



Values Study Report

# Transportation Values & Priorities in the Maricopa Region

December 2019



# Introduction



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Beginning in 2018, Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) commissioned Envision Utah and Heart+Mind Strategies to conduct a series of research efforts and workshops to understand key stakeholder and public values and transportation priorities in the region in order to support and guide the development of MAG’s next regional transportation plan, Imagine.

The Envision Utah and Heart+Mind team are national experts, creators, and pioneers in the use of values research to guide regional visioning and transportation planning. Each brings more than two decades of experience to this effort.

Over nearly a year, MAG, Envision Utah, and Heart+Mind held workshops, conducted extensive online research panels, held focus groups, and gathered input from more than 10,000 residents via online surveys. The result is a deep understanding of how Maricopa residents feel about life in the region with a particular focus on the transportation issues that matter most to them and why those issues matter. These research findings offer important insights for creating a long-range transportation plan that will best serve residents.

This report synthesizes the key findings of this research, details the research process, provides guidance on understanding and using the research findings, and offers suggested next steps in the development of the next regional transportation plan. The full and detailed research findings and survey results are included in the appendix.

# Executive Summary

Maricopa Association of Governments commissioned Envision Utah and Heart+Mind Strategies to research local values and transportation priorities in Maricopa County. The following findings will support the development of the next regional transportation plan.

## MARICOPA RESIDENTS ARE WILLING TO INCREASE SPENDING ON TRANSPORTATION



Residents show an overwhelming support for transportation as a regional priority. **They are willing to increase transportation spending to improve and maintain a regional transportation system.** 71 percent said they would like to see a small to large increase in transportation funding, and 89 percent believe investing in transportation should be a regional priority.

## WHAT RESIDENTS WANT THAT SPENDING TO DO

They want investing that is specific but also flexible to adapt to their future needs.



They want the spend first to reduce congestion and improve safety.

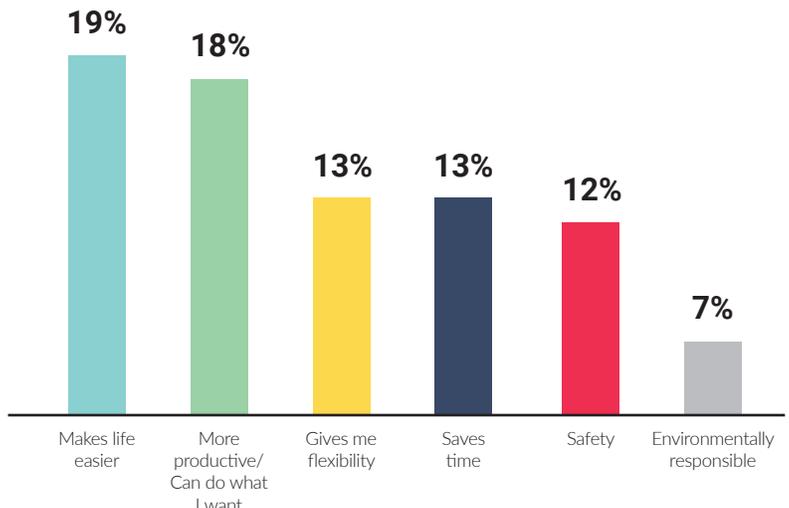
(Percent of residents who rate this as a very high priority)



## WHY RESIDENTS FEEL THIS WAY

### TOP TRANSPORTATION VALUES

Residents feel well-connected roads, highways, public/active transportation, and good planning make life easier by reducing stress and increasing productivity. Focusing on these values is key to fulfilling residents' expectations and garnering their support.



(Percent of residents who most highly value each transportation outcome)

# Research Design Overview

A sequence of four research phases was conducted between September 2018 and March 2019 leading up to workshops conducted in June 2019. Results from Phase 1 were designed to guide and shape the later phases. Results of Phase 2 were designed to explore and uncover potential insights and hypotheses that could then be tested and validated with the quantitative research methodologies applied in Phases 3 and 4.

To launch and guide the research efforts, the team met with the Maricopa Transportation Policy Committee on September 19, 2018, to understand the key issues, questions, and priorities of this key stakeholder group utilizing a highly interactive computer-assisted technique known as an iLab. Additionally, the research team facilitated a similar iLab session with over 40 regional business, government, non-profit, and elected community leaders focusing on transportation issue identification, brainstorming, prioritizing, and visioning.

