their issues were important.

After the breakout groups were conducted, the entire group met to discuss the priorities and actions that had been identified by each group. Although 23 different "potential priorities" had been identified by both groups, the participants agreed to categorize them into the following ten areas:

- maintenance of the existing highway system
- communication
- shoulder improvements on rural two-lane roads/widening rural two-lane roads
- striping
- smoothness of highways
- snow removal
- public transportation
- removal of debris
- improvements to lighting at rural interchanges
- pavement markings

After these 10 major categories had been established, the facilitator asked members of the Executive Team if they thought the categories (listed above) adequately covered the specific issues that had been suggested during the brainstorming sessions. Everyone at the meeting indicated that their specific issues were adequately covered by these 10 general categories.

Once the entire group had reached consensus about these ten “potential priorities”, the facilitator asked participants to select up to three issues as the top priorities for action over the next 2-3 years. Based on the rankings provided, the members of the Executive Team were able to narrow the list to four “priority areas for action” described in the Executive Summary and again beginning on page 49 of this report.

TASK 9: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Develop an action plan that can be incorporated into the Department’s overall strategic planning efforts and that addresses the acknowledged issues and concerns.

The tools that were used to develop recommendations for action are described below.

TREND ANALYSIS

Differences between the 2006 and previous surveys were reviewed. Significant differences are identified in the appropriate sections of this report.

BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS

The results of the 2006 Survey were compared to the results of the regional benchmarking survey that was described on page 18.

PERFORMANCE/NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Performance/Needs Assessment is a unique tool that allows organizations the ability to assess the quality of service delivery and to use survey data to help set organizational priorities. The Importance-Satisfaction rating is based on the concept that public agencies will maximize overall customer satisfaction by emphasizing improvements in those areas where the level of satisfaction is relatively low and the perceived importance of the service is relatively high. ETC Institute developed a Performance/Needs Matrix for the SDDOT to display the perceived importance of core services against the perceived quality of service delivery. These matrices are provided in the recommendations section of this summary report.

REGIONAL ANALYSIS & CROSS TABULATION OF SURVEY DATA

Although the primary objective of the Customer Satisfaction Assessment is to evaluate the delivery of services statewide, overall findings may camouflage important differences that exist within regions of the state. To ensure that potential differences are identified when they occur, individual analysis has been conducted for each of the four regions (Aberdeen, Mitchell, Pierre and Aberdeen) that constitute the SDDOT. The results for each question on the survey were tabulated by region and significant differences are noted where applicable in subsequent sections of this report.

COMPARISON OF THE RESULTS AMONG DIFFERENT CUSTOMER GROUPS

In addition to the survey conducted among South Dakota residents, surveys were also conducted with key customer groups who have a prominent stake in the delivery of SDDOT services. These key customer groups included farmers/ranchers, shippers/truckers, emergency vehicle operators, contractors, and senior citizens. To ensure that potential differences between key customer groups were identified, individual analysis was conducted for each of the customer groups that were surveyed. Significant differences are noted where applicable in subsequent sections of this report.

GIS MAPPING

Mapping by geographical information system (GIS) is a method to identify potential areas of concern based on the geographic location of the respondent’s home. Survey results were geo-coded to the home address of respondents to the resident survey. This technique integrated survey data into a geographic information system, allowing ETC Institute to prepare maps that show overall satisfaction with specific SDDOT services. Maps are provided in subsequent sections of this report. Figure 3 shows the location of respondents to the survey.

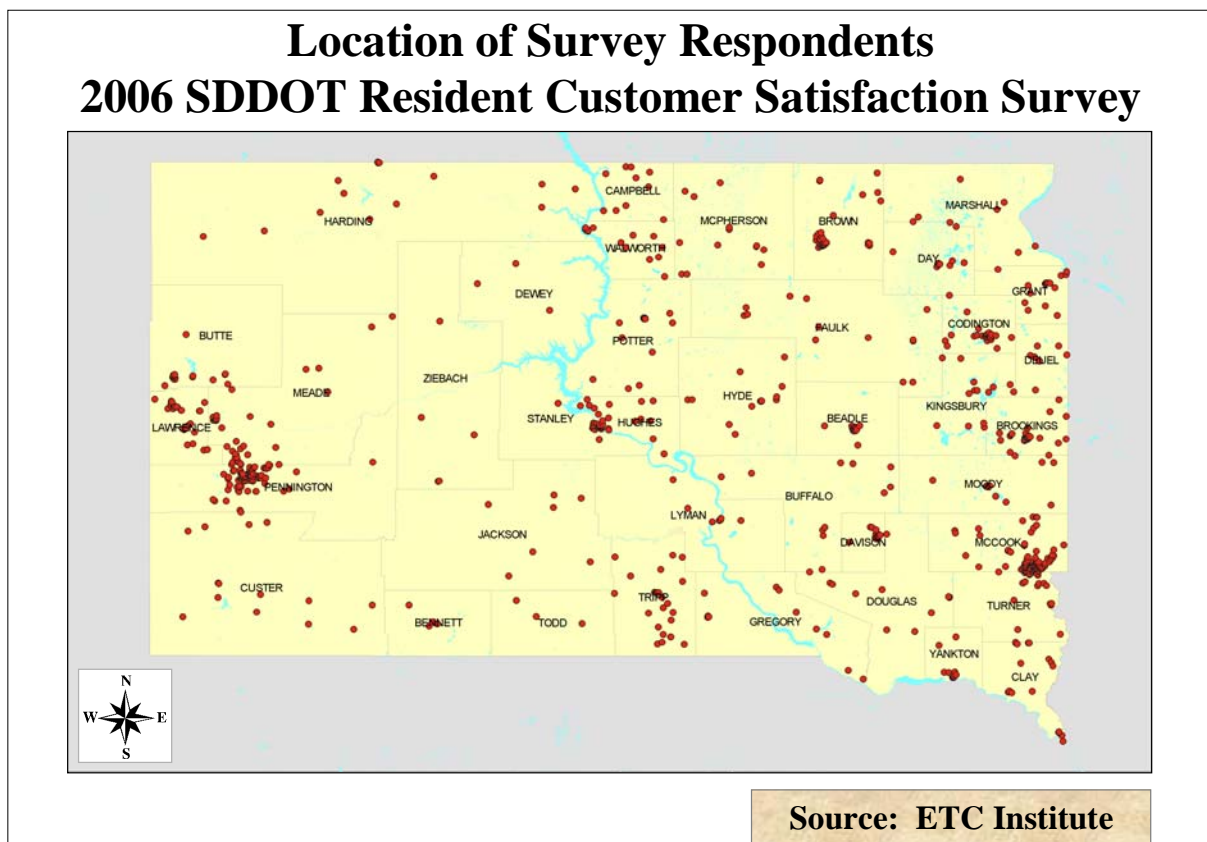


Figure 3: Location of Resident Customer Survey Respondents

TASK 10: FINAL REPORT

Prepare a final report summarizing research methodology, findings, conclusions, and recommendations, as well as recommended updates to the survey instrument to be used in the succeeding survey cycle.

ETC Institute prepared a draft final report summarizing research methodology, findings, conclusions and recommendations, as well as copies of the survey instrument that were used. This report included:

- Executive Summary of survey methodology and findings;
- benchmarking analysis that shows how the results of SDDOT's customer satisfaction survey compares to regional norms;
- charts depicting the overall results of the survey;
- tabular data that shows the overall results for each question on each survey along with cross tabulations of the results by region and other variables as appropriate;
- conclusions and recommendations for action;
- copies of the survey instruments;
- summary reports of the stakeholder interviews and focus groups.

TASK 11: EXECUTIVE PRESENTATIONS

Make executive presentations to SDDOT's Research Review Board and Executive Team at the conclusion of the project.

In May 2007, ETC Institute made a final presentation of the results to SDDOT's Research Review Board and the Executive Team. The presentations focused on the results of the survey, recommendations for action, and the implications that the survey results have for the Department's Strategic Plan.

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

The 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment was designed to evaluate SDDOT's performance in ten major categories:

- highway safety
- highway maintenance
- highway design
- transportation system priorities
- communication
- customer service
- construction and detours
- travel characteristics of residents
- environmental stewardship
- overall perceptions of and satisfaction with SDDOT

Significant findings in each of these areas are described below.

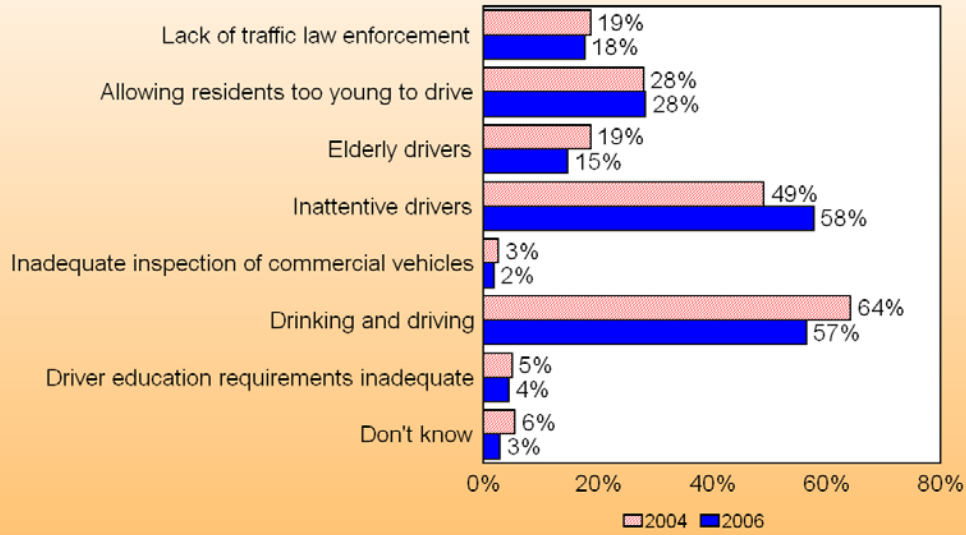
HIGHWAY SAFETY

During the focus groups, residents and key customer groups across the state indicated that they thought highway safety should be one of the top priorities for SDDOT. Some of the specific findings related to highway safety are listed below.

- Forty-seven percent (47%) of the residents surveyed indicated that South Dakota highways were “much safer” or “somewhat safer” than they were five years ago; 41% rated highways safety “about the same”; 8% thought highways were “more dangerous” and 5% did not have an opinion.
- Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the residents surveyed thought that “inattentive drivers” contributed the most to accidents in South Dakota. “Drinking and driving” (which was the number one contributor in the 2004 survey) was second at 57%.
- Eighty-five percent (85%) of the residents surveyed thought that the SDDOT did a good job of providing signage in work zones on state highways. Figure 5 shows how safe residents feel driving through work zones based on the location of the respondent's home. The shading reflects the mean rating that was given by all respondents in each county. Counties with fewer than 20 respondents were merged with adjacent counties to ensure the results would be statistically significant. The entire state is shaded in blue, which indicates that residents generally thought SDDOT was doing a good job in all areas of the state. Red and orange shading would have identified areas where residents did not think SDDOT was doing a good job.

