
2006 TDOT Statewide Customer Satisfaction Survey Executive Summary

Purpose

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) completed its first comprehensive customer satisfaction survey in July 2006. The purpose of the survey was to help identify and prioritize the transportation services and improvements that are most important to Tennesseans and to assess TDOT's overall performance. The results of the survey will also be used to help evaluate the effectiveness of TDOT's Strategic Plan.

Methodology

The Customer Satisfaction Survey consisted of three major components: (1) stakeholder interviews, (2) focus groups, and (3) statistically valid surveys. Each of these components is described below.

Stakeholder Interviews.

The purpose of the internal and external stakeholder interviews was to assess the perceptions that senior TDOT managers and external stakeholders have about the quality of services provided by the Tennessee Department of Transportation. A total of 42 external and 35 internal interviews were conducted during October 2005. The information from the internal and external interviews was used to identify the issues that were discussed at the focus groups. The summary reports for the external and internal interviews are provided in Sections 9 and 10 of this report, respectively.

Focus Groups and Resident Interviews.

ETC Institute facilitated focus groups and resident interviews during November 2005. Focus group participants were selected at random from a list of more than 200 community leaders that had participated in meetings related to TDOT's Long Range Plan. The participants included local elected officials, city and county staff, business leaders, transit operators, chamber officials, airport managers, utility representatives, representatives of non-profit organizations, and others. Focus groups were held in each of TDOT's four regions, Knoxville, Chattanooga, Nashville, and Jackson. ETC Institute also conducted open-ended interviews with 102 randomly selected residents throughout the State. At least 25 interviews were completed in each of the four TDOT regions. Residents participating in the open-ended interviews were asked the same basic set of questions that were asked during the focus groups.

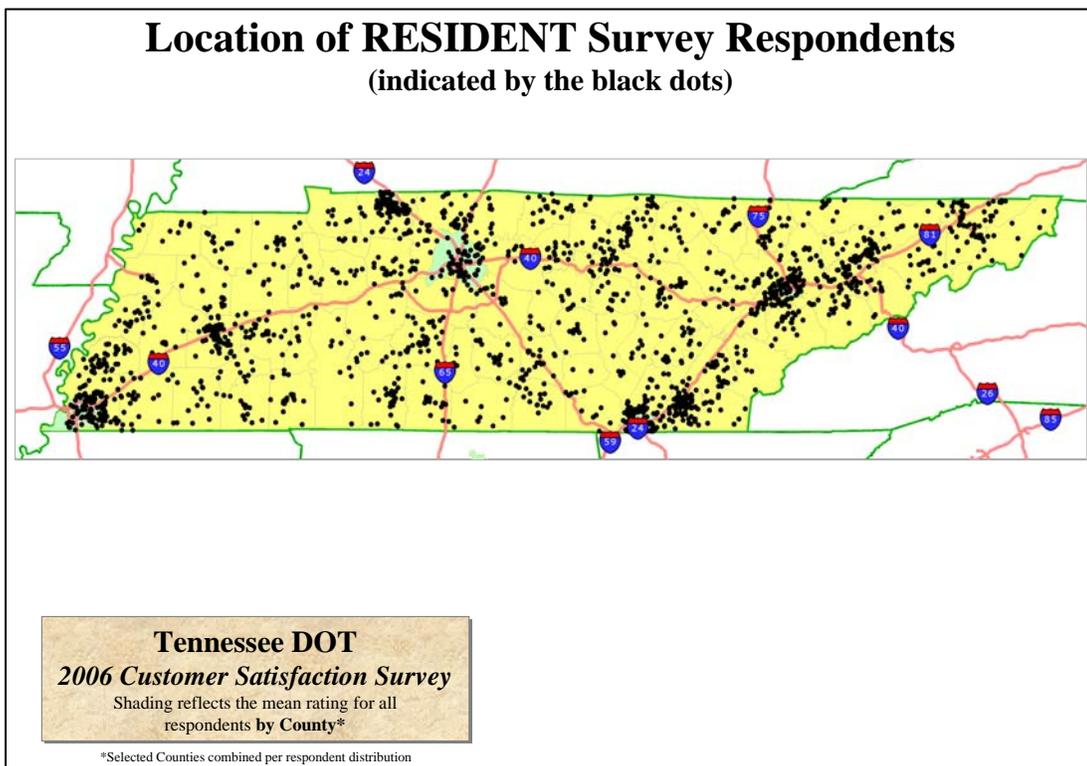
The purpose of the focus groups and resident interviews was three-fold: (1) to identify the core expectations that residents and community leaders have regarding the delivery of transportation services, (2) to understand how residents and community leaders evaluate the TDOT's performance in different areas, and (3) to identify ways that residents and community leaders think the TDOT could improve the delivery of specific services. The summary report for the focus groups and open-ended interviews is provided in Section 8 of this report.