Guided by the insights and priorities of these key regional leaders, Phase 2 of the research used a combination of traditional and innovative new qualitative research techniques to identify and explore the values and transportation priorities of residents in the region. A week long, online, interactive BrightBoard™ was held with 38 residents from across the region from November 13 - 17, 2018, allowing extensive questioning and probing on a broad range of regional and transportation issues and priorities. The group was designed to represent a diverse set of interests and transportation usage and needs and included a rich diversity of age, ethnicity, and income as well as quotas to ensure representation from young professionals and auto deficient households. Additionally, two in-person focus groups were conducted on November 29, 2018.

While Phase 2 focused on identifying the range of transportation concerns, preferences, priorities and personal values from a broad and diverse set of residents, Phases 3 and 4 focused on collecting feedback from across the entire region in a large and representative way. Phase 3 was designed to generate rigorous and precise findings from a scientific sample of residents representative of the people in the region. Most of the findings and insights highlighted in this report are based on the results of this phase of the research and a more detailed methodology is provided below.

Phase 4 was designed to ensure any resident who wanted to provide input into the process would be able to do so and included extensive public outreach efforts and invitations from MAG and a host of regional partners. The Phase 4 effort impressively generated responses from over 9000 Maricopa residents!

## Scientific Study Methodology

The Phase 3 “scientific” study, which took respondents an average of 20 minutes to complete, was fielded March 5 through 19, 2019, via an online, web-based survey platform. Respondents 18 years or older were selected using an industry standard opt-in panel sample from Maricopa County.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate. Online opt-in panels such as the one used for this study do not use probability sampling and accordingly the strict calculation of sampling error is not typically done. In the hypothetical case of a perfectly random sample and no response or measurement errors, a sample of this size (n=1500) would produce a margin of error of  $\pm 2.5\%$  at a 95% confidence interval. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.

To ensure sample representativeness, rigorous steps were applied in the pre-survey sample design. The design applied set quotas for age, gender, and ethnicity for the Maricopa County region based on recent figures available from the United States Census Bureau. Additionally, the study set sample minimum targets for Hispanic, low income residents, minorities, young professionals, and native nations.



# Key Insights & Findings

## QUALITY OF LIFE & TRANSPORTATION IN THE REGION

Residents generally feel positive about the quality of life in the region, and most residents believe the region's quality of life is increasing. Residents in the region further value their safe, strong neighborhoods and communities but also appreciate great access to the amazing amenities and features across the region. For residents, great transportation is closely linked to high quality of life, particularly qualities such as high accessibility to jobs, fast commute times, and good public transportation.

## TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES

There are many qualities about the transportation system that make it great, including public transit accessibility. Overall, the region's great freeway system is its most prized transportation asset. The high connectivity of the transportation system and the variety of mobility options contribute to making the region a great place to work and live. Traffic congestion is by far the greatest "dislike" or "frustration" with regional transportation, although this is not distinct to this region.

