

Virginia Poll Report

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Hampton Roads Regional Transportation Poll

I. Hampton Roads voters want HRBT expanded, mass transit and light rail, Third Crossing; Uncertain about how to fund improvements

By a wide margin, voters in Hampton Roads feel that traffic congestion in the region is high and that it has gotten worse in the past five years. When asked to rate which projects should be the top priorities for the region, voters ranked expanding the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel and improving and expanding mass transit, including light rail, as their top picks. Building a Third Bridge-Tunnel crossing came in third. A strong majority also generally supports increased funding for transportation improvements in the region. When asked about specific funding options voters by a slight margin indicated a preference for tolls and an increase in the statewide sales tax. Most voters oppose a statewide gas tax increase as well as regional sales or gas taxes. Regardless of the way transportation improvements are funded, voters by a wide margin indicate a preference for transportation funding to be put into a “lockbox” to guarantee that it will be used for transportation improvement in the region.

These findings are from a regional survey on transportation jointly sponsored by the Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University and the Hampton Roads Center for Civic Engagement. The poll was conducted April 16-20, 2008 with 500 registered voters in the Hampton Roads region. The margin of error is +/- 4.38% at the 95% confidence level. The poll was commissioned to provide regional voter input for consideration during the anticipated special session of the General Assembly in June.

Jim Oliver, Chairman of the Hampton Roads Center for Civic Engagement, said about the decision to do the survey, “We hope this information can be useful in the search for common ground for transportation solutions for our region. It appears to us that voters have identified several specific acceptable paths to explore through further dialogue. The recent court ruling did not cancel our mutual obligations and we think the survey shows strong public support for continuing the efforts. In the months to come, the HRCCE will find additional means to enable the public’s involvement in productive consideration of our region’s transportation options.”

II. Voters say traffic congestion is a problem and has gotten worse; support increased funding

When asked their views on the level of traffic congestion in Hampton Roads, 89% of respondents say that it is high or very high, and when asked whether it has gotten worse or better in the past five years, 77% say worse and only 1% say better. Nearly 7 of every 10 respondents generally supports increased funding for transportation improvements. “These numbers are simply overwhelming...voters see traffic congestion in Hampton Roads as a problem that is getting worse, and because of that they generally support increased funding for transportation improvements,” said Quentin Kidd, Director of the Center for Public Policy at CNU.

In your view, is the level of traffic congestion in Hampton Roads generally very high, high, neither high nor low, low or very low? (cells=%, numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding.)

Very high	41
High	48
Neutral/neither high nor low	8
Low	2
Very low	0
DK/Refused	2

And in the last five years, has the level of traffic congestion in Hampton Roads gotten better, worse, or stayed about the same? (cells=%, numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding.)

Gotten better	1
Gotten worse	77
Stayed about the same	21
DK/Refused	1

Would you say that you generally support increased funding for transportation improvements in Hampton Roads or do you generally oppose increased funding? (cells=%, numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding.)

Support	67
Oppose	20
DK/Refused	13

III. Voters show regional thinking on transportation, but HRBT, mass transit including light rail, and Third Crossing top list of projects

Asked to rate the importance of eight separate transportation projects, voters appeared to show a sense of regional thinking with all but one project (expanding U.S. Highway 460) rated as “important” by at least a plurality of voters. Five of the eight projects were rated as “important” by at least half of voters.

“Next I will read you a short list of transportation projects that have been discussed or proposed for Hampton Roads. Rate how important you feel each project is on a 1 to 5 scale, with “1” meaning LOWEST IMPORTANCE and “5” meaning HIGHEST IMPORTANCE. Here’s the first one.” (cells = %)

Issue Item	Rating as Important (4 or 5)	Net Rating – Important (4-5) vs. Not Important (1-2)
Expand the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel	69	69 – 13
Improve/expand mass transit, including light rail	60	60 – 21
Build a third Bridge-Tunnel crossing	57	57 – 21
Expand the Mid-Town Tunnel/MLK Freeway	53	53 – 19
Widen I-64 on the Southside	50	50 – 19
Widen I-64 on the Peninsula	48	48 – 23
Build the Southeast Parkway in Chesapeake and Virginia Beach	35	35 – 30
Expand U.S. Highway 460	31	31 – 29

However, when asked to indicate which project they think should be the top and second priority for the region, voters indicate a strong preference for expanding the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel and expanding and improving mass transit including light rail. Just over 4 in 10 respondents choose the HRBT as their top or second priority while nearly one-third pick mass transit and light rail. Nearly 3 in 10 respondents pick the Third Bridge-Tunnel Crossing as their top or second priority, while the Mid-Town Tunnel/MLK Freeway, I-64 on the Peninsula, and I-64 on the Southside tie with 2 in 10 respondents picking them as their top or second priority. The least supported projects include Highway 460 and the Southeast Parkway in Chesapeake and Virginia Beach.

