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**SD Department of Transportation
Office of Research**

SDDOT 2004 Statewide Customer Satisfaction Assessment

**Study SD2003-12
Executive Summary**

Prepared by

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16. Abstract <p>This report summarizes, by user segment and region, perceptions of the South Dakota Department of Transportation's performance in delivering services to citizens across South Dakota. It is the fourth in a series of surveys that tracks and monitors attitudes and needs among SDDOT customers. This is the second in the series of surveys that gathers data from all key user segments: citizens, visitors, farmers, emergency vehicle operators and trucker/shippers. A subset of surveyed legislators (70) is treated as a sixth segment. The study includes opinions of 1,740 South Dakota residents representing the six user segments.</p> <p>Key objectives that guided this research were 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; assess the Department's progress in addressing customer concerns through development and execution of its strategic plan; and identify specific actions the Department can take to improve its performance and the perception by the public and key customer groups regarding that performance.</p> <p>By assessing the public's opinions of the SDDOT's performance and understanding its significance, this research provides the framework for development of a management action plan for Department response.</p>			
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Executive Summary

Purpose

In 2004, the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) conducted a Customer Satisfaction Assessment of residents and key customer groups, including truckers, out-of-state visitors, state legislators, 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 strategic planning process and will be incorporated into the Department's 2005 Strategic Plan. SDDOT previously completed statewide Customer Satisfaction Assessments in 1997, 1999 and 2002.

Objectives

The 2004 SDDOT Customer Satisfaction Assessment had three primary objectives.

- **Objective One:** *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.*
- **Objective Two:** *To assess the Department's progress in addressing customer concerns through the development and execution of its strategic plan.*
- **Objective Three:** *To identify actions that SDDOT can take to improve its performance and the perception its customers have of the Department.*

Research Approach

The 2004 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. Surveys were conducted to obtain statistically representative data from six key customer groups including: residents, legislators, shippers/truckers, emergency vehicle operators, out of state visitors, and farmers/ranchers.

The survey format involved the administration of a core set of questions to all groups with supplemental questions that were tailored to individual groups. Each of 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 April 2004. The information from the internal and external interviews was used to develop questions for the focus groups that were administered in May 2004.

Focus Groups

During May 2004, ETC Institute facilitated a total of 12 focus groups with residents and key customer groups of the South Dakota Department of Transportation (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 June and July 2004. 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 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 five major customer groups: (1) state legislators (2) truckers/shippers, (3) emergency vehicle operators, (4) farmers/ranchers, and (5) visitors. The goal was to obtain a total of 600 completed surveys from persons in these five groups. The actual number of completed surveys

was 726, including 70 state legislators, 168 truckers, 101 emergency vehicle operators, 156 farmers, and 231 visitors.

- *Resident Survey Methodology.* The resident survey was administered to a stratified random sample of 1170 South Dakota residents during the months of June and July 2004. 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 1170 residents has a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/- 2.9%. The sample included 156 farmers and ranchers.
- *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, Kansas and Missouri. 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 2004 resident survey to the results from other states.

Significant Findings

Some of the major findings of the 2004 Customer Satisfaction Assessment are provided below. The findings are grouped according to the topic areas that were addressed on the survey.

Highway Safety

- Residents of South Dakota were four times more likely to report that they thought state highways in South Dakota had become “safer” over the past five years than they were to report that state highways had become more “dangerous.” Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the residents surveyed indicated that South Dakota highways were “much safer” or “somewhat safer” than they were five years ago; 47% rated highways safety “about the same”; 9% thought highways were “more dangerous” and 5% did not have an opinion.
- Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the residents surveyed thought that the SDDOT did a good job of signing in work zones on state highways.

Highway Maintenance

- Overall satisfaction with the quality of maintenance on state highways has increased significantly over the past five years. In 1999, 62% 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 2004, 87% of the resident surveyed indicated that they were satisfied with the overall quality of maintenance on state highways.

- 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 areas that had the lowest levels of satisfaction were removing roadway and shoulder debris, maintaining the surface of highways, and striping on the sides of road.
- Areas of maintenance that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next two years were: (1) maintaining the surface of highways, (2) removing roadway and shoulder debris, (3) plowing, salting, and sanding of snow covered roadways, and (4) striping on the sides of roads.

Construction and Detours

- Most (87%) of the residents surveyed who had experienced a delay caused by construction on state highways reported that the length of the delay was acceptable.
- Three-fourths (73%) of the residents surveyed who had traveled through a detour on state highways described the detour as “easy” or “very easy” to follow.