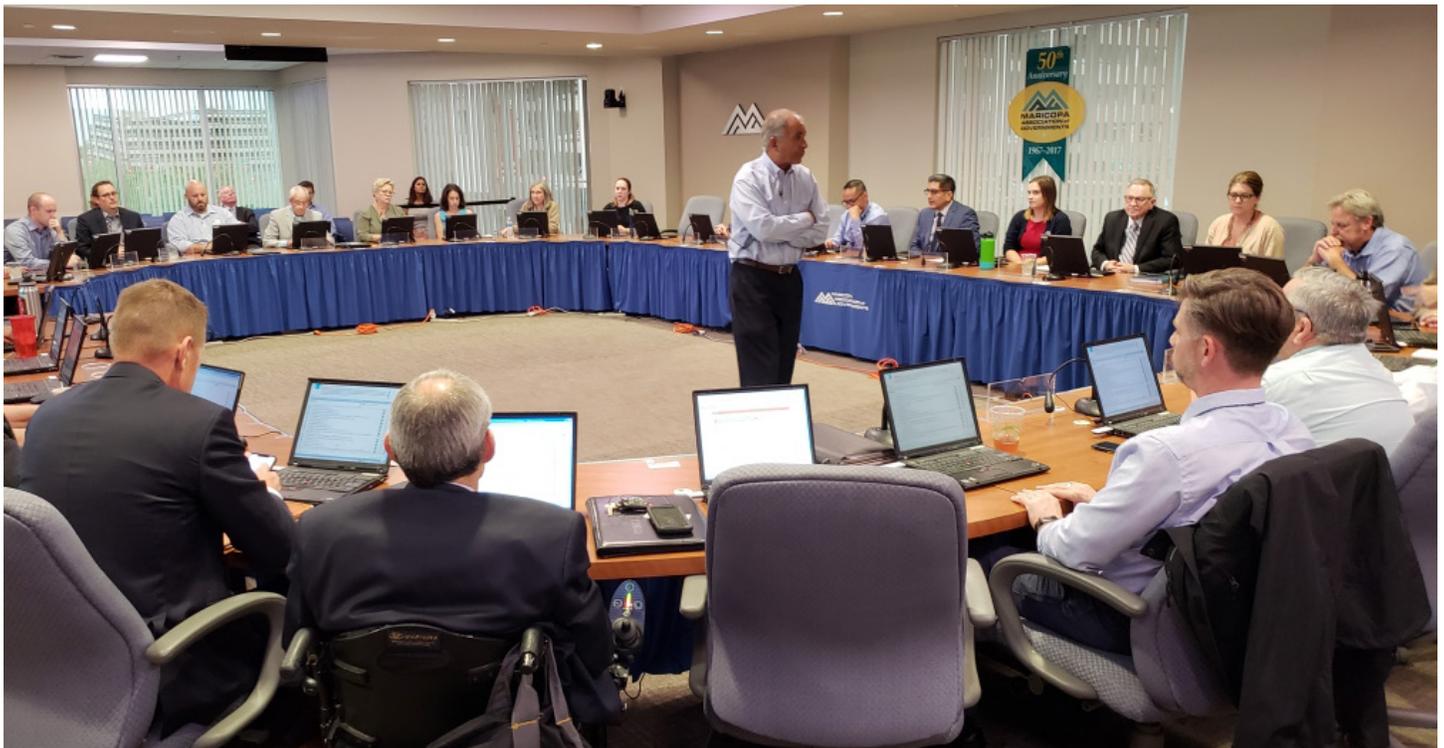
## QUALITY OF LIFE & TRANSPORTATION IN THE REGION

Most residents believe a regional vision to address transportation issues is important, and many believe the region is doing a good or excellent job planning and providing transportation solutions. Transportation is an important regional priority and transportation funding for it should be increased. A wide variety of transportation priorities are supported for increased investment; however, safety and technology, increased freeway capacity, and road maintenance/operations have the highest support. The public wants to see both fixed and flexible funding in the regional transportation vision.

Looking to the future, people in the region have two paramount transportation priorities: reducing traffic congestion and improving safety measures. Investing in transportation that promotes economic growth, road maintenance, keeping residents up to date and informed, and increased freeway capacity are also high priorities for the future of the region.

## VALUES

Focusing transportation planning and solutions on addressing the objectives most important to residents is critical for generating public support and funding for the regional transportation plan. The two dominant positive emotional drivers are making life easier and helping people be more productive. The transportation keys related to these orientations include public and active transportation, good highway infrastructure, and the grid network. More detail about these values is provided in the next section.



Community leaders and stakeholders in the MAG region participated in an iLab—an intensive computer-assisted focus group—to kick off the research process.

# Maricopa Transportation Values

Values research helps us identify and understand the dominant emotional drivers behind people’s attitudes and decisions. It goes beyond identifying what issues people care about—it gets at **why** they care about those things. This kind of research has been a linchpin guiding strategy, communications, and planning for a number of successful national public transportation and regional visioning initiatives for more than two decades, and an intensive values research process was conducted in 2018 and 2019 to understand residents’ values related to overall life in Maricopa County as well as, more specifically, transportation in the region.

The next few pages provide an overview of the key values related to transportation and offer an interpretation of what these values mean for messaging, coalition building, public engagement, and transportation planning.

## Values Related to Transportation

For Maricopa residents, transportation issues are tied to six different values orientations:

- 1. **Making my life easier**
- 2. **Being productive and doing what I want**
- 3. **Flexibility**
- 4. **Saving time**
- 5. **Safety for me and my family**
- 6. **Environmental responsibility**

Residents certainly might think about issues like transit, bike lanes, highway congestion, connectivity, or the grid network when they think about transportation. But these attributes of a transportation system don’t motivate residents’ attitudes or behavior. Residents care about these issues because they affect the values listed above.

