

Community Impact of Regional Transportation Infrastructure:  
Revisited After Completion of Airport and Major Highway

**Project 2034**

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# Final Report: Community Impact of Regional Transportation Infrastructure: Revisited After Completion of Airport and Major Highway

## Introduction to the Research Project

Not enough is known about the impact of transportation infrastructure on citizen satisfaction and quality of life. This study was an interdisciplinary project involving Public Policy, Public Administration, and Political Science. Measuring against a baseline data set created in 1993, this study examined the change in Northwest Arkansas citizens' attitudes toward recent improvements in both ground and air transportation infrastructure including the opening of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport and Interstate 540. Our primary research hypothesis was that residents of Northwest Arkansas support increased growth in this area, but may be experiencing higher levels of uncertainty as their community changes in the transition from a rural to a more urban corridor. The methodology was a mail survey sent to residents of Northwest Arkansas, and to expand on the 1993 research, we also sent the survey instrument to a selected group of public officials and policy decision makers in Northwest Arkansas.

## Results

Two things may be said about the outcome of this project. First, the methodology used in the survey did not allow us to make the kinds of comparisons we had hoped to make. So we were not confident enough in the survey results to publically announce the findings. Second, the survey laid the groundwork for a number of other research projects which continue to look at quality of life issues in Northwest Arkansas. It is expected that a number of dissertations and published articles, as well as a system of indicators for use at the county level in Arkansas, will result from the subsequent projects. Each of these two outcomes will be addressed below.

## Survey Results

In a number of ways, the survey results duplicates previous survey work. In this report we will discuss some of the most interesting and relevant findings. The previous survey, conducted near the completion of the new regional airport and a major highway to the south, showed similar travel patterns to our current survey in two important areas. The main north/south feeder (US 71) was used by over half of the respondents at least once a day. Secondly, the new airport has never been used by over half of the respondents to the survey.

	Travel Frequency			
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Never
Drive on 71	52%	37%	9%	2%
Fly XNA	0%	2%	33%	65%

As the area continues to grow, both traffic congestion and parking might be seen as problems.

Traffic and Parking			
	Not Serious	Somewhat Serious	Very Serious
Traffic Congestion	7%	46%	48%
Parking	44%	49%	7%

Both traffic congestion and parking are seen as somewhat problematic, but traffic congestion seems to be leading the way as an emerging concern in the area.

Still, respondents were happy with the direction of the region, believing that the region was a better place to live than it was five years ago.

Better Place to Live					
	Disagree		Neither		Agree
Better Place to Live	1%	5%	16%	31%	57%

When thinking about options to improve reduce traffic congestion, almost half of the respondents believed that the use of toll roads would be a good option.

Support Toll Roads		
Support	No Opinion	Against
49%	14%	37%

Another option is to use impact fees as a source of funding for road improvement and other infrastructure needs. Support for impact fees was much more decisive.

Support Impact Fees		
Support	No Opinion	Against
60%	24%	16%

Not all transportation developments are seen as unambiguous improvements. The building of a new regional airport has been received with some mixed emotions.

Regional Better than Municipal		
Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
18%	58%	24%

When asked whether the new regional airport made flying in and out of Northwest Arkansas easier, most respondents had no opinion and more disagreed than agreed. This corresponds with the previous

survey which noted the respondents desire to keep passenger service at their municipal airports. In this instance transportation policy may have reflected corporate more than public desires.

Reflecting the public's frequency of use and consistent with previous questions, respondents chose highways and local roads as the top two options for transportation funding. The differences were clear with highways and roads far above other spending preferences. It is also interesting to note that spending on air travel infrastructure was not supported at all.

Top Spending Preferences							
Highways	Roads	Rail Passenger	Public	Bicycle	Air	Sidewalks	Parking
68%	19%	6%	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%

There were two main reasons why the results of the study were not publicly released. First, the original survey was conducted by telephone. This present survey was conducted by mail. In looking at the results and analyzing the literature, we felt that such a mix-mode approach was not yet proven to the extent that we can make confident comparisons. In addition, we experimented with a series of "waves" spread over the course of six months for our second survey. While in theory we felt that the we could get a more stable view of opinions that would not be influenced by short term events, in the end we felt that we could not be sure enough of our approach and results to release the results.