Which TWO of the Following Do You Think Contribute Most to Accidents?

multiple responses accepted



Source: ETC Institute Survey (2006)

Figure 4: Perceived Contributors to Traffic Accidents

Level of agreement among residents with the statement: "I feel safe when driving through work zones on South Dakota highways"

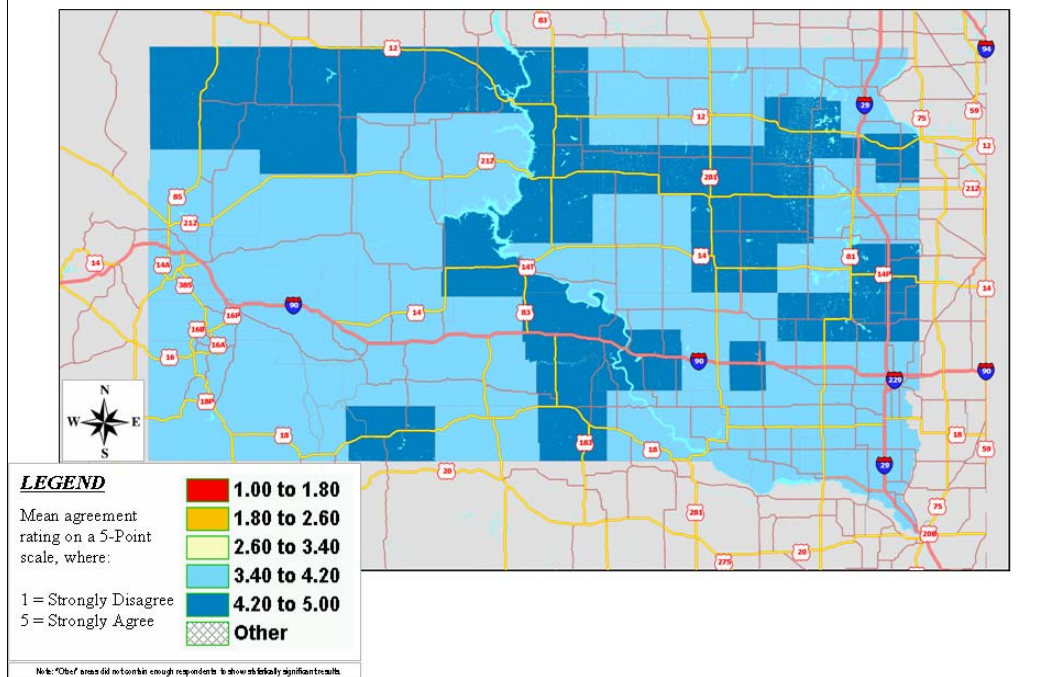


Figure 5: Perceived Safety Driving Through Work Zones

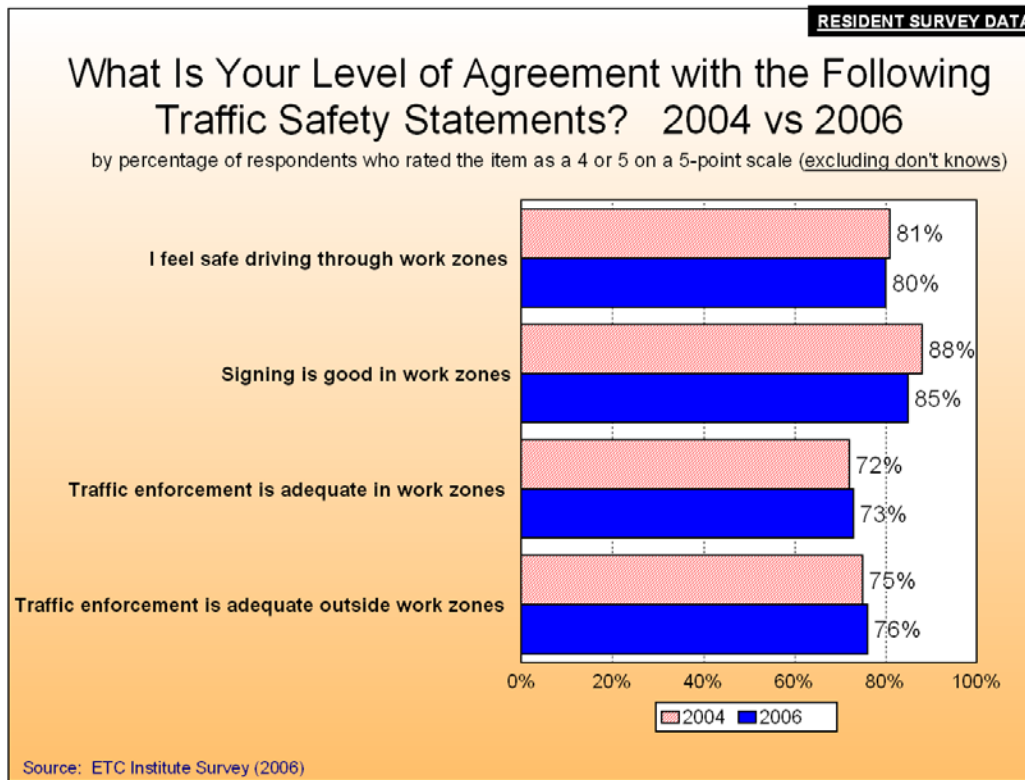


Figure 6: Traffic Safety Responses

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Highway maintenance was another topic that was identified as a priority during the focus groups and stakeholder interviews with residents and key customer groups. Some of the specific findings that were related to highway maintenance are listed below.

There was a significant improvement in 7 of the 13 highway maintenance activities that were assessed. (Changes of 3% or more were statistically significant). There were no significant decreases in any of the activities that were rated (Figure 7).

Overall satisfaction with the quality of maintenance on state highways has increased significantly over the past four years. In 2002, 80% of the residents surveyed indicated that they were satisfied (meaning they gave a rating of 7-10 on a 10-point scale) with the quality of maintenance on state highways in South Dakota. In 2006, 85% of the residents surveyed indicated that they were satisfied the overall quality of maintenance on state highways. Since 1999 the percentage of residents who indicated that they were dissatisfied with maintenance on state highways has decreased from 16% to 3%. Figure 8 shows how satisfied residents were with the overall job SDDOT has done maintaining state highways based on the location of the respondent's home. The shading reflects the mean rating that was given by all respondents in each county. Counties with fewer than 20 respondents were merged with adjacent counties to ensure the results would be statistically significant. The entire state is shaded in blue, which indicates that residents generally thought SDDOT was doing a good job in all areas of the state.

What Is Your Level of Satisfaction with the Following Highway Maintenance Activities? 2004 vs 2006

by percentage of respondents who rated the item as a 1 to 10 on a 10-point scale

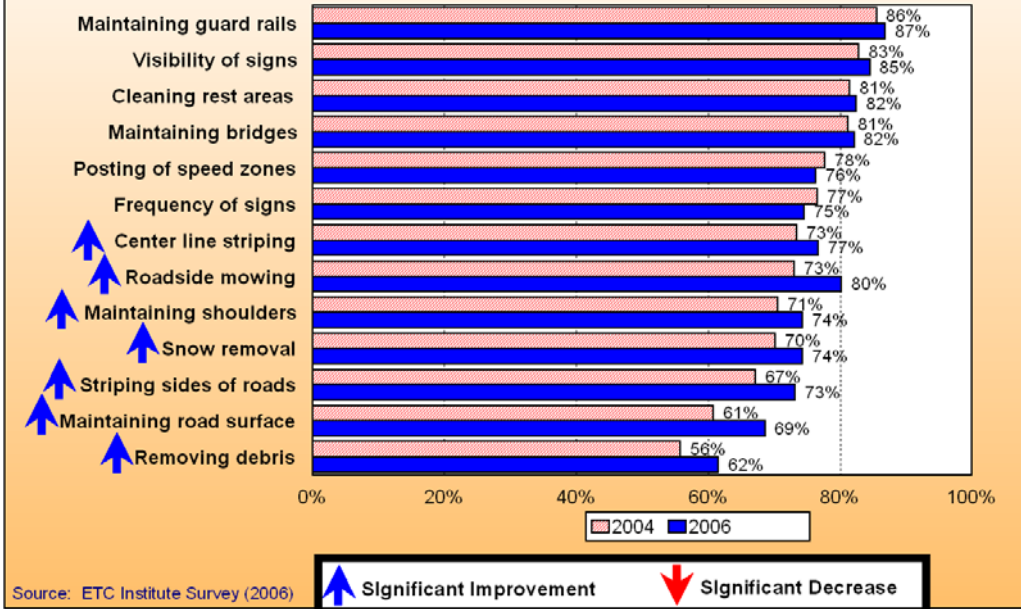


Figure 7: Satisfaction with Maintenance Activities

How satisfied residents were with the overall job SDDOT has done maintaining state highways during the past year

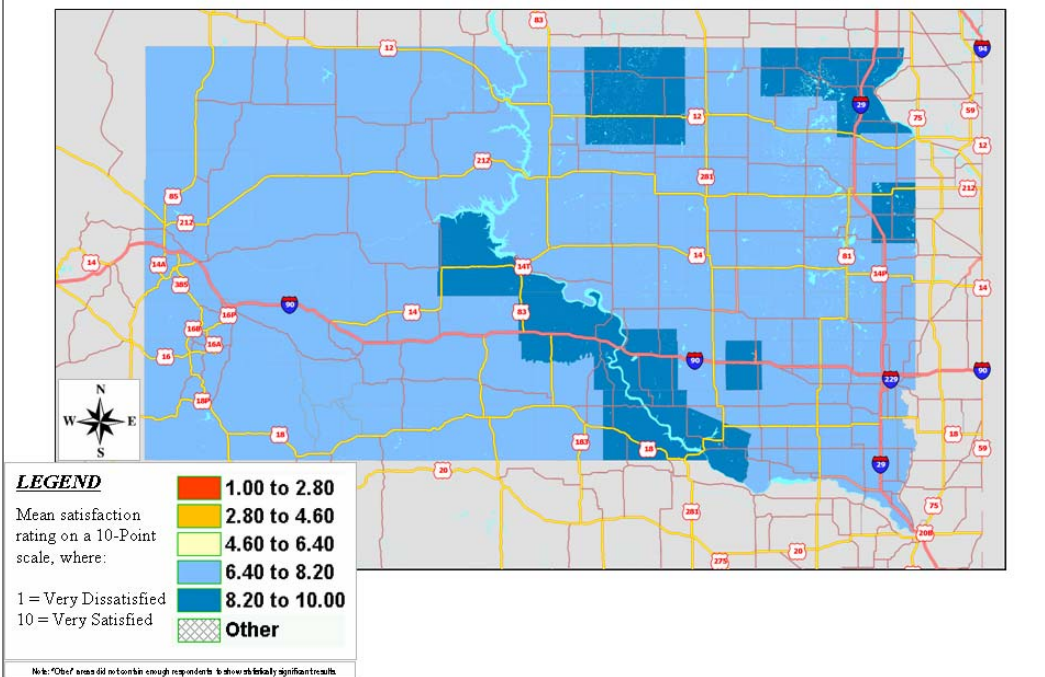


Figure 8: Overall Satisfaction with Highway Maintenance by County

The highway maintenance activities that had the highest levels of satisfaction were maintaining guard rails, visibility of signs, cleaning rest areas, and maintaining bridges.

The activities that had the lowest levels of satisfaction were removing roadway and shoulder debris, maintaining the surface of highways, striping on the sides of road, and snow removal. However, all these activities significantly improved since the 2004 survey.

Activities of maintenance that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next two years were (1) removing roadway and shoulder debris, (2) maintaining road surfaces (3) snow removal, (4) maintaining shoulders, and (5) striping on the sides of roads.

Figure 9 shows that overall satisfaction with state highway maintenance in South Dakota is significantly higher than neighboring states. Residents in South Dakota were more satisfied than residents in bordering states with 11 of the 13 maintenance activities that were assessed on the benchmarking survey that was conducted. Satisfaction was significantly higher in six of the 13 activities, including the cleanliness of rest areas, maintenance of bridges, center line striping, roadside mowing, roadside striping, and the maintenance of roadway surfaces. The only area that rated significantly lower in South Dakota compared to neighboring states was the removal of debris.