For example, nearly one-fifth of residents identify “**making my life easier**” as their most important outcome related to transportation. Specifically, they say that transportation attributes such as well-connected roads and highways along with public and active transportation and good planning make life easier. That in turn helps them feel less stressed, more productive, and more independent. Ultimately, that gives them a sense of happiness and peace of mind.

### VALUES LADDER: **EASIER LIFE** (19% OF RESIDENTS)



For another 18 percent of residents, those same transportation attributes primarily make them feel more **productive** and allow them to do more of what they want.

**VALUES LADDER: PRODUCTIVITY**  
**(18% OF RESIDENTS)**



For another 13 percent of residents, those transportation attributes primarily provide a sense of **flexibility**. Still others care most about saving time or safety.

**VALUES LADDER: FLEXIBILITY**  
**(13% OF RESIDENTS)**



Finally, for a smaller portion of residents, aspects such as safe active transportation are important because they are environmentally responsible and lead to feelings of hope for the future, less stress, and more peace of mind about future generations.

These same values concepts work in the negative as well. For instance, negative attributes like congestion or the shortcomings of public transportation make people upset because they feel like their time is wasted. Poor road maintenance or construction also affect people's sense of safety.



## We Know Residents' Values—So What?



### 1. VALUES SHOULD INFORM TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Residents' values systems can be thought of as the ultimate outcomes residents hope to get from their transportation systems. For example, residents don't want well-connected roads and good highways for the sake of well-connected roads and good highways; they want those things because they make residents' lives easier and allow them to be more productive. In that sense, reducing total travel times and increasing predictability of travel times might be more important than reducing congestion.



### 2. VALUES CAN CONVENE STAKEHOLDERS AND FIND COMMON GROUND

Unlike political stances or opinions on policies, which can change quickly and vary widely among a single population, values change slowly and often provide common ground even among diverse groups. This makes values an important tool for building coalitions. For instance, both those opposed to and in support of increased transportation funding might be able to unite around the importance of safety or making life easier for local residents. Supporters and opponents of public transportation might be able to agree on the values of saving time or flexibility (even if they disagree on other values like the importance of creating a healthy environment).

This common ground opens a path for even adversarial stakeholders to cooperate, learn together, and, hopefully, reach agreement on the more specific elements that previously caused conflict.

Focusing on values can also serve as a rallying cry to bring stakeholders together. An invitation to examine active transportation options might be less compelling than an invitation to examine ways active transportation can provide more flexibility for local residents.



### 3. VALUES CAN IMPROVE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Values can impact public engagement in at least two important ways. First, values can serve as a rallying cry. Invitations to attend meetings, take surveys, or even vote on important issues can be more compelling if residents understand that some of their motivating values are at stake. Second, values can help frame the issues in ways that are more salient to residents. In a sense, using values can provide a way to speak residents' language. Some people may have thought very little about transportation infrastructure and may simply not be familiar with basic concepts. Even these people, however, can likely understand values-focused ideas like saving time or being more productive.

# Communicating with Values

These insights into residents' values are helpful not only in guiding transportation planning, but also in communicating those plans effectively. Values can put ideas that might otherwise be obscure into a more meaningful context.

Furthermore, for residents to accept a plan or even change their attitudes or behavior, it's important to communicate both the rational reasons behind the plan or behavior change as well as the emotional motivators that are tied to their personal values. In other words, persuade with reason and motivate with emotion.

Fortunately, the emotional connections already exist. For example, the "Productivity/Do What I Want" values orientation shows well-connected roads and highways lead residents to feel more productive, less stressed, and happier. But just because these connections exist, does not mean that they are front-of-mind for residents. That makes it important to communicate in a way that triggers or activates the important emotional connections.

For example, discussion of highway improvements that will reduce traffic may or may not trigger the attendant emotional drivers. On the other hand, highway improvements that will make life easier, create a more stress-free commute, and allow for more productivity are much more emotionally compelling.

## TANGIBLE ATTRIBUTES

- Improved highway infrastructure
- Well-connected streets or a grid network
- Options for biking or walking or scootering

THESE MAY OR MAY NOT  
MEAN ANYTHING TO ME

## EMOTIONAL BENEFITS

- Highways that make your life easier by making it more convenient to get around.
- Streets and neighborhoods designed to save you time so you can do more of what you want.
- Transportation options so you can get around however you want.