Surveys.

During April and May 2006, the TDOT conducted three surveys: (1) a survey of residents, (2) a survey of elected officials, and (3) a benchmarking survey of residents who live in the eight states that border Tennessee. The purpose of the surveys was to objectively assess customer satisfaction with TDOT's performance and to determine the relative importance that should be placed on issues that were identified during the stakeholder interviews and the focus groups. The methodology for each survey is briefly described below.

- Survey of Elected Officials. The survey of elected officials was designed to obtain input from elected officials at three levels: (1) city mayors, (2) county mayors, (3) and state legislators. The goal was to obtain a total of 200 completed surveys. The actual number of completed surveys was 208, including 138 city mayors, 36 county mayors, and 34 state legislators.

- Resident Survey. The resident survey was administered to a stratified random sample of 2,036 Tennessee residents. The sample was stratified to ensure the completion of at least 400 surveys in each of the four TDOT regions. The seven-page survey was mailed to 5,000 households. Approximately seven days after the surveys were mailed, residents who received the survey were contacted by phone. Those who indicated that they had not returned the survey were given the option of completing it by phone. Of the households that received a survey, 934 completed the survey by phone and 1102 returned it by mail for a total of 2,036 completed surveys. The overall results of the statewide sample have a precision of at least +/- 2.3% at the 95% level of confidence. The results for each of the four regions have a precision of at least +/- 5% at the 95% level of confidence. There were no statistically significant differences in the results of the survey based on the method of administration (phone vs. mail). In order to better understand how well TDOT services are being delivered in specific areas of the state, ETC Institute geocoded the home address of respondents to the survey. The map below shows the physical distribution of survey respondents based on the location of their homes. Section 5 of this report contains maps that show the results of specific questions in the survey.

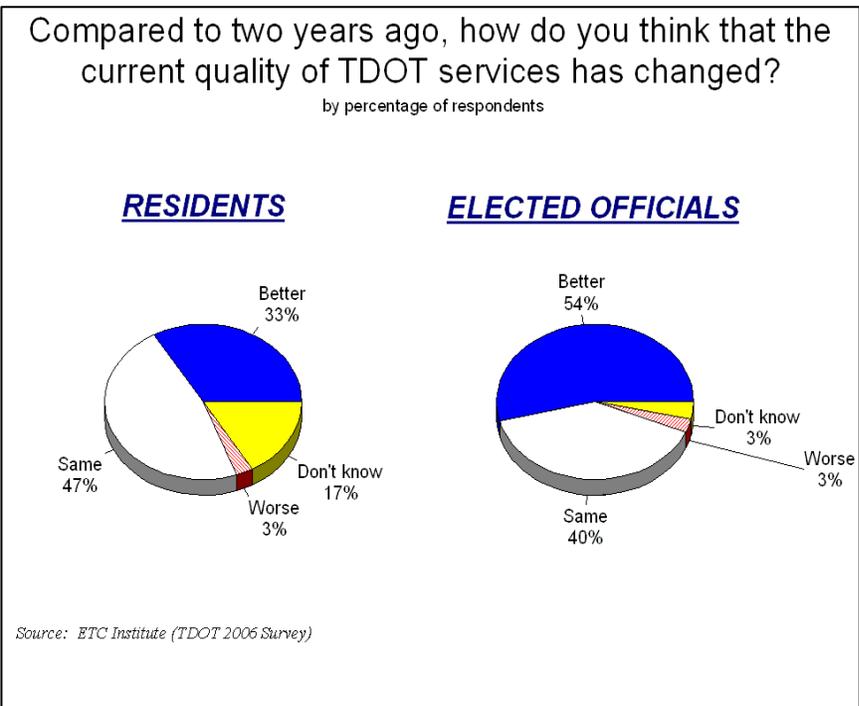


- Benchmarking Survey.** In addition to the surveys that were administered to residents and elected officials, ETC Institute also administered a benchmarking survey to 400 residents in the eight states that border Tennessee: North Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. Approximately 50 surveys were administered to a random sample of residents in each of the bordering states. The purpose of the survey was to have residents in bordering states rate the quality of transportation services in the state where they live to assess whether the quality of service provided by TDOT was better, worse, or about the same as other Department’s of Transportation. The overall results of the benchmarking survey have a precision of at least +/-5% at the 95% level of confidence.