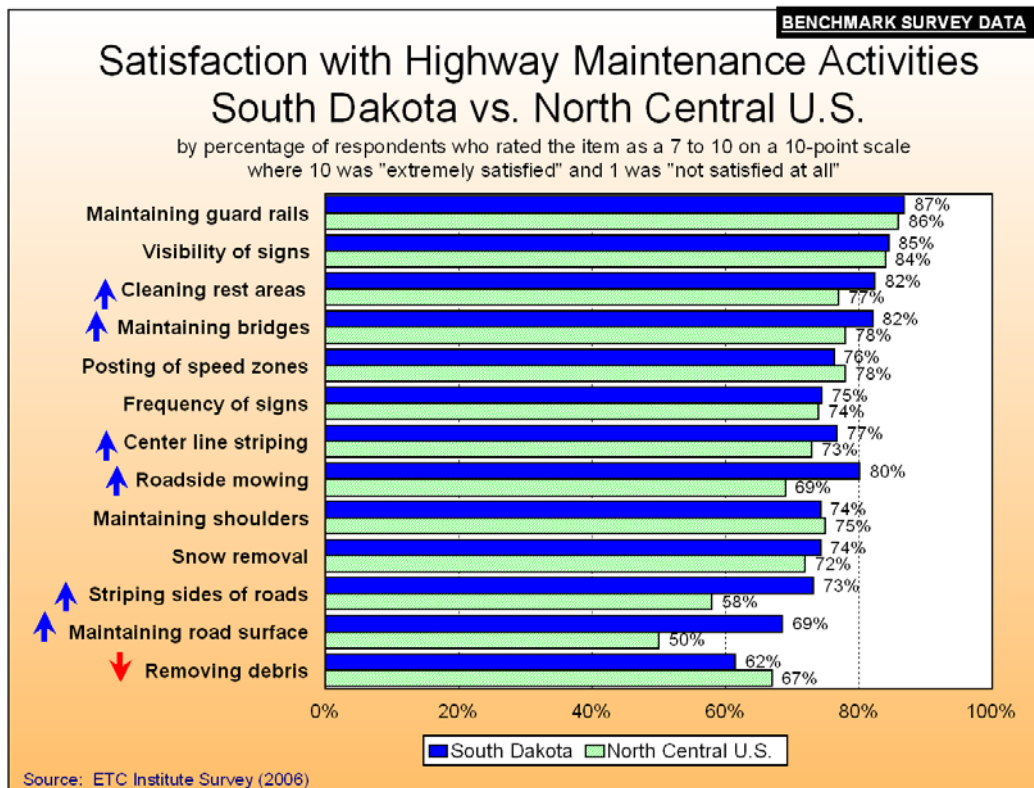


Figure 9: Satisfaction with Maintenance Activities

HIGHWAY DESIGN

To help SDDOT understand the expectations of residents regarding the design of state highways, the survey contained several questions regarding satisfaction with specific highway features and the priority that should be placed on improvements.

- Highway features that had the **highest** levels of satisfaction from residents were: the adequacy of shoulders on Interstate, flow of traffic on highways, and the adequacy of lighting at interchanges along Interstates in urban areas (Figure 10).
- Highway features that had the **lowest** levels of satisfaction among residents were: the frequency of roadside rest areas on non-Interstate highways, the adequacy of shoulders on rural 2-lane highways, and the smoothness of rural 2-lane highways, and lighting on rural Interstate interchanges.
- Overall satisfaction with the design of state highways improved for 9 of the 12 features that were assessed in 2004 and 2006. There was a statistically significant improvement for 5 of the features that were assessed. (Changes of 3% or more were statistically significant.) Overall satisfaction with the quality of lighting at interchanges on Interstates in rural areas was the only feature where satisfaction levels decreased significantly.

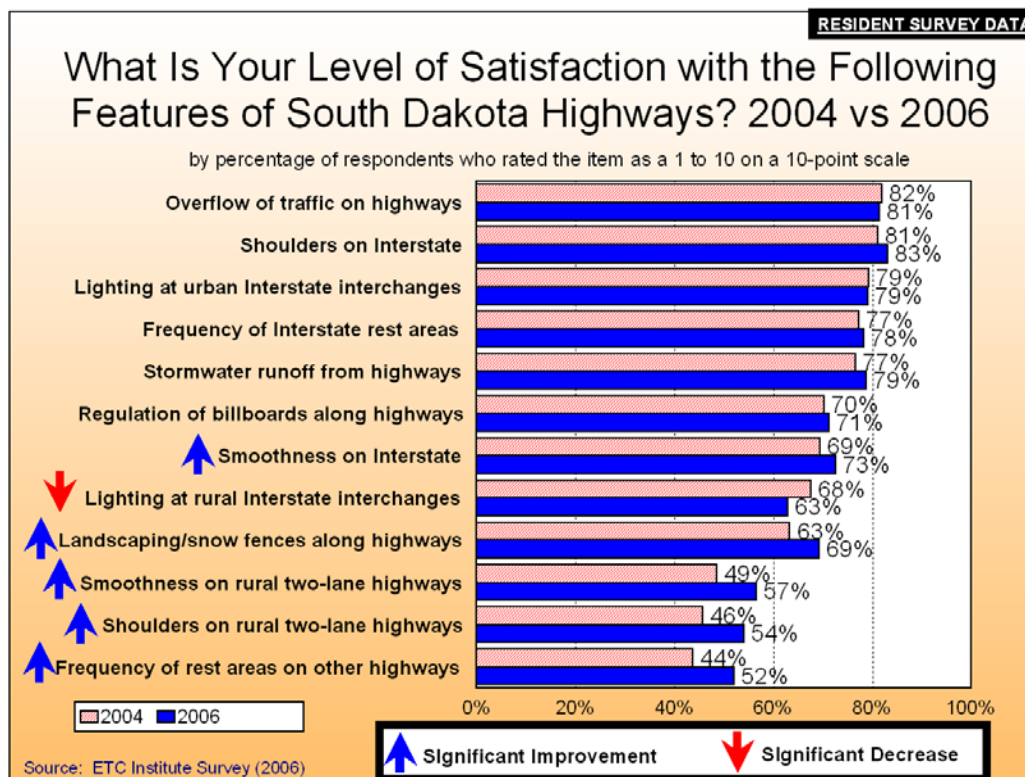
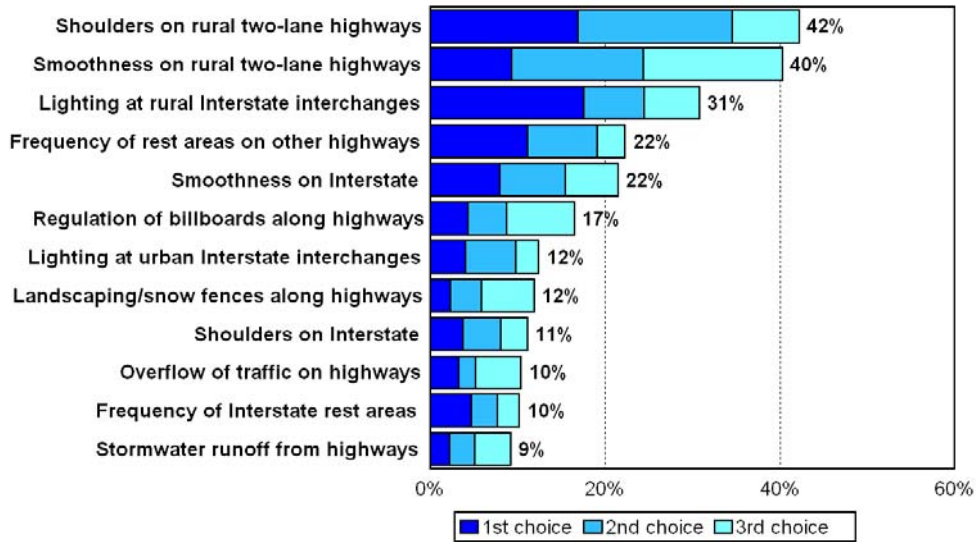


Figure 10: Satisfaction with Highway Design Features

Highway Features Residents Think Should Receive the Most Emphasis Over the Next Two Years - 2006

by percentage of respondents who selected the item as one of their top three choices

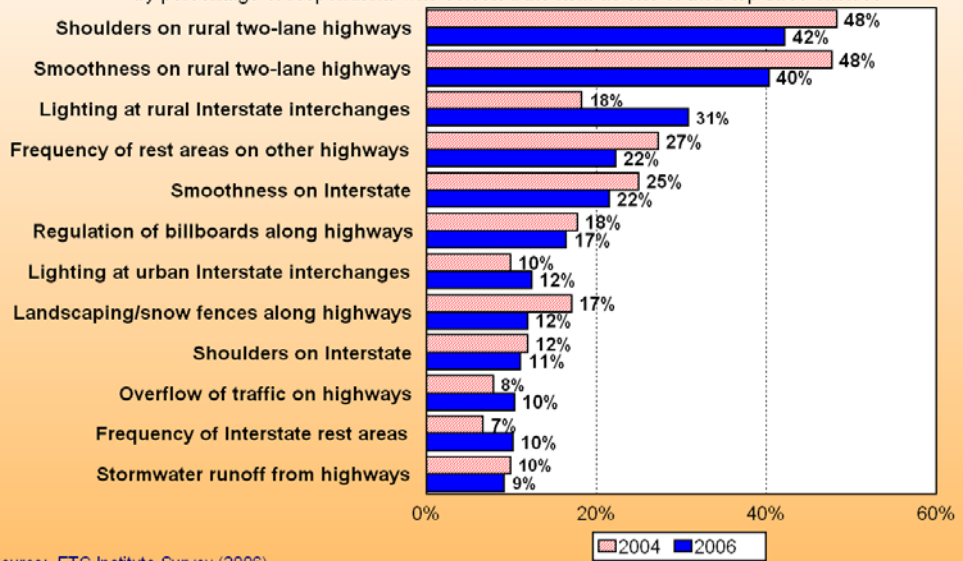


Source: ETC Institute Survey (2006)

Figure 11: Highway Features Deserving Emphasis in Next Two Years

Highway Features Residents Think Should Receive the Most Emphasis Over the Next Two Years - 2004 vs. 2006

by percentage of respondents who selected the item as one of their top three choices



Source: ETC Institute Survey (2006)

Figure 12: Highway Features to Emphasize

- The two highway features that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next two years (Figure 11) were (1) the adequacy of shoulders on rural 2-lane highways and (2) the smoothness of rural 2-lane highways. Lighting on rural Interstate interchanges (31%) was significantly more important to residents in 2006 than in 2004 (18%) (Figure 12).

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM PRIORITIES

To help SDDOT leaders set priorities for improvement to the state’s transportation system, the survey included a series of questions that asked residents to rate the importance of various transportation priorities. The priorities that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next five years were: maintaining existing highways (48%), widening highways (32%), expanding transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities (31%), adding shoulders to highways (28%), and adding passing lanes to highways (26%).

Some customer groups placed significantly more importance on some transportation priorities than did other groups. For example, expanding transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities was significantly more important to seniors. Widening highways and adding passing lanes were significantly more important to farmers/ranchers and truckers/shippers.

Other findings that may affect transportation priorities for the state are noted below.