THESE PACK A MORE  
MEANINGFUL PUNCH

## CASE STUDY

Two propositions were run in the same community about a decade apart. Both were aimed at increasing funding for transportation improvements, and both, if passed, would result in a small tax increase to fund those improvements.

The messaging in Campaign A focused almost exclusively on the attributes of the transportation improvements. One particular ad showed a variety of local residents talking about why they supported the ballot proposition:

**Person 1 (Woman with 2 kids):** "I'm voting to fix our sidewalks."

**Person 2 (Man on a bike):** "I'm voting for more trails."

**Person 3 (Man standing in front of a pothole):** "I'm voting to fix this pothole."

**Person 4 (Woman in a car):** "I'm voting for a shorter commute"

**Narrator:** "When you vote yes on PROPOSITION, you're voting for improvements to be made in your local community. Like better streets, improved transit options, and more bike trails for your family. Vote yes on PROPOSITION and help us all enjoy a better quality of life."

The messaging in Campaign B focused less on the attributes of the improvements and more on the emotional benefits. One particular ad showed a woman sitting in a car, stuck in a traffic jam. As drivers honk and her car inches forward, she's clearly anxious to get to her destination.

**Narrator:** "The problem with waiting to solve STATE'S escalating transportation crisis is the longer we wait, the longer we wait. Act now to keep STATE moving. Vote for PROPOSITION."

The ad in Campaign B mentioned nothing about specific improvements that would result from the proposition. Instead, it showed the stress and anxiety from the waste of time that was being caused by traffic—tying into values.

The result is a strong emotional appeal that suggests transportation challenges waste our time and even harm time and relationships with loved ones. Campaign A, on the other hand, made no direct or implicit connections to emotional motivators, families or otherwise.

In the end, the proposition supported by Campaign A failed in almost half of the counties where it ran—including the state's two largest counties. The proposition supported by Campaign B passed.

# Recommendations

As MAG begins the process to establish the next Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and to convene conversations about potentially renewing Proposition 400, this values study work will be very valuable. Moving forward, utilizing the values study through messaging, advertisement, coalition building, public engagement, and planning processes will be critical ways to generate support and build momentum. Some key recommendations include:

- **Pursue a new proposition for regional transportation funding.** The public clearly supports continued, and even increased, investment in transportation infrastructure. MAG, along with other regional transportation stakeholders and partners, should explore a renewed proposition, and potentially even an increase in the amount of the sales tax. This increase could, for example, fund maintenance and operations. While this research has identified strong public support for the concept of continued and/or increased investment, additional work will be needed to understand the extent of public support for specific tax extensions and increases, particularly among likely voters.
- **Tie the new proposition to a regional transportation vision that includes both fixed and flexible components.** The vast majority of residents believe that a regional vision or plan for transportation is very or extremely important, and most believe the vision or plan should include a mixture of fixed and flexible components. Accordingly, a regional transportation vision should contain some fixed elements so residents know what their tax dollars will buy, while also maintaining some flexibility to reprioritize projects over time based on changing circumstances and technologies.
- **Explore ways to fund maintenance and operations.** Residents understand the need to invest in maintenance and operations. They recognize that good maintenance reduces wear and tear on vehicles, improves safety, and minimizes costs in the long run. As gas tax revenues continue to decline, augmentation or alternatives to the state's traditional funding source for highway and road maintenance (also known as the Highway User Revenue Fund, or HURF) need to be explored.
- **Plan for a broad spectrum of public goals.** Improving safety and reducing congestion are the two most important goals for the public, but others also garner significant support, including investing in maintenance and promoting economic growth. Planning should account for all these goals, while placing highest importance on the goals the public prioritizes most.
- **Invest in a variety of transportation modes and priorities.** Residents seek investment in a wide variety of transportation modes and priorities. While safety and technology, freeway capacity, and road maintenance and operations top the list, other priorities also enjoy high support, including new rail construction, buses, and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Residents value having flexibility and options, and more than a third of the negative transportation attributes that respondents listed relate to the lack of adequate and convenient public and active transportation options.
- **When evaluating investment options, measure the outcomes residents value most.** Residents place high importance on the transportation system making life easier, allowing them to do more of what they want, providing flexibility, saving time, promoting safety, and facilitating environmental responsibility. In relation to these values, analysis of different investment options could focus on metrics such as vehicle hours traveled, predictability of travel times, access to a variety of travel modes, safety, and emissions. These types of metrics will ensure that investments achieve the outcomes residents most value.