Major Findings

Many Residents and Elected Officials Think TDOT Services Have Gotten Better.

Compared to two years ago, **residents** were 11 times more likely to think that TDOT services had gotten “better” (33%) than they were to think TDOT services had gotten “worse” (3%). **Elected officials** were 18 times more likely to think that TDOT services had gotten “better” (54%) than they were to think TDOT services had gotten “worse” (3%).



Most of those Surveyed Thought TDOT Is Moving in the Right Direction.

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of the **residents** surveyed thought TDOT was “moving in the right direction”; only 6% did not think TDOT was moving the right direction, and 31% had a neutral opinion. Among **elected officials**, 73% thought TDOT was “moving in the right direction”; only 7% did not, and 20% had a neutral opinion.

Most Residents and Elected Officials Trust TDOT to Make Good Decisions.

Sixty percent (60%) of the **residents** surveyed indicated that they trust TDOT officials to make good decisions; 10% did not trust TDOT, and 31% had a neutral opinion. Among **elected officials**, 69% indicated that they trusted TDOT officials to make good decisions; 10% did not trust TDOT, and 21% had a neutral opinion.

Overall Satisfaction with the Maintenance of Interstate Highways.

Nearly three-fourths (72%) of the **residents** surveyed indicated that they were satisfied with TDOT’s overall efforts to maintain Interstate highways; 8% were dissatisfied, and 20% had a neutral or no opinion. Among the **elected officials** surveyed, 84% indicated that they were satisfied with TDOT’s overall efforts to maintain Interstate highways; 4% were dissatisfied, and 12% had a neutral or no opinion.

Highway-Related Services with the *HIGHEST* Levels of Satisfaction.

The five highway-related services that had the highest levels of satisfaction among residents were: the visibility of roadway striping on highways during the day (78%), the quality of snow and ice removal (78%), how easy highway signs are to understand (78%), how easy highway signs are to see (78%), and how accessible rest areas are to people with disabilities (76%).

Highway-Related Services with the *LOWEST* Levels of Satisfaction.

The five highway-related services that had the lowest levels of satisfaction among residents were: the availability of alternative modes of transportation along highways (33%), availability of park and ride facilities along highways (41%), the level of congestion on highways in urban areas (45%), the adequacy of lighting at highway interchanges in rural areas (54%), and the visibility of roadway striping on highways in wet weather (54%).

Highway Related Services that Should Be the Top Priorities for Improvement.

The top five highway-related priorities based on the sum of the top choices that were provided by residents and elected officials are listed below:

Top Highway-Related Priorities for RESIDENTS.

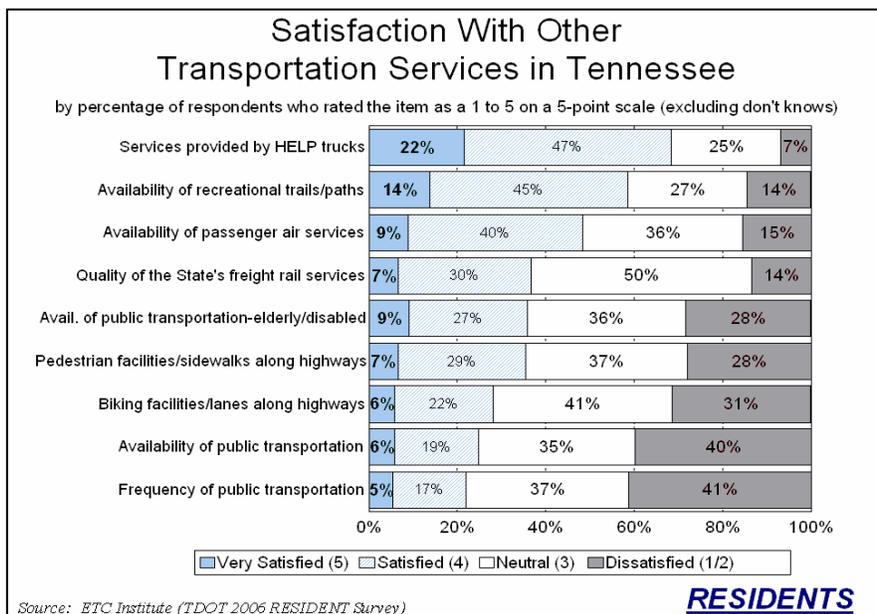
- Keeping the surface of Interstates and other highways in good condition
- Minimizing congestion on highways in urban areas
- Improving the visibility of road striping on highways in wet weather and at night
- Removing debris from highways
- Ensuring water drains quickly from highways during storms

Top Highway-Related Priorities for ELECTED OFFICIALS.