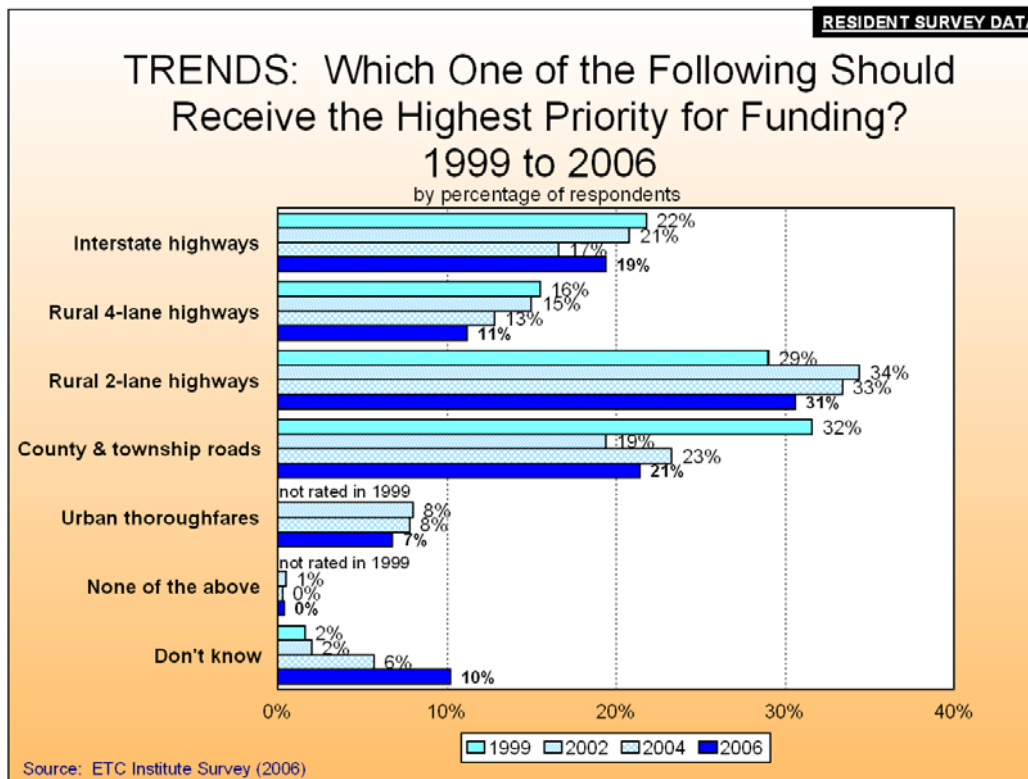


Figure 13: Funding Priorities

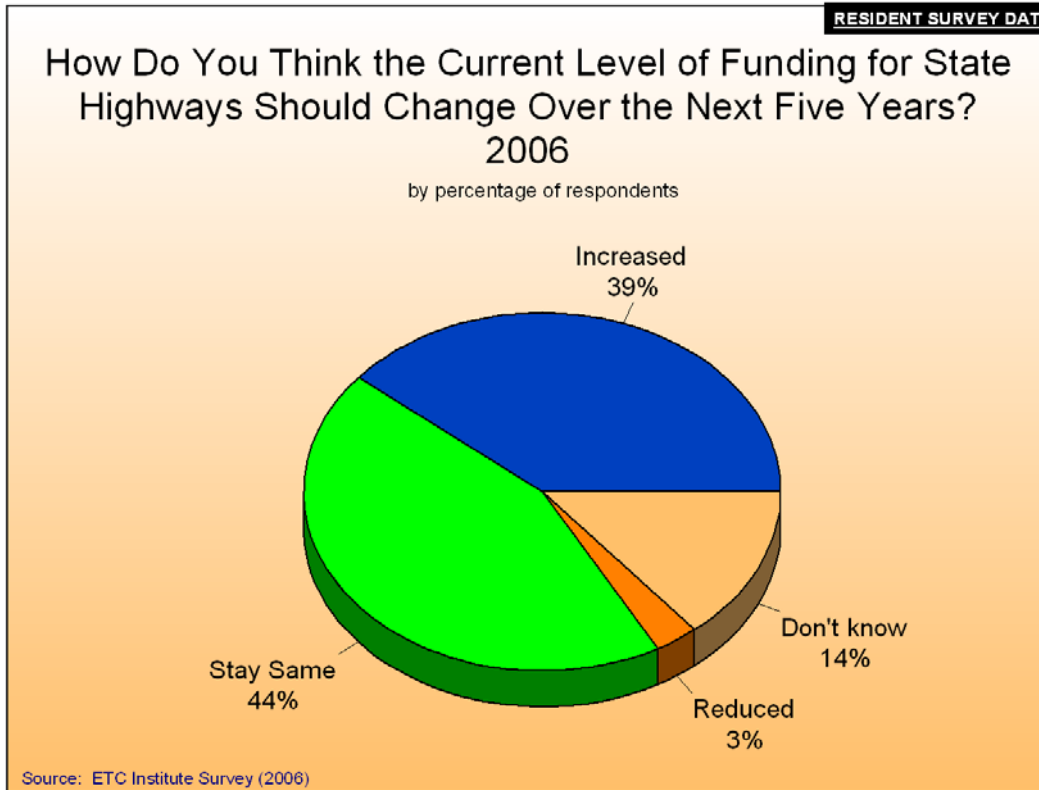


Figure 14: Perceptions on Future Funding Levels

- Residents were much more likely to think that rural two-lane highways (31%) should receive priority for additional funding than they were to think Interstate highways (19%) should receive priority for additional funding.
- More than one-third (39%) of the residents surveyed thought that funding for state highways should be “increased”. 44% thought it should “stay the same” and 14% did not have an opinion. Only 3% indicated that the current level of funding should be “reduced”.

COMMUNICATION

Most members of the Executive Team who participated in the stakeholder interviews felt it was important for SDDOT to communicate well with residents and key customer groups. To assess the effectiveness of communication programs that are currently in place, the research team included several questions about communication. Some of the major findings in this area are listed below.

- Nearly three-fourths (71%) of the residents surveyed thought that SDDOT considers and values the opinions of the public.
- Three-fourths (74%) of the residents surveyed thought SDDOT adequately involved their community during the planning of highway improvements in their area.

- Only forty-nine percent (49%) of the residents surveyed knew that SDDOT had a website. Of those 49%, over one-third (39%) have actually used the website in the past year. Website use is up 7% from 2004.
- Four-fifths (81%) of the residents surveyed were familiar with the *511 Traveler Information System* (Figure 15). Of those residents who were familiar with *511*, 47% indicated that they have actually called the service.
- Three-fourths (74%) of the residents surveyed had seen variable message boards along Interstate highways in South Dakota (Figure 16). 22% had not and 4% did not have an opinion.
- The ways residents surveyed preferred getting or receiving information from the SDDOT (Figure 17) were newspapers (31%), TV local public access channel (31%), radio (28%), and direct mailings/newsletter (18%).

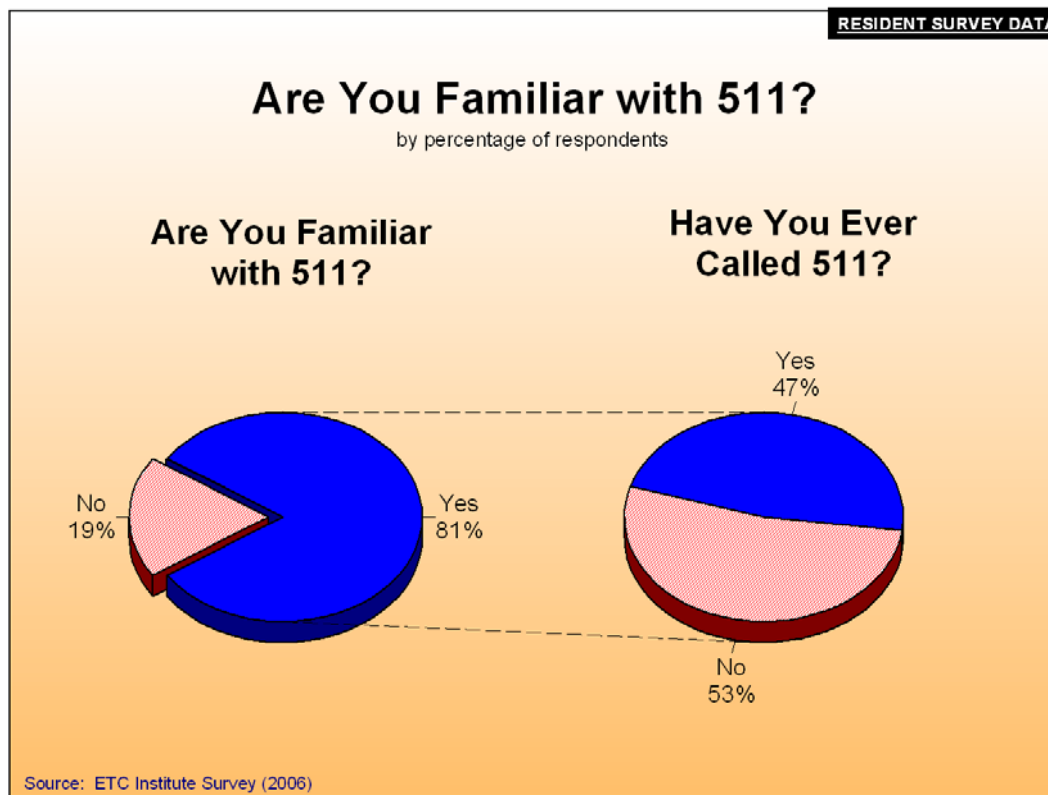
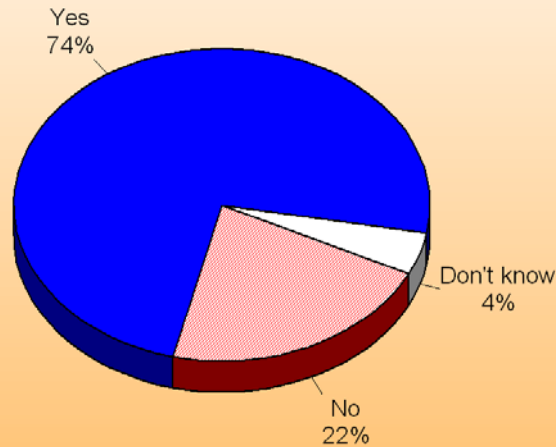


Figure 15: Familiarity with the 511 Traveler Information System

Have You Seen Variable Message Boards Along Interstate Highways in South Dakota?

by percentage of respondents

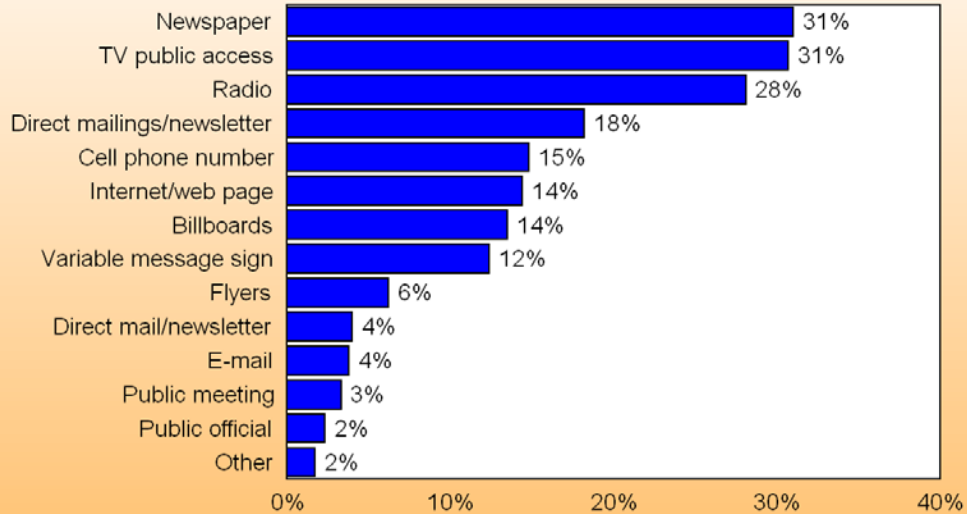


Source: ETC Institute Survey (2006)

Figure 16: Familiarity with Dynamic Message Signs

How Would You Like to Get or Receive Information from the South Dakota DOT?

multiple responses accepted



Source: ETC Institute Survey (2006)

Figure 17: Preferred Methods for Receiving Information

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Among all groups that were surveyed, the general public (residents) were the least likely to have contacted SDDOT during the past two years (Figure 18). Only one in eight (12%) of the residents surveyed had contacted SDDOT during the past two years compared to 19% of the farmers/ranchers, 37% of the truckers/shippers, and 43% of the emergency vehicle operators who were surveyed.

Although only 12% of the residents surveyed and fewer than half of the respondents from each of the key customer groups had contacted an SDDOT employee during the past two years, most of those surveyed who had contacted the Department gave positive ratings for the customer service issues that were assessed on the survey.