# Appendix

Workshops were designed by Envision Utah to introduce the results of the values study to key stakeholders and to discuss messaging strategies for the emerging findings. Two workshops were held in July 2019 with participants from the *iLab*. Attendees included representatives from government, nonprofits, the university, and others. These workshops began with a presentation summarizing past legislation and providing an overview of the values study. A group discussion of the values study funding followed. Highlights from the discussions include:

1. There should be a clear and robust conversation with the public regarding funding for transit operations. The burden of operations and maintenance largely falls on the cities.
2. Do people who feel negatively about the transportation system feel motivated to vote? How can we motivate these people to act?
3. The operations discussion should be based around maintenance and safety. Efficiency is a long-term goal, but security can be addressed today. Real and perceived safety concerns must be addressed.
4. Uneven funding across cities has led to a disconnected bus system. Local governments must cooperate and commit funding to maintain connectivity. Connectivity can also address workforce challenges across the region.
5. The grid system can contribute to citizens feeling connected and safe in their communities because they understand how to get around.
6. It is understood that the region will continue to grow so investing in capacity should be a priority. Congestion must be discussed in a thoughtful way that doesn't invalidate the frustration that people in the region feel. Ensure you are meeting people where they are and dispel misperceptions.
7. Voters are frustrated by the perception that there are free riders on light rail.
8. Sharing the story of the accomplishments of Prop 300 and Prop 400 will be important for conveying the need for continued funding. Key benefits include economic growth and quality of life.
9. Seniors who are unable to drive need transportation options. Translate the connection between an extension to the tax and the savings in time and money.
10. There are concerns about how decisions were made regarding light rail. Local communities must be involved at every step of the process.
11. Environmental responsibility is an emerging priority across the region. Air quality attainment is specifically noted.

## Small group takeaways and messaging:

**Having a vision for transportation in this region is very important. There's high support for the work our region has been and is doing.**

While the region has overall been performing well, there are still populations that are not having their needs met under the current system. There are equity issues, and any vision must address accessibility for all populations including young families, low-income people, and the aging population. Further, there must be community education and awareness. We must ensure that we are working to invest in our long-term prosperity rather than just growth in order to preserve our quality of life.

**People in the region like how it was built. They love their communities and value the transportation investments that have been made to connect them to where they need and want to go providing choice, mobility, and connectivity.**

Investments in transportation should be regional to maintain overall quality of the system including providing shaded corridors, sidewalks, and transit stops. When talking about transportation, any discussion should help illustrate how investments benefit the individual and the local communities. Focus on telling positive stories and highlighting the resulting benefits of specific investments.

**Constituents support shifting to a long-range program that provides flexibility to modify priorities based on changing circumstances and technologies.**

Intergovernmental coordination, collaboration, and cooperation are critical. To advocate for flexible funding, suggestions included using examples from Prop 400 to show where flexibility would have been helpful. Stakeholders want a balance between flexible and fixed funding.

**There is tremendous support for increased funding for transportation in this region – a distinctly higher amount of support than in other parts of the country.**

Highlight the returns on investment – particularly how it supports better communities. Use the successes of Prop 400 to show what increased funding can accomplish. Build on the wins we achieved with Prop 400. Explore all avenues for funding, such as a gas tax, but be mindful of the impacts on low income communities. Differentiate that this is a continuation of a tax. Emphasize the need to continue planning as we have in the past.

An additional presentation was given to the Management Committee in which the values study was shared in detail with a longer discussion period. In this meeting, city managers discussed how to convey the results of the values study to the legislature and generate buy-in with other stakeholders and the public. The discussion included the following highlights:

- Regional planning currently does not feel like a community discussion, and more involvement from other individuals will give the values study more credibility.
- Satisfaction with the system may contribute to voter apathy.
- The importance of continued funding and maintenance must be conveyed to the public as most people are unaware that they are currently paying this tax.
- Elderly communities need flexible transportation options.
- Some wondered if there was a difference in responses in cities that do not contribute as much local funding to transportation, so members asked if they could explore subsets of the results by geography or income.
- The state will benefit significantly if maintenance is shifted from the state to local communities (county, cities).
- Flexibility in the tax must be balanced with more flexible ‘buckets.’
- Developing a framework and principles before developing the plan itself will help provide reassurance to member agencies.