Highway Design

- Highway features that had the **highest** levels of satisfaction from residents were: the flow of traffic on state highways, the adequacy of shoulders on Interstate and divided 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, and the smoothness on rural 2-lane highways.
- 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: repairing and maintaining existing highways (56%), widening highways to accommodate large truck and agricultural equipment (37%), expanding transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities (34%), adding shoulders to highways (33%) and adding passing lanes to state highways (29%). Some customer groups placed significantly more importance on various transportation priorities than other groups. For example, 24% of the state legislators surveyed thought improvements to freight rail service should be a top priority compared to just 8% of the residents surveyed.
- Residents were nearly twice as likely to think that rural two-lane highways (33%) should receive priority for additional funding than they were to think Interstate highways (17%) should receive priority for additional funding.
- Nearly half (44%) of the residents surveyed thought that funding for state highways should be “increased”, 41% thought it should “stay the same,” and 14% didn't have an opinion. Only 1% indicated that the current level of funding should be “reduced”.

Overall Perceptions of SDDOT

- When asked how the overall quality of SDDOT services has changed compared to five years ago, 41% of the residents surveyed reported that it was “better”, 44% “about the same”, 2% “worse,” and 13% did not have an opinion. Only 2% of those surveyed thought the overall quality of SDDOT services was worse than it was five years ago.
- More than three-quarters (78%) of the residents surveyed thought that SDDOT is an efficient organization.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were made based on the results of the 2004 Customer Satisfaction Assessment. The supporting evidence and rationale for each conclusion is provided in the main body of this report.

- Conclusion #1: SDDOT has made substantial progress in the area of Customer Satisfaction (Goal Area 1), but there is still room for improvement.
- Conclusion #2: Residents and key customer groups generally thought state highways in South Dakota are safer today than they were five years ago, but there are still opportunities to enhance traffic safety on state highways (Goal Area 2).
- Conclusion #3: Environmental Stewardship (Goal Area 3) is important to residents, but many residents are not aware of what SDDOT's is doing in this area.
- Conclusion #4: The Department's capital improvement (Goal Area 4) program has generally been responsive to the needs of customers, but the Department will need to continue to reassess customer needs to ensure future investments continue to be targeted in the appropriate areas.
- Conclusion #5: SDDOT's communication efforts (Goal Area 5) have had a positive impact and the Department should begin tailoring its communication strategies 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 2004 Customer Satisfaction Assessment, the research team has limited recommendations for improvement to the "10 Priority Areas" that are listed below. The rationale for these recommendations is provided in the "Recommendations Section" of the main report.

1. SDDOT should increase its emphasis regarding the removal of debris on state highways.
2. SDDOT should improve the quality of centerline and roadside striping on state highways.
3. SDDOT should continue to place a strong emphasis on maintaining roadway surfaces and removing snow/ice from state highways.

4. SDDOT should place a higher priority on the development of shoulders and improving smoothness on rural 2-lane highways.
5. SDDOT should examine ways to enhance lighting at rural interchanges on Interstate highways.
6. SDDOT should continue its efforts to actively communicate with the public and 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 key customer groups.
7. SDDOT should continue to make itself accessible to customers via public meetings, the website, 511 information systems, and other methods.
8. SDDOT should proactively address environmental concerns as part of the Department's planning and project development process. The Department should also encourage contractors and other external partners to do the same.
9. SDDOT should ensure that the 2005 Strategic Plan includes provisions to address the transportation needs of the State's elderly and disabled population.
10. SDDOT should ensure that the 2005 Strategic Plan is updated to address the Department's role in supporting non-highway transportation modes, such as rail, airport, and public transportation services.

Implementation Schedule

- **By December 1, 2004**, SDDOT should issue press releases to the media and informational notices to leaders of key customer groups to report the findings of the 2004 Customer Satisfaction Assessment and announce the Department's plans to respond to the findings.
- **By January 1, 2005**, SDDOT should ensure that the results of the survey are communicated to all employees in the Department.
- **By February 1, 2005**, 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 2004 Customer Satisfaction Assessment to improve organizational performance over the next two years.
- **During the Spring of 2005**, SDDOT should complete an update to its Strategic Plan to reflect the priorities that were identified in this assessment.

- **During the Spring and Summer of 2005**, SDDOT should begin working with external customer groups to identify new funding sources for capital improvements to the State's highway system. This should include discussions with state legislators and other external partners about funding for a new transportation program.
- **By the Summer of 2005**, SDDOT's budget should reflect increased funding in areas that were identified as priorities for residents and key customer groups.
- **During the Fall of 2005**, 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 2004 Customer Satisfaction Assessment to improve their work unit's performance as part of their performance review process.
- **In the Spring of 2006**: 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 2004 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. In order 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.