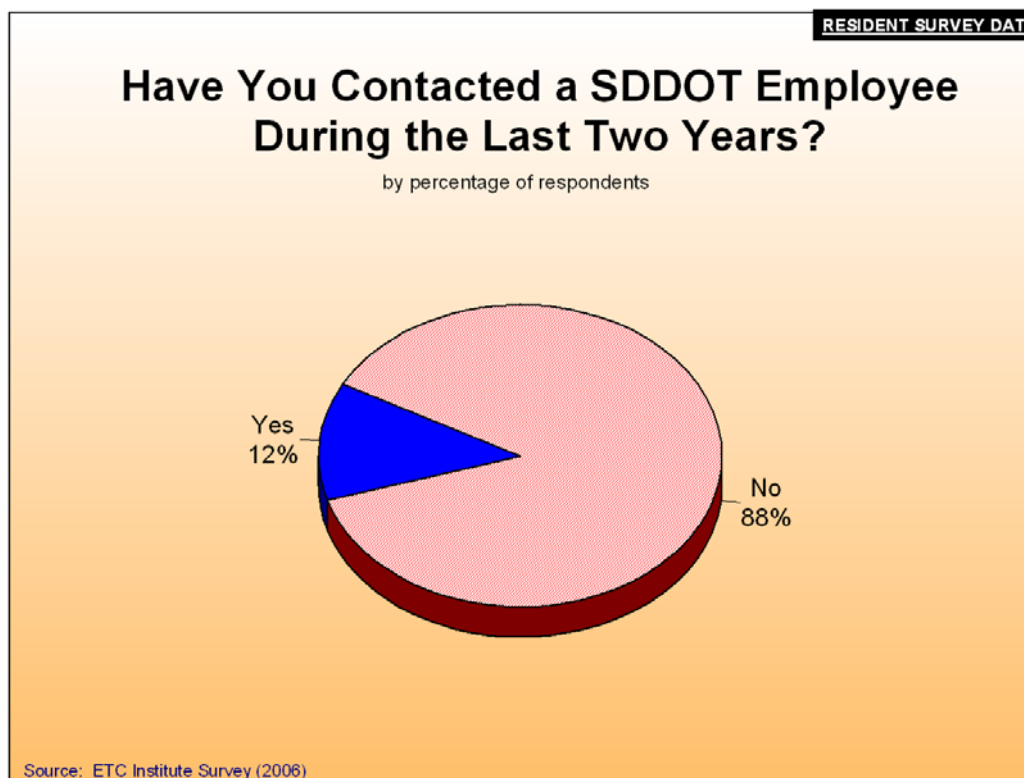


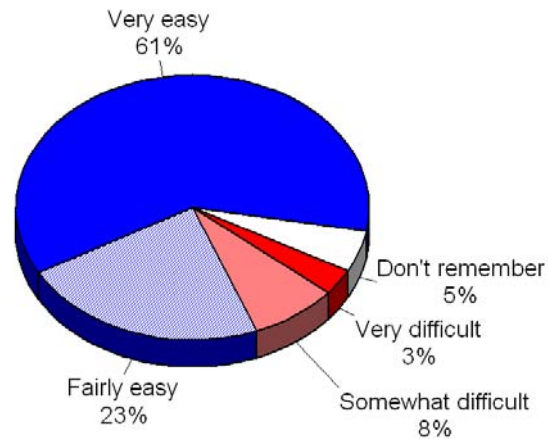
Figure 18: SDDOT Contact During Past Two Years

Among residents who had contacted a SDDOT employee during the past two years, 84% indicated that it was “easy” or “very easy” to contact the right person the last time they contacted the SDDOT; 80% also reported that they were able to get their question answered or get the information needed the last time they contacted the SDDOT.

Among farmers/ranchers who had contacted a SDDOT employee during the past two years, 83% indicated that it was “easy” or “very easy” to contact the right person the last time they contacted the SDDOT. 80% also reported that they were able to get their question answered or get the information needed the last time they contacted the SDDOT.

How Easy Was It to Contact the Right Person the Last Time You Contacted SDDOT?

by percentage of respondents who have contacted a SDDOT employee during the past two years

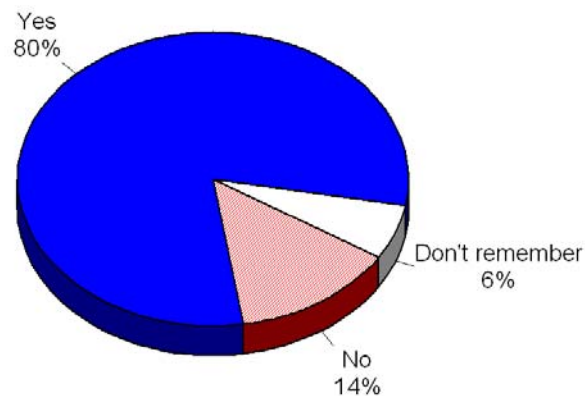


Source: ETC Institute Survey (2006)

Figure 19: Ease of Contacting Right Person at SDDOT

Were You Able to Get Your Question Answered the Last Time You Contacted SDDOT?

by percentage of respondents who have contacted a SDDOT employee during the past two years



Source: ETC Institute Survey (2006)

Figure 20: Success of Getting Questions Answered at SDDOT

Among truckers/shippers who had contacted a SDDOT employee during the past two years, 91% indicated that it was “easy” or “very easy” to contact the right person the last time they contacted the SDDOT; 93% also reported that they were able to get their question answered or get the information needed the last time they contacted the SDDOT.

Among emergency vehicle operators who had contacted a SDDOT employee during the past two years, 81% indicated that it was “easy” or “very easy” to contact the right person the last time they contacted the SDDOT; 93% also reported that they were able to get their question answered or get the information needed the last time they contacted the SDDOT.

CONSTRUCTION AND DETOURS

External stakeholders and members of the Executive Team thought it was important for SDDOT to gather input from the general public and key customer groups about construction and detours on state highways. Some of the major findings from this section of the survey are listed below.

- Most (85%) of the residents surveyed who had experienced delay caused by construction on state highways reported that the length of the delay was acceptable. The percentage of other key customer groups who rated the length of delays as acceptable were: 91% of farmers/ranchers, 86% of truckers/shippers, and 84% of emergency vehicle operators.
- More than two-thirds (67%) of the residents surveyed who had traveled through a detour on state highways described the detour as “easy” or “very easy” to follow. Key customer groups generally gave lower ratings for how easy detours were to follow. The percentage respondents from key customer groups who described detours as being “easy” or “very easy” to follow were: 56% of farmers/ranchers, 60% of truckers/shippers, and 62% of emergency vehicle operators.

TRAVEL CHARACTERISTICS OF RESIDENTS

Although the primary purpose of the Customer Satisfaction Assessment was to assess satisfaction with the services provided by SDDOT, the survey was also designed to gather input about travel characteristics of residents and key customer groups. Some of the major findings from this section of the survey are listed below.

- Only 5% of the resident survey respondents indicated that they had used public transit, such as buses, for mobility within South Dakota during the past 12 months.
- More than one-third (36%) of the resident survey respondents indicated that they drove 15,000 miles or more each year compared to 73% of the truckers/shippers, 65% of the farmers/ranchers, and 32% of the emergency vehicle operators.

How Many Miles Do You Drive Your Vehicle Each Year?

by percentage of respondents

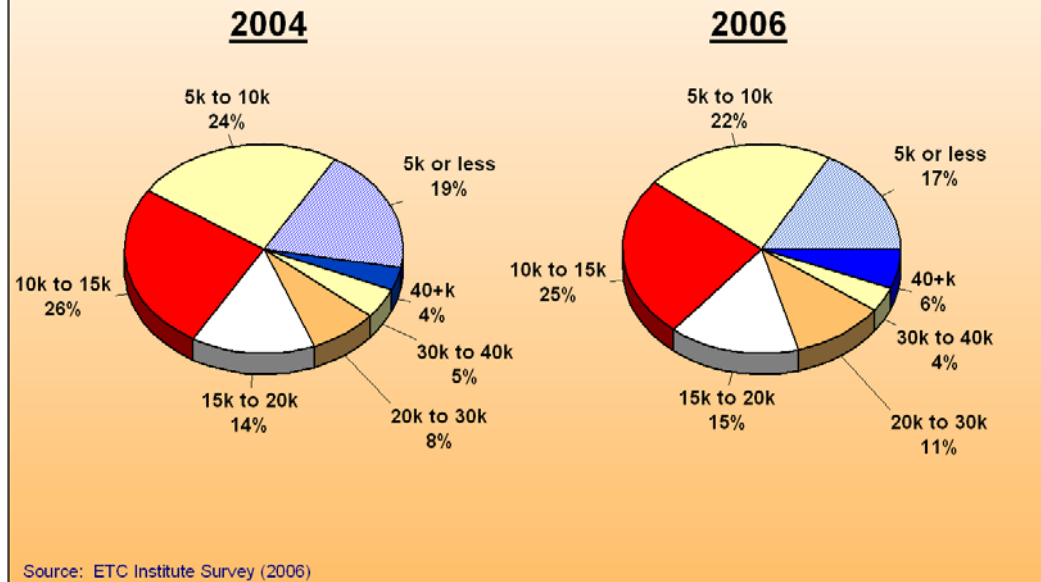


Figure 21: Miles Traveled Per Year by Residents

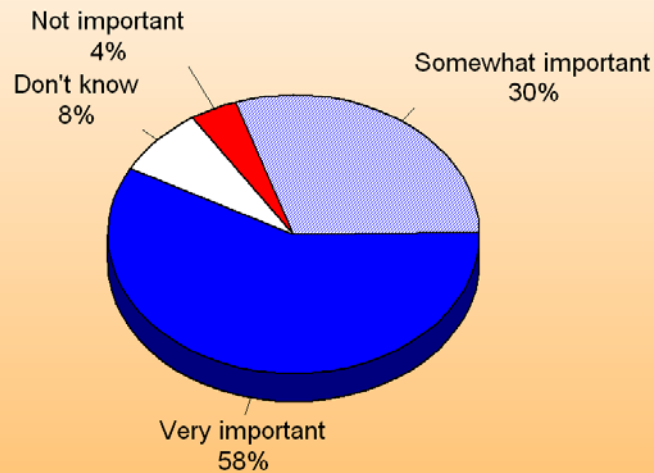
ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Increased public awareness about environmental issues combined with Federal mandates that govern the construction and reconstruction of highway have made it more important than ever for departments of transportation to be perceived as good stewards of the environment. For this reason, the research team included several questions about environmental stewardship on the survey. The major findings are described below.

- Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the residents surveyed indicated that it was “very important” or “somewhat important” that the SDDOT consider the impact transportation improvements will have on the environment.
- Seventy-five percent (75%) of the residents surveyed thought that SDDOT was a good steward of the environment, and 22% did not have an opinion. Only 3% did not think SDDOT was a good steward of the environment.

Importance for SDDOT to Consider the Impact That Transportation Improvements Will Have on the Environment?

by percentage of respondents

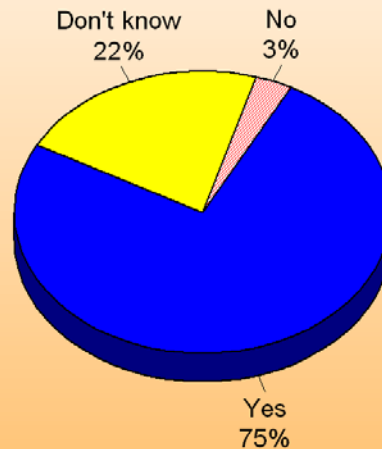


Source: ETC Institute Survey (2006)

Figure 22: Importance of Considering Environmental Impact

Do You Think the SDDOT Is a Good Steward of the Environment?

by percentage of respondents



Source: ETC Institute Survey (2006)

Figure 23: Perceived Environmental Stewardship of SDDOT

OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF AND SATISFACTION WITH SDDOT

At the end of the survey, the research team included several questions to assess overall perceptions and satisfaction with SDDOT. The major findings are listed below.