Capturing quality of life and its relationship to transportation proved more difficult than expected. The research conducted here became the starting point for a series of continuing lines of study. We have made some steps toward operationalizing such concepts as "quality of life" and "sustainability," but much more needs to be done in order to understand the relationships.

## Continuing Research

A series of research projects has grown out of what we have learned in the above study. First, the Arkansas Science and Technology Authority funded a study on Arkansas and the new economy. This study looked at the conditions necessary for developing the "new economy" in Arkansas communities. The role of transportation in such development was considered as one aspect of the response to the changing economy and globalization.

Another study is being funded by the Arkansas Extension Service. In this case the effort is to try and determine useful indicators of economic growth and quality of life at the county level. Again the effort is to explore how to measure quality of life and "success" so that policy makers can respond to changing circumstances.

A final area of present study growing from the transportation study above has to do with sustainability. The graduate assistant who was funded by the above transportation grant is now working on how to measure quality of life and sustainability. The skills she developed in the transportation survey are being enhanced by further study and research. The hope is that we will continue to improve our ability to link transportation and other economic developments to changes in quality of life and sustainable community.

## Appendix

## Transportation and Community Growth

**1.) How do you feel about life in Northwest Arkansas today? Please circle the number that best reflects your level of satisfaction. 1 is very unsatisfied and 5 is very satisfied.**

	<b>Very</b>	<b>Very</b>
<b>How satisfied with...</b>	<b>Unsatisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>

My neighborhood as a place to live	1	2	3	4	5
The natural beauty of my community	1	2	3	4	5
The quality of my school district's public education	1	2	3	4	5
My house, apartment or mobile home	1	2	3	4	5
Housing affordability	1	2	3	4	5
The locally available retail stores	1	2	3	4	5
Local elected officials	1	2	3	4	5
My personal safety in my community	1	2	3	4	5
The condition of your local streets and roads	1	2	3	4	5
Local job opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Parks and public recreational facilities	1	2	3	4	5
The number of friends I have in my community	1	2	3	4	5
My household's income	1	2	3	4	5
The available leisure opportunities (arts, entertainment, restaurants).	1	2	3	4	5

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**3.) It is sometimes hard to know how serious people feel a problem is. Please circle the words (Not Serious, Somewhat Serious, Very Serious), which describe your feelings on each issue. In Northwest Arkansas, how serious a problem is...**

Parking space availability	Not serious	Somewhat Serious	Very Serious
Traffic congestion	Not serious	Somewhat Serious	Very Serious
Water pollution	Not serious	Somewhat Serious	Very Serious
Landfills	Not serious	Somewhat Serious	Very Serious
Noise	Not serious	Somewhat Serious	Very Serious
Tree loss	Not serious	Somewhat Serious	Very Serious
Crime	Not serious	Somewhat Serious	Very Serious
Air pollution	Not serious	Somewhat Serious	Very Serious
Local population growth	Not serious	Somewhat Serious	Very Serious
Transportation to health care facilities	Not serious	Somewhat Serious	Very Serious

4.) Decision-makers need to know how you feel about a variety of issues. Please circle a number which represents how strongly you agree or disagree. One means that you strongly disagree. Two that you disagree. Three that you neither agree nor disagree. Four means that you strongly agree with the statement.

Do you disagree or agree with...	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree		
	1	2	3	4	5	
I believe that my community is a better place to live than it was five years ago.	1	2	3	4	5	
There are enough well paying jobs in NW Arkansas.	1	2	3	4	5	
I am very afraid of being a victim of crime	1	2	3	4	5	
I favor efforts to expand underdeveloped, forested lands.	1	2	3	4	5	
Local government leaders care a lot about what I think.	1	2	3	4	5	
Continued population growth in our area will hurt our quality of life.	1	2	3	4	5	
The new highways and the new regional airport provide jobs for local people.	1	2	3	4	5	
Population growth most helps such individuals as bankers, realtors, businessmen and those who own land.	1	2	3	4	5	
This community is doing a good job of regulating growth.	1	2	3	4	5	
We have a right to modify the natural environment to suit our needs even if it harms some plants and animals.	1	2	3	4	5	
The cost of economic development to my region can be justified.	1	2	3	4	5	
We are preserving enough of NW Arkansas natural resources.	1	2	3	4	5	

The following questions are about transportation policy in Northwest Arkansas. Answering these questions will provide valuable information for policy makers in Northwest Arkansas.

5.) Do you drive to work?

