

# MEMORANDUM

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**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

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DATE: January 9, 2012

TO: Colorado Transportation Commission

FROM: Debra Perkins-Smith, Director, Division of Transportation Development

SUBJECT: Focus Group Results

Corona Insights was retained by CDOT in October 2011 to conduct focus group research as a follow up to the summer phone survey in order to better understand Colorado residents' opinions of CDOT and various transportation-related issues. Outcomes from this research will help support CDOT's Civic Engagement Plan, inform an upcoming Long Range Plan, shape overall strategic planning, and determine certain performance measures to communicate to the general public. A total of nine groups were conducted in order to provide strong statewide representation. To allow for analysis to be conducted by region, three groups were conducted in Denver, three in Colorado Springs, and three in "Rural Colorado" – which included Lamar, Delta, and Frisco.

## Key findings:

### General Awareness

- Colorado residents focus on processes that CDOT performs, not benefits it creates. When asked to explain top-of-mind thoughts about what CDOT does, people naturally gravitate to process-driven tasks, such as maintaining roads and controlling snow and ice. What they don't think of initially is economic impacts, environmental impacts, planning for the future, and other important forward-thinking tasks that CDOT performs. This was standard across all nine groups.
- The general public feels that CDOT's communication is very good. But, promoting more of the work that CDOT does to benefit the state may help get people thinking more about benefits rather than processes.
- There appears to be a relatively low level of awareness about what CDOT's mission is. Related to this, many were surprised that "multimodal" is a key part of the mission since they tended to initially think about vehicles and road systems.
- Satisfaction with CDOT is generally high. Corona's previous resident survey for CDOT (2,136 respondents statewide) showed that 78 percent of people approve of the job CDOT is doing and 81 percent have a "favorable" impression of CDOT. During the focus groups, most agree that CDOT operates well under the budget it has and generally "does the right thing" for the Colorado public.
- Urban residents desire better intercity access.
- Rural areas sometimes feel neglected in terms of funding in their respective areas.

## **Priorities and Trade Offs**

- Maintaining existing roads and bridges is seen as the top priority for CDOT because it makes economic sense, not necessarily because the roads and bridges are bad. Corona's previous resident survey overwhelmingly showed that Colorado residents feel that maintenance should be CDOT's top priority. (Results of last summer's resident survey regarding priorities are displayed below.)
- Although maintenance is seen as the top priority, enhancing safety is seen by many as the overarching goal. This is a very important distinction to make. On the survey and during the focus groups, not as many people selected safety as the top priority as those who selected maintenance. However, for many, safety is essentially viewed as the end goal for much of what CDOT does.
- It appears that most Colorado residents would be OK with CDOT reallocating some funding away from snow and ice removal—as long as they still feel safe on the roads.

## **Fiscal and Budgetary Issues**

- Transportation issues are viewed as important—not necessarily more or less—than other top-tier issues the state of Colorado faces.
- In terms of real dollars, residents perceive CDOT has enough money to get by, but feel that it could definitely put additional money to good use. People understand that more money is needed to plan for the future by way of building new roads, expanding public transit options, etc.
- Perhaps the biggest driver of supporting a funding increase is knowing exactly where the money is going (and approving of where it's going). This was heavily stressed across all audiences. If people are going to support a funding increase, they want to know that it's going toward something tangible—something for which they can actually see the results.
- Statistics don't appear to be a driving force on why a person would or wouldn't approve a funding increase. Stats help support the argument, but they're not often seen as a primary motivator.
- Affordability is a concern, so a fuel tax increase of only two or three cents seems manageable for most. Support seemed to level out at about ten percent, which is an additional 2.2 cents to the existing 22 cents per gallon for state fuel tax. Even with this, there was still a significant amount of hesitation, especially in rural areas.
- Funding increases that are based on use are much more popular than ones that aren't. Graduated was slightly preferred because "it's an easier pill to swallow" but some still expressed concern that the tax would graduate up to the cap, and then there would be another round of increases.
- There's an overwhelming preference for CDOT's newer version of the budget.

## **Transit, Tolls, and Managed Lanes**

- For most, convenience is the biggest factor when using or not using alternative modes of transportation.
- In terms of funding additional modes of travel, there is support for it, but it might not be very high on the list of priorities. As expected, there was even less support in rural areas than urban ones.

- There's a significant amount of confusion about express lanes, even in Denver. Mostly, this revolves around how much the express lanes cost, how you pay for it, where (exactly) you can get on and off, and when (exactly) the lanes switch direction.
- Residents (outside of Denver) like express lanes as a way to generate new funds for CDOT, but there's not much support to actually pay for more lanes.

### **Economic Development**

- Proactively promoting economic development isn't something the general public feels CDOT has to do. People understand that CDOT is a major contributor to economic development, but they feel that it's more of a natural process than a forced one. If roads are being maintained and snow is being removed, people know that it has impacts on the economy.
- Big picture economic issues appear to be slightly more desirable for people to hear about than ones on a more personal level.
- Regardless of what economic impacts are determined, Colorado residents expect CDOT to make the information available. Transparency was frequently discussed in all groups, and not just in terms of this topic. Essentially, for anything CDOT does, the public feels it needs to be forthcoming with all information so people can explore it further if they so choose.

### **Communications**

- Awareness of CDOT communications appears to be high in all areas of the state. All groups felt that they currently hear enough about CDOT and transportation issues, in general.
- There's some confusion between Cotrip.org and the actual CDOT website, Coloradodot.info.
- In terms of performance measures, most people generally prefer CDOT uses an A-F to show progress. The "stoplight" reporting system with only three options is less desirable than the five point A-F scale option that allows for more gradation in the reporting.
- A website that shows transportation-related performance measures should be as simple as possible, especially the homepage.

### Survey Results: Residents' Top Priority