- More than four-fifths of respondents—84% of residents, 80% of farmers/ranchers, 85% of truckers/shippers, and 89% of emergency vehicle operators—thought SDDOT designs safe highways.
- Approximately three-quarters of respondents—73% of residents, 75% of farmers/rangers, 76% of truckers/shippers, and 75% of emergency vehicle operators—thought SDDOT does a good job planning for future needs.
- A strong majority of respondents—71% of residents, 62% of farmers/ranchers, 64% of truckers/shippers, and 71% of emergency vehicle operators—thought SDDOT is an efficient organization.
- Four-fifths of respondents—81% of residents, 80% of farmers/ranchers, 83% of truckers/shippers, and 85% of emergency vehicles—were satisfied with the overall quality of all services provided by SDDOT:

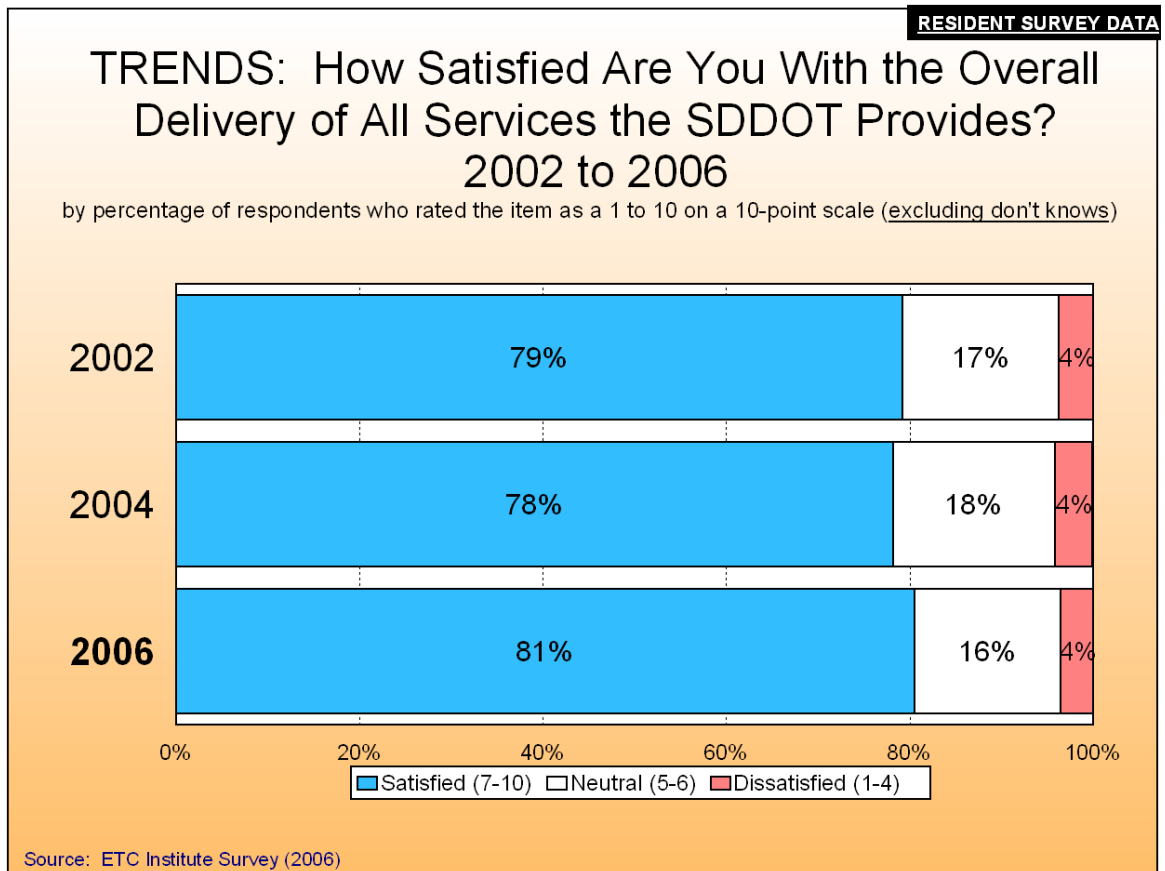


Figure 24: Overall Satisfaction with SDDOT Services

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were made based on the results of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment. The supporting evidence and rationale accompanies each conclusion.

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

SDDOT has made substantial progress in the overall maintenance of the state's highway system.

Supporting Evidence

- There was a significant improvement in 7 of the 13 highway maintenance activities that were assessed. (Changes of 3% or more were statistically significant.) There were no significant decreases in any of the activities that were rated (Figure 7).
- Overall satisfaction with the quality of maintenance on state highways has increased from 80% in 2002 to 85% in 2006. Since 1999 the percentage of residents who indicated that they were dissatisfied with maintenance on state highways has decreased from 16% to 3%.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

SDDOT's capital improvement program has generally been responsive to the needs of residents, but the Department will need to continue assessing customer expectations to ensure future investments are targeted in the appropriate areas.

Supporting Evidence

- Overall satisfaction with the design of state highways improved for 9 of the 12 features that were assessed in 2004 and 2006. The reason the Department's priorities appear to be aligned with the needs of residents is that that three biggest increases in satisfaction occurred for the three features that had the lowest satisfaction ratings in 2004—frequency of rest areas on highways, quality of shoulders on two-lane highways, and the smoothness of two-lane highways. Improvements to shoulders on two-lane highways and smoother two-highways were also the top two highway improvement priorities for residents.
- Overall satisfaction with the quality of lighting at interchanges on Interstates in rural areas decreased significantly, from 68% in 2004 to 63% in 2003. The reasons this is a concern are that this issue was the third most important highway improvement priority for residents and the percentage of residents who selected interchange lighting on Interstates in rural areas as one of their top three priorities for improvement increased from 18% in 2004 to 31% in 2006. SDDOT does not currently appear to have the resources available to address this growing concern.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

SDDOT has enhanced perceptions of highway safety, but there are opportunities to enhance perceptions of travel safety, particularly in rural areas.

Supporting Evidence:

- Residents were six times more likely to think that South Dakota highways had gotten safer over the past five years than they were to think that state highways had gotten more dangerous (47% safer vs. 8% more dangerous).
- Eighty percent (80%) of those surveyed indicated that they felt safe driving in work zones along state highways. Only 4% felt unsafe and the remaining 16% gave a neutral rating.
- Eighty-four percent (84%) of those surveyed agreed with the statement that “SDDOT designs safe highways.” Only 3% disagreed, and 13% gave a neutral rating.
- Although most of those surveyed indicated that they felt safe when traveling on state highways in South Dakota, several of the priorities for improvement that were identified by residents and key customer groups related to safety issues. Safety related improvements that were identified as priorities included improvements to shoulders on rural two-lane highways, lighting at interchanges on Interstates in rural areas, removing debris from highways, and roadside striping.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Although most customers think SDDOT is easy to contact and responsive to their needs, the Department should continue to identify ways to enhance its ability to be responsive to public and key customer groups. SDDOT should continually evaluate the way the Department responds to customers who contact the agency to ensure the Department maintains the high customer service ratings that have been achieved. If managers do not continue to emphasize the importance of being responsive to customers, overall satisfaction will decrease.

Supporting Evidence

- More than 80% of the residents and each of the key customer groups surveyed reported that it was “easy” or “very easy” to contact employees at SDDOT
- At least 80% of the residents and each of the key customer groups that were surveyed reported that they were able to get their question answered or get the information they needed the last time they contacted the SDDOT.

COMMUNICATIONS

SDDOT efforts to communicate with the public have improved, but there is a need to do more and target information to specific customer groups.

Supporting Evidence

- The percentage of residents who agreed with the statement that “SDDOT considers and values the opinions of the public” has increased from 58% in 1999 to 71% in 2006.
- Nearly three-fourths (74%) of the residents surveyed have seen variable message boards along state highways. In 2004, this question was not included on the survey because the signs were so new.

- In 2006, four-fifths (81%) of the residents surveyed were familiar with the *511 Traveler Information System* compared to 73% in 2004.
- In 2006, 49% of the residents surveyed were familiar with the Department's website compared to 40% in 2004.
- In 2006, 83% of those surveyed who had used the Department's website thought the website was easy to use compared to 78% in 2004.
- 73% of those surveyed gave positive ratings (ratings of 7 to 10 on a 10-point scale where 10 means "very good") for the Department's efforts to keep citizens informed of planned highway construction and maintenance activities.

While overall satisfaction ratings have increased, many residents and key customer groups are not aware of the communication services SDDOT provides. More than half (51%) of the residents surveyed did not know that SDDOT has a website. Among key customer groups, 64% of farmers/ranchers, 39% of truckers/shippers, and 34% of emergency vehicle operators did not know about SDDOT's website. In addition, even though the majority of those surveyed were familiar with *511*, fewer than half indicated that they had actually used the service. To reach residents and key customers, SDDOT may need to use communication and outreach efforts that are targeted to the interests of specific customer groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The development of the recommendations for action was a three-step process. First, the research team analyzed the survey data and developed a “performance needs assessment matrix” that was used to identify areas of concern for the Department. Second, members of the Executive Team identified a list of “potential priorities” for the Department based on the results of the survey. Third, members of the Executive Team discussed the list of “potential priorities” and selected four “Priority Action Areas” to focus on over the next 2-3 years.

STEP ONE: THE PERFORMANCE-NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In addition to the findings presented previously in this report, the research team conducted a performance-needs assessment to identify maintenance and highway design priorities for the Department based on the results of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment. The results of this analysis are provided below.

MAINTENANCE PRIORITIES

One method for using customer satisfaction data to help set organization priorities involves an assessment of both how well the organization is performing in an area and how important the activity is to the customers. Figure 25 shows the relative importance and satisfaction of each of the maintenance activities that were rated. Items on the right side of the chart were generally more important, while items on the left side were generally less important. Similarly, items listed on the top of the chart rated above average in satisfaction, which items listed on the bottom of the chart rated below average.

Based on the distribution in the chart, the areas that should receive the highest priority from the South Dakota Department of Transportation are those in the lower right quadrant labeled “areas of concern.” The items in this quadrant are generally more important to residents, but the agency is underperforming relative to customer expectations. Based on the results of this analysis, SDDOT should maintain or increase its emphasis on:

- removal of debris on highways
- maintenance of roadway surfaces
- roadside striping
- shoulder maintenance
- snow removal

HIGHWAY DESIGN PRIORITIES

Using the same method that was just described, the research team analyzed the results of the survey to identify highway design issues that should be addressed. Figure 26 shows the relative importance and satisfaction of each of the maintenance activities that were rated.

Based on the distribution in the chart, the areas that should receive the highest priority from the South Dakota Department of Transportation are those in the lower right quadrant labeled “areas of concern.” The items in this quadrant are generally more important to residents, but the agency is underperforming relative to customer expectations.