I will now read through the list of project...please tell me which one you feel should be the top transportation project for the region...and which would be your second choice.

Issue Item	1 st choice and 2 nd choice combined
Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel	42
Mass transit including light rail	35
Third Bridge-Tunnel Crossing	28
Mid-Town Tunnel/MLK Freeway	21
I-64 on the Peninsula	21
I-64 on the Southside	21
Highway 460	13
Southeast Parkway in Chesapeake and Virginia Beach	10
Don't know/Refused	8

IV. Voters not certain how to pay for projects; worry about how money will be spent

When asked how they would like to pay for any transportation improvements in Hampton Roads, voters are strongly opposed to regional solutions, either through a regional gas tax or regional sales tax, and oppose a statewide gas tax as well. By a percentage point or two voters support a statewide sales tax and tolls as a method of funding transportation improvements. Only 16% of respondents agree or strongly agree with a regional gas tax compared to 83% who disagree or strongly disagree. On a regional sales tax, only 24% of respondents agree or strongly agree compared to 75% who disagree or strongly disagree. On the statewide solutions, 31% of voters agree or strongly agree with a statewide gas tax while 68% disagree or strongly disagree. However, by small margins voters support an increase in the statewide sales tax (50% agree or strongly agree and 49% disagree or strongly disagree). Finally, voters support tolls, either generally or only on new highways and bridges, buy a similar small margin. “We can see clear avenues of general agreement amongst voters here,” said Kidd. “Voters are clearly not interested in regional funding solutions unless they are tolls. They might accept a statewide sales tax increase.” Respondents also expressed concern about how the money would be spent and by a wide margin support the idea of a “lockbox” to keep money raised for transportation from being diverted to other uses.

Next I am going to read you several ways in which people have suggested funding transportation improvements in Hampton Roads. Tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each way to fund transportation improvements in Hampton Roads. (cells=%, numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding.)

Issue Item	Rating as “Strongly agree”	Net Rating – Agree (1-2) vs. Disagree (3-4)
Through tolls only on new highways and bridges built in Hampton Roads	23	51 – 47
Through tolls on highways and bridges	20	49 – 48
An increase in the statewide sales tax	16	50 – 49
An increase in the statewide gas tax	14	31 – 68
A new regional sales tax just in the Hampton Roads area	6	24 – 75
A new regional gas tax just in the Hampton Roads areas	4	16 – 83

Some people worry that new funding for transportation improvements in Hampton Roads might be used for other purposes in the future. Tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement.

I trust elected and appointed officials to spend new funding only on transportation improvements in Hampton Roads. (cells=%, numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding.)

Strongly agree	18
Somewhat agree	26
Somewhat disagree	20
Strongly disagree	33
Don't know	3

I worry that new funding for transportation improvements will be diverted to other uses and not spent on transportation improvements in Hampton Roads. (cells=%, numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding.)

Strongly agree	49
Somewhat agree	29
Somewhat disagree	10
Strongly disagree	10
Don't know	2

I want all new transportation funding to be put into a "lockbox" so that it can be used for transportation improvements in Hampton Roads (cells=%, numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding.)

Strongly agree	67
Somewhat agree	20
Somewhat disagree	5
Strongly disagree	6
Don't know	2

Survey Methodology

This Hampton Roads Regional Transportation Poll is provided as a public service to the citizens of Hampton Roads and Virginia. It is a public opinion survey of registered Hampton Roads voters conducted by telephone from April 16-20, 2008. Results for the full sample have a margin of error of plus or minus 4.38% at the 95% confidence level. This means for the full sample we can be 95% confident that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 4.38%. In addition to sampling error, the other potential sources of error include non-response, question wording, and interviewer error. Where percentages for subgroups are reported, the margin of error would be higher. Numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding. The poll was designed by the Center for Public Policy at CNU and the Hampton Roads Center for Civic Engagement and conducted for CNU and HRCCE by FrederickPolls, LLC of Arlington, Virginia. For information or requests, contact Dr. Quentin Kidd, at (757) 594-7971 or qkidd@cnu.edu.