

OPINION / MARKET RESEARCH

Description

Meaningful public engagement in a transportation project requires a full and complete understanding of the opinions held by the people who will be affected by that project. Before a public will lend its support to a transportation improvement project, they will want to first be assured that:

- The project is needed.
- It represents the best available option.
- The responsible agency is spending money wisely and effectively.
- There will be a direct personal benefit for them that is worth whatever cost is involved.

The most direct way to know where any public stands on a project is to ask them—through opinion polls, focus groups, interviews, or some combination of these. Public opinion polling can secure the views of a large population through a sample of at least 500 travelers, residents, etc. Interviews with a similar sample size can also render an accurate reading of public opinion. Focus groups can go beyond a reading of “what” people think to gain a more substantive understanding of “why” they believe as they do.

Target Market

Public opinion polling is most useful in gauging the public’s sentiment about broad topics. For instance, an agency may want to conduct market research about a new policy. Market research is necessary to know your audience. Market research can help an agency connect issues to specific audiences. Opinion research can be conducted for before-after studies, as a snapshot in time, or to show how opinions have changed.

How Will This Help?

- Illustrates any beliefs, concerns or opposition held by an affected audience.
- Offers insight that will help agencies shape messages and determine specific engagement and communication strategies.
- Provides information that can help to counter misinformation.



Cost:	Moderate to High
Time:	Near & Long
Impact:	Corridor/Local/ Region
Who:	Subcontractor
Hurdles:	Population Samples

Success Stories

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) heavily invests in market research because it aligns with the strategic vision of the department including a commitment to “upholding public needs.” MnDOT spends approximately \$750,000 a year on market research.

Implementation Issues

Agencies should use research methods and instruments that are created by experienced researchers to protect against any biases, as well as any challenges that may be presented by opposition groups. Ongoing public opinion and market research requires a leadership commitment to engage in the action itself, use the information in decision-making, and demonstrate that public opinions are being heard, respected, and acted upon.