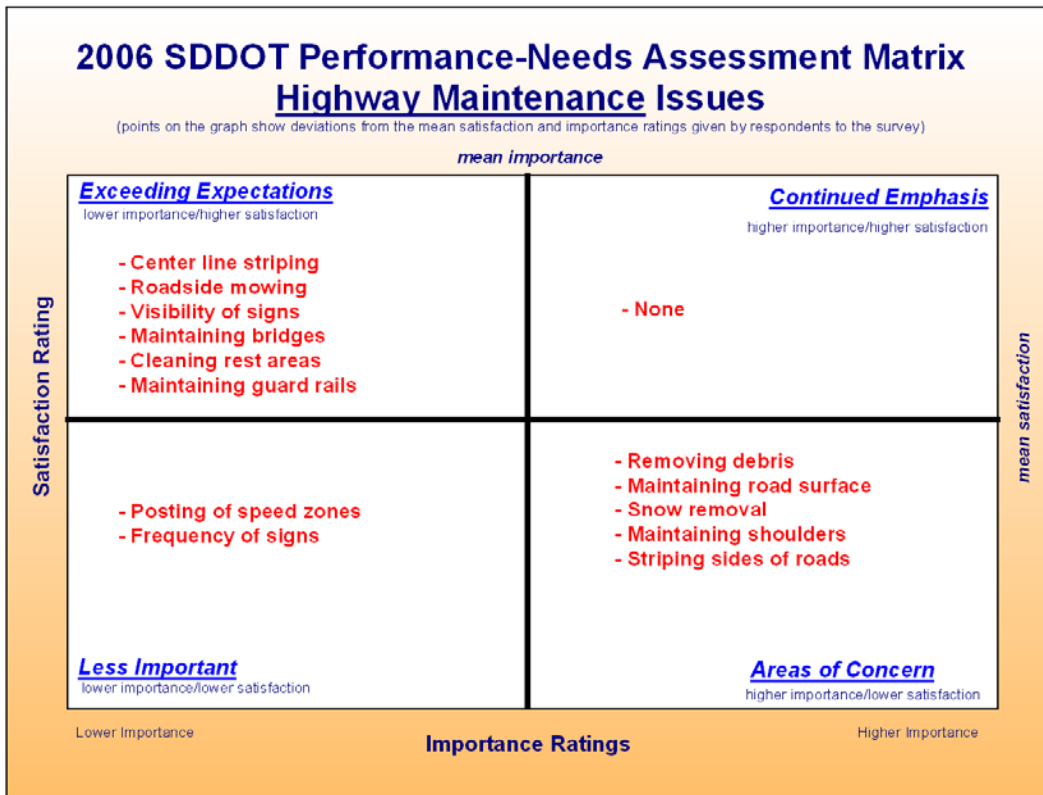


Figure 25: Highway Maintenance Performance-Needs Assessment

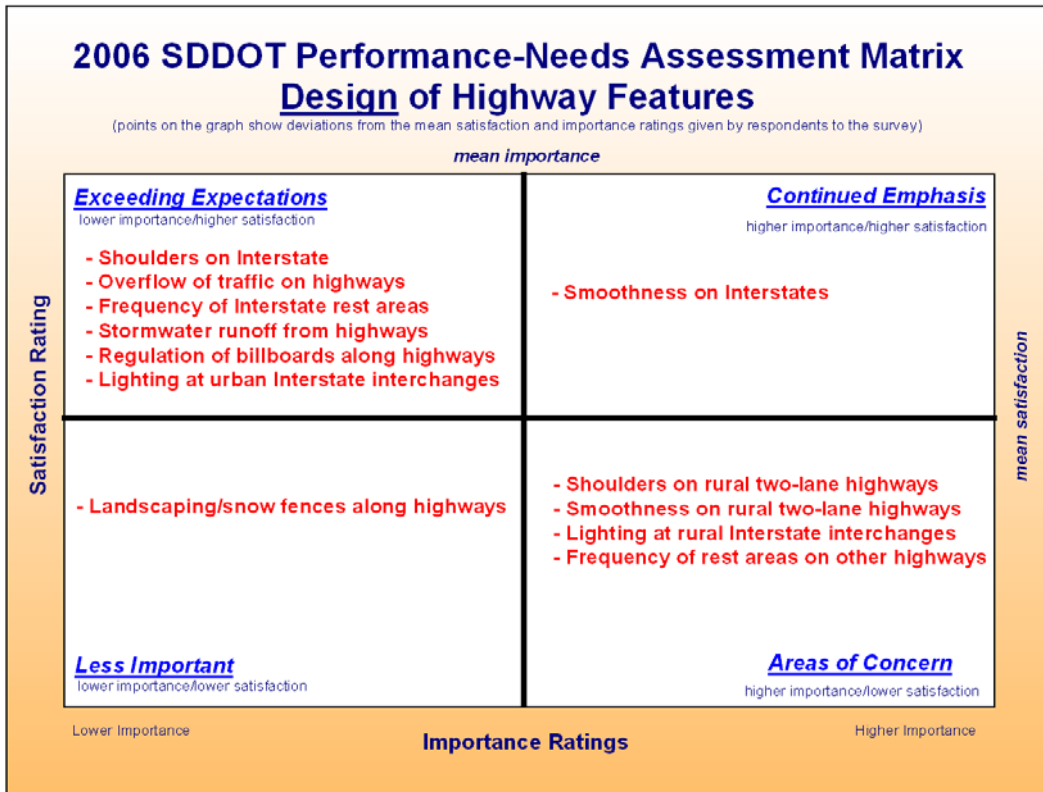


Figure 26: Highway Design Performance-Needs Assessment

Based on the results of this analysis, SDDOT should maintain or increase its emphasis in the following areas:

- shoulders on 2-lane rural highways
- smoothness on rural 2-lane highways
- lighting at rural interchanges on Interstates
- frequency of rest areas on non-Interstate highways

STEP TWO: IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL PRIORITIES

Based on the results of the surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews, members of the Executive Team participated in a Consensus Building Session to brainstorm a list of potential priorities. A description of the issues that were identified is provided below.

DEBRIS REMOVAL

Given the low population densities in many parts of the state, this will not be an easy issue to address. However, it is an area that the Department could positively affect in the short term by reallocating resources and getting employees and contractors to support this effort. Overall satisfaction with the removal of debris on state highways in South Dakota rated 5% below the regional average for North Central States. In addition, removal of debris had the highest percentage of respondents who selected it as the most important maintenance area for SDDOT to address over the next two years. The relatively low satisfaction rating combined with relatively high importance rating is the reason the removal of debris from highways was identified as a Priority Area for the Department.

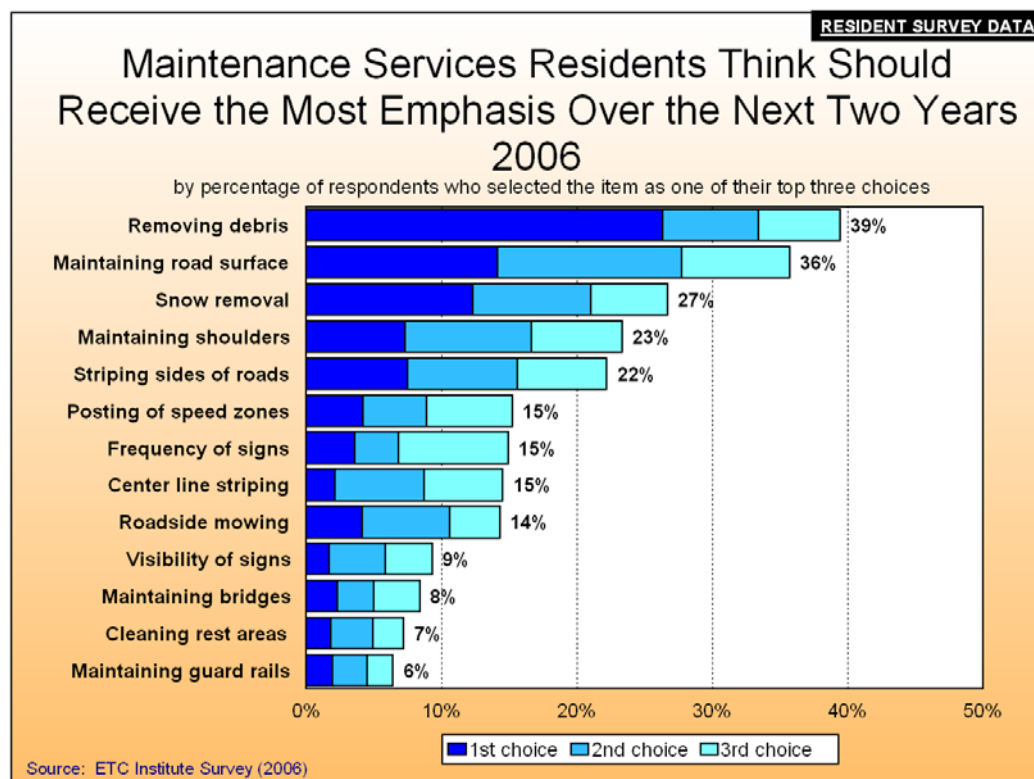


Figure 27: Maintenance Services to Emphasize

ROAD SURFACE MAINTENANCE AND SNOW & ICE REMOVAL

Overall satisfaction ratings with the maintenance of highway surfaces and snow removal have improved over the past five years. In fact, overall satisfaction with the maintenance of highway surfaces rated 19% above other states in the North Central U.S. Although overall satisfaction with these two areas have improved, residents still think the Department should place a strong emphasis on these areas over the next two years. Maintenance of highway surfaces was rated as the second most important maintenance area. Snow removal was the third most important maintenance area. As a result, continued emphasis on these two areas was identified as a Priority Area for the Department over the next two years.

SHOULDERS AND SMOOTHNESS ON RURAL 2-LANE HIGHWAYS

Residents placed a significantly higher level of importance on these two design features than all other highway design features that were rated.

LIGHTING AT RURAL INTERCHANGES ON INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS

Compared to other states in the North Central U.S., residents of South Dakota were slightly less satisfied with lighting at rural interchanges on Interstates than residents in other North Central States. The comparatively low satisfaction rating combined with relatively high importance rating is the reason lighting at rural interchanges was identified as a Priority Area for the Department.

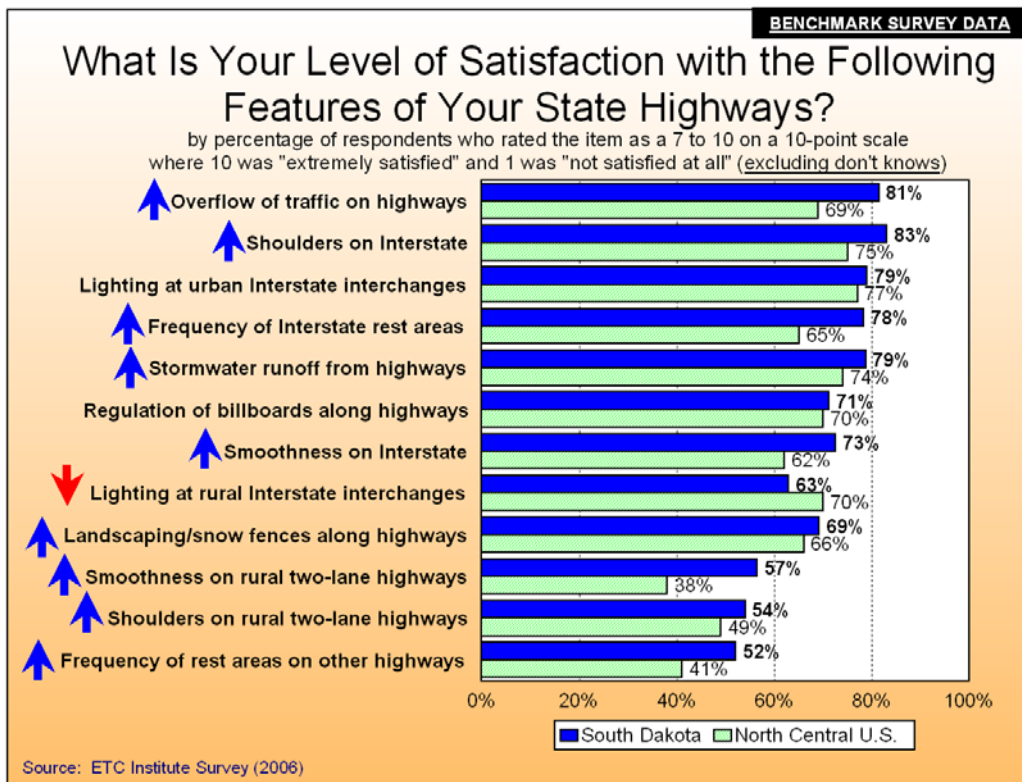


Figure 28: Satisfaction with Highway Features

SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

Many highway improvement priorities relate to safety issues such as; lighting on rural interchanges, shoulders on two-lane highways, debris removal, and roadside striping. Overall satisfaction with roadside

striping had the third lowest rating of all the thirteen maintenance activities that were assessed. Among thirteen maintenance activities that were rated, residents of South Dakota thought roadside striping was the fifth most important area to emphasize over the next two years. The relatively low satisfaction ratings combined with relatively high importance ratings is the reason roadside striping was identified as one of the Priority Areas for the Department.

PREFERRED METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

As part of this effort, the Department should begin tailoring both the content and method of communication the Department uses to communicate with key customer groups. Although SDDOT has done a good job of communicating with constituents, the Department should realize that the preferred methods of communication differed significantly between residents and key customer groups as shown in Figure 29.