- Keeping the surface of Interstates and other highways in good condition
- Improving the visibility of road striping on highways in wet weather and at night
- Minimizing congestion on highways in urban areas
- Improving lighting at highway interchanges in rural areas
- Enhancing the quality of mowing and trimming along highways

Satisfaction with Non-Highway Transportation Services.

The non-highway transportation services that had the highest overall levels of satisfaction were: services provided by HELP trucks (69%) and the availability of recreational trails and paths (59%). Residents were least satisfied with the frequency (22%) and availability (25%) of public transportation services. See the chart below.



Most Effective Ways for TDOT to Provide Information to Residents.

The top ways that residents would prefer to receive information from TDOT were: electronic message boards along highways (61%), radio (46%), signs along highways (46%), newspapers (42%), and local television/public access channels (42%).

Awareness and Use of TDOT's Toll-Free Road Condition Hotline.

- Less than half (41%) of the residents surveyed knew that TDOT had a toll-free road condition hotline.
- Among those who were aware of the hotline, less than one-fourth (23%) had called the hotline during the past year.
- Among those who had called the hotline, more than three-fourths (78%) were satisfied with the service, 14% were not satisfied, and 8% had a neutral opinion.

Awareness and Use of TDOT's Website.

- About one-third (35%) of the residents surveyed knew that TDOT has a website.
- Among those who were aware of the website, less than one-third (29%) had visited the site during the past year.
- Among those who had visited the website, 60% thought the site was easy to use; 33% thought it was "okay"; 3% thought it was difficult to use, and 4% could not remember.
- The top three reasons that residents would use TDOT's website were to: (1) obtain current weather/road condition information, (2) get current project information, and (3) get detour/work zone information.

Residents Were Generally Satisfied with TDOT's Efforts to Keep Them Informed.

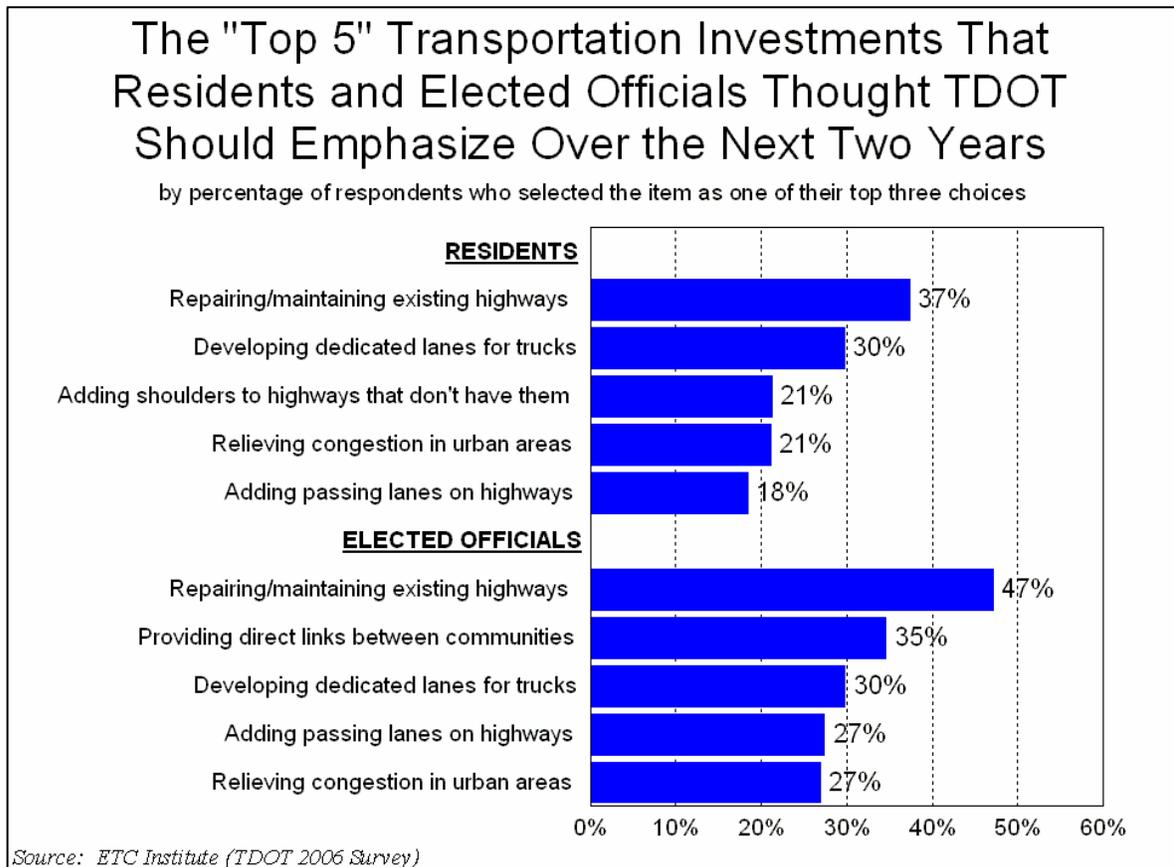
Nearly half (49%) of the residents surveyed indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with TDOT's efforts to keep them informed about transportation related issues; only 10% indicated that they were dissatisfied. The remaining residents gave a neutral rating or did not have an opinion. Among residents who indicated that TDOT completed the construction of a new highway or the reconstruction of an existing highway that they regularly use, 45% thought TDOT adequately involved their community during the planning and implementation of highway improvements; 19% did not think TDOT adequately involved their community, and 36% did not have an opinion.

How Timely TDOT Completes Major Construction Projects.

Although residents and elected officials were generally satisfied with the condition and maintenance of state highways, both groups were concerned about the amount of time it takes to complete major construction projects. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of the **residents** surveyed did not think TDOT completes major construction projects in a timely manner, and 52% of the **elected officials** surveyed did not think TDOT completes major construction projects in a timely manner.

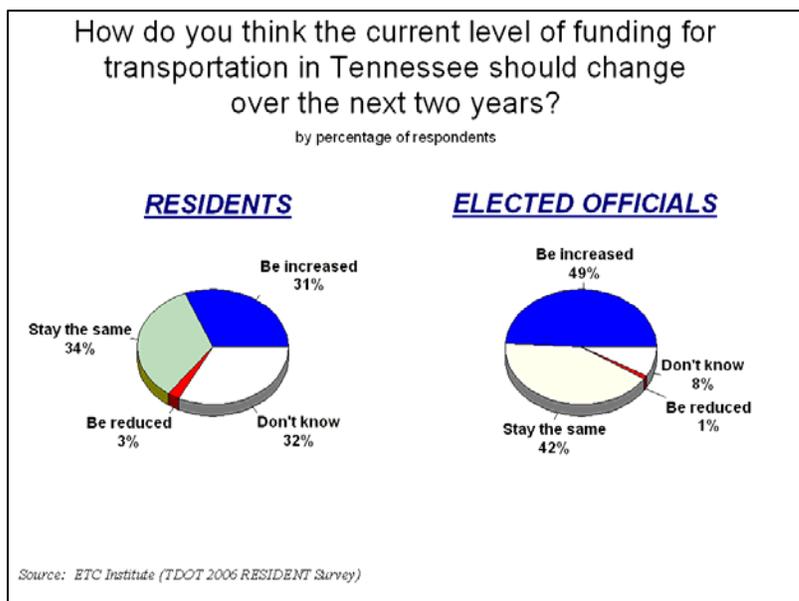
Repairing Existing Highways Was the Top Priority for Residents and Elected Officials.

Residents and elected officials were asked to select the transportation investments that should be the top priorities in Tennessee over the next two years. From a list of 16 items, four of the five highest rated items were the same for both groups: repairing and maintaining existing highways, developing dedicated lanes for trucks, relieving congestion in urban areas, and adding passing lanes to existing highways. **Residents** placed more importance on adding shoulders to highways. **Elected officials** placed significantly more importance on the development of direct links between communities. See the chart below.



Residents and Elected Officials Do NOT Want Transportation Funding Reduced.

Only 1% of the **elected officials** surveyed thought the current level of funding for transportation in Tennessee should be reduced; nearly half (49%) thought it should be increased; 42% thought it should stay the same, and 8% did not have an opinion. Only 2% of the **residents** surveyed thought the current level of funding for transportation in Tennessee should be reduced;



31% thought it should be increased; 34% thought it should stay the same, and 32% did not have an opinion.

Environmental Issues.