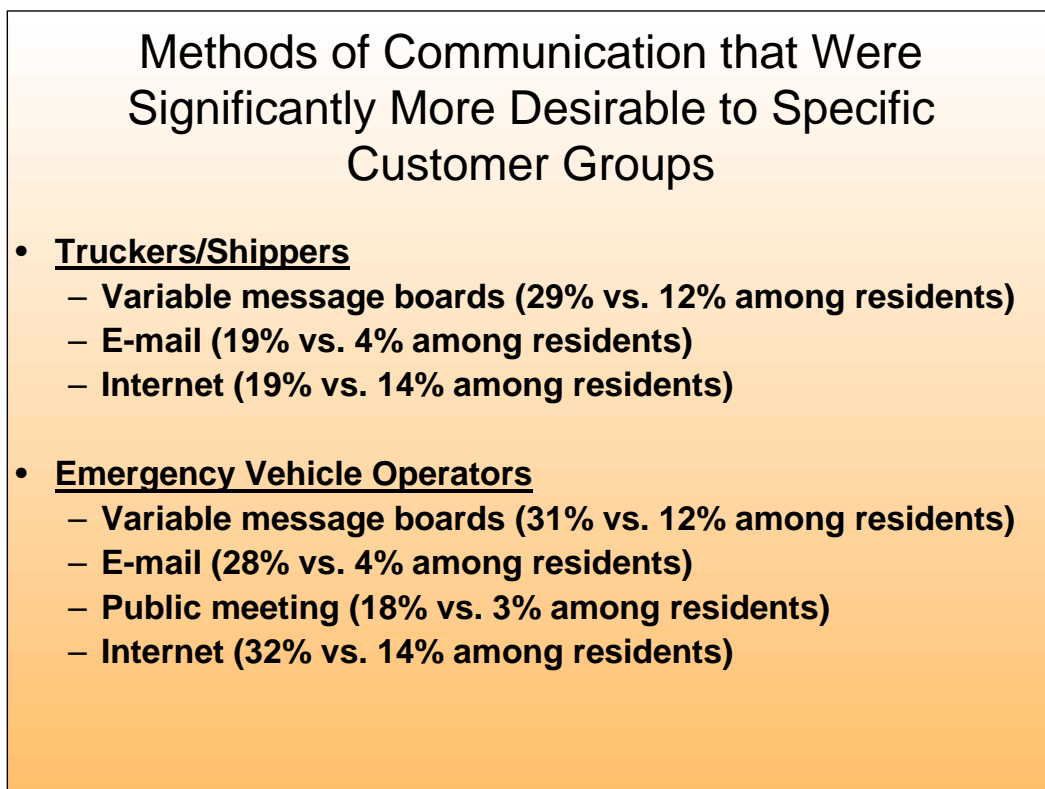


Figure 29: Preferred Methods of Communication

COMMUNICATION EMPHASIS

There was strong correlation between overall satisfaction with the Department's overall performance and the ratings residents gave for the quality of communication. This finding suggests that improved communication enhances the overall perception that customers have of the Department, which is the reason the Department should continue emphasizing communication over the next two years.

COMMUNICATION OF INITIATIVES

Communicating initiatives that are already a part of the Department’s planning and development process (i.e. debris removal initiatives) to the public is an effective, inexpensive technique to quickly raise customer satisfaction.

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM PRESERVATION

Nine (9) out of ten (10) residents surveyed thought it was either “very important” or “somewhat important” to maintain the existing highway infrastructure. In addition to this finding, nearly half (48%) of the residents surveyed thought that maintaining the existing highway system should be the number one transportation priority over the next five years. Because the importance placed on maintaining the existing transportation system was so high, continued emphasis on this area is essential. As a part of this effort, the Department should examine and research existing and potential pavement management techniques and materials.

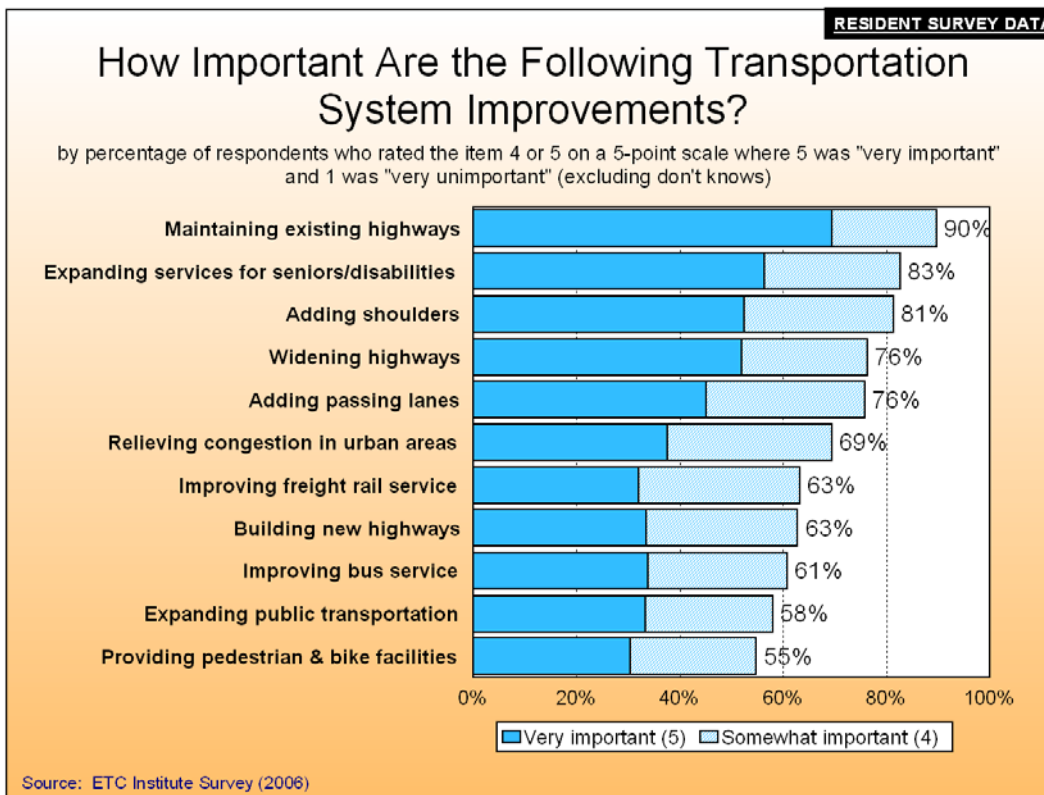


Figure 30: Importance of Transportation System Improvements

TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR SENIORS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Eighty-three percent (83%) of the residents surveyed thought it was either “very important” or “somewhat important” to expand transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities (see Figure 30 above). This importance that residents place on this issue suggests that the Department should continue its efforts to improve access to transportation for persons with disabilities and seniors who are no longer able to drive.

The frequency of rest areas along non-Interstate highways was the only “area of concern” on the Performance-Needs Assessment Matrix (see Figure 26) that was not identified as a potential priority by the Executive Team. When compared to other needs that were identified in the survey, none of the members of the Executive Team thought this issue should be a priority for the Department.

STEP 3: IDENTIFYING PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION

After members of the Executive Team had reached consensus about the “potential priorities” described above, the facilitator asked the participants to select up to three issues as the top priorities for action over the next 2-3 years. Based on the rankings that were provided, the members of the Executive Team were able to narrow the list to four “Priority Areas for Action” that are listed below. In some cases, the “potential priorities” were grouped together.

MAINTENANCE & PRESERVATION OF EXISTING HIGHWAY SYSTEM

SDDOT should emphasize the maintenance and preservation of the existing highway system.

Specific actions that would support this recommendation include:

- Completing the pavement management research project that is currently being conducted by the Department and implementing the recommendations.
- Increasing funding for resurfacing projects.
- Ensuring that projects that support the preservation of the existing system are given a high priority in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.

LONG-RANGE SAFETY PLAN

SDDOT should develop a long-range plan to address safety concerns related to travel on highways in rural areas of South Dakota. Specific issues that should be addressed in this plan would include:

- Ways to address and fund investments related to the public’s concern about the lack of lighting at interchanges in rural areas and the need for night-time visibility enhancements at rural Interstate interchanges.
- Ways to address and fund improvements that will address the public’s concern about narrow lanes and the lack of shoulders on many two-lane highways in rural areas.
- The need to give SDDOT Regions some flexibility in the planning and implementation of safety-related projects, such as the ability to make some shoulder improvements.

OPERATIONAL SAFETY INVESTMENTS

SDDOT should continue to make operational investments that support travel safety on all highways in South Dakota a top priority. Specific operational activities that should be emphasized by the Department include:

- Removing debris from state highways. The Department has made significant progress in this area, but there is still room for improvement.

- Clearing snow and ice during winter storms. Overall satisfaction with snow and ice removal efforts was high among all customer groups, but the Department's ability to respond to major storms could be enhanced with (1) the development of a plan for extended hours during major storms and (2) the enhancement of the Department's winter reserve program that recruits and retains additional operators who can assist with snow removal operations during a major storm.
- Enhancing the quality of roadside striping. Although satisfaction with roadside striping increased significantly from 2004 to 2006, this issue continues to be a high priority of residents and key customer groups.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

SDDOT should enhance the quality of external communication with customers. Specific actions that would support this recommendation include:

- SDDOT should proactively educate the public and key customer groups about initiatives that have been implemented to respond to concerns that were identified on previous customer satisfaction surveys, such as the debris removal initiatives that were started in response to the results of the 2004 survey.
- The Department should enhance efforts to communicate SDDOT priorities and the rationale for these priorities to the public and key customer groups. This should include information about the costs associated with major investments and the tradeoffs between investments.
- Increasing awareness and use of the Department's website. Although use of the Department's website increased from 2004 to 2006, fewer than half of the residents surveyed knew that SDDOT had a website.
- SDDOT should review its process for assigning communication responsibilities during major construction projects. The person who is responsible for communication efforts should be clearly identified at the beginning of each project.
- SDDOT should continue to actively communicate with key customer groups. As part of this effort, the Department should begin tailoring both the content and method of communication the Department uses to communicate with each key customer group.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

- By March 1, 2007, SDDOT should issue press releases to the media and informational notices to leaders of key customer groups to report the findings of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment and announce the Department's plans to respond to the findings.
- By April 1, 2007, SDDOT should ensure that the results of the survey are communicated to all employees in the Department.
- By May 1, 2007, the Executive Team should require subordinate managers from the Area Engineer level and above to identify specific ways that they will use the results of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment to improve organizational performance over the next two years.

- By November 1, 2007, SDDOT managers from the Area Engineer level and above should provide an update to their immediate supervisor regarding how they have used the results of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment to improve their work unit's performance as part of their performance review process.
- In the spring of 2008, SDDOT should begin the process of reassessing its performance again.

SUMMARY AND BENEFITS

Although the short-term benefits of customer surveys and strategic planning initiatives are difficult to measure, the long-term impact of such processes can have a dramatic and lasting impact on an organization. The results of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Assessment clearly demonstrate that SDDOT's on-going efforts to gather input from customers has had a very positive impact on public perceptions of the Department. The Department's priorities are generally aligned with the needs of its customers, and overall satisfaction ratings have improved in almost every area that has been rated over the past seven years.

By conducting surveys every two years, SDDOT has been able to provide its senior managers and employees with objective feedback from residents and the key customer groups on a regular basis. This has created a corporate culture that is customer-oriented, which has helped the Department meet the needs of its customers.

Although the customer satisfaction survey should not be the only tool the Department uses, it is a very important tool because it helps the Department balance feedback that would otherwise only be provided by special interest groups or those who have a direct stake in the outcome of major transportation planning and investment decisions. The Customer Satisfaction Assessment ensures that the needs of the general public and key customers who do not interact with SDDOT on a regular basis are incorporated into the Department's decision-making process.

Despite significant progress, the Department still has room for improvement. To continue achieving success, SDDOT will need to respond to the priorities that were identified during this assessment and be prepared to respond to new issues that will emerge in the years ahead. SDDOT should continue conducting the survey every two years. Even if no change in the survey results occur, the overall assessment process engages community leaders, the general public, and key customer groups in a manner that demonstrates the Department's commitment to customer satisfaction. Knowing that things have not changed can be just as important as knowing that they have. This process will help build long-term customer loyalty, which will provide immeasurable benefits to the Department in the years ahead.