- 30% of the residents surveyed thought TDOT's current level of emphasis on preserving and protecting the environment in the planning and building of transportation projects should be increased; 35% thought it should stay the same; 3% thought it should be reduced, and 32% did not have an opinion.
- Most of the residents surveyed thought TDOT does a good job of addressing environmental considerations when planning and building transportation projects in Tennessee. Three-fourths (75%) gave positive ratings for TDOT's efforts to protect lakes and streams; 73% thought TDOT does a good job of preserving historic buildings and cultural areas, and 71% thought TDOT does a good job of preserving wetlands.

Other Findings:

- Less than half (49%) of the residents surveyed indicated that they felt safe when driving through work zones; 26% did not feel safe, and 29% had a neutral opinion.
- 66% of the elected officials surveyed indicated that they have more confidence in TDOT today than they did three years ago; 8% have less confidence and 26% indicated that their level of confidence was about the same.

- 61% of the elected officials surveyed indicated that they think TDOT adequately supports local projects; 16% did not think TDOT adequately supports local projects, and 23% had a neutral opinion.

How TDOT Compares to Other Departments of Transportation

Areas Where TDOT Performed *BETTER* than Neighboring State DOTs. Compared to the average rating for other Departments of Transportation in the eight states that border Tennessee, overall satisfaction with TDOT was significantly higher in the following areas:

- Adequacy of lighting at interchanges on highways in rural areas
- How well debris is removed from highways
- How well trash and litter are picked-up along highways
- The condition of the road surface on Interstates and other highways
- How well snow/ice is removed from highways
- Mowing and trimming of trees/grass/weeds along highways
- Condition of bridges on highways
- Level of congestion on highways in urban areas
- Overall, how safe residents feel when traveling on highways

Areas Where TDOT Performed *WORSE* than Neighboring State DOTs. Compared to the average rating for other Departments of Transportation in the eight states that border Tennessee, overall satisfaction with TDOT was significantly lower in the following areas:

- The availability and frequency of public transportation services
- How safe residents feel when traveling in work zones on highways at night
- How well detours on highways are marked
- The quality of the freight rail services
- The availability of passenger air services

Recommendations

The results of the surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews provide TDOT 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 Customer Satisfaction Survey, the research team has limited recommendations for improvement to the issues that are listed below.

Top Priorities. The four issues listed below should receive the highest overall priority from TDOT over the next two years. Improvements in these areas are likely to result in higher levels of satisfaction with TDOT. Decreased performance in these areas will likely result in lower levels of satisfaction.

- Repairing/maintaining existing highways and keeping road surfaces in good condition. This was the top priority for both resident and elected officials.
- Improving the visibility of striping at night and during wet weather. This issue was identified as an opportunity for improvement by both residents and elected officials.
- Improving drainage from the surface of highways during storms. This issue was identified as an opportunity for improvement by both residents and elected officials.
- Relieving congestion in urban areas. This issue was identified as an opportunity for improvement by both residents and elected officials.

Other Priorities. The next highest priorities that TDOT should emphasize over the next two years are listed below. These issues should receive a high priority from TDOT, but investments in these areas should not prevent TDOT from making improvements in the areas that have been identified as the “overall priorities” above.

- Improving lighting at highway interchanges in rural areas. This was identified as an opportunity for improvement for elected officials and overall satisfaction with lighting at rural interchanges was relatively low among residents.
- Developing dedicated lanes for trucks and/or additional passing lanes on highways. This was identified as a high priority for both residents and community elected officials.
- Adding shoulders to highways that don't have them. This was identified as an area for continued emphasis by both residents and elected officials.
- Increasing the availability of alternative modes of transportation, such as public transit. This was identified as an opportunity for improvement for residents.

Next Steps. Recommendations regarding the distribution of the results and the frequency that the survey should be conducted are listed below:

- TDOT should ensure that the results of the survey are communicated to all employees in the Department.
- TDOT should share the results of the survey with the elected officials who were invited to participate in the survey.
- TDOT should issue press releases to the media and informational notices to elected officials and key customer groups to report the findings of the Customer Satisfaction Survey and announce the Department's plans to respond to the findings.
- TDOT's Executive Team should require subordinate managers to identify specific ways that they will use the results of the Customer Satisfaction Survey to improve organizational performance over the next two years.

- The customer satisfaction survey should be administered every two years; TDOT should schedule the next survey for the Spring-Summer of 2008.

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 TDOT's Customer Satisfaction Survey clearly demonstrate that TDOT's commitment to its Strategic Plan and the Department's efforts to involve Tennessee residents in the development of the Long Range Transportation Plan 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 are relatively high in most areas. In order to continue achieving success, TDOT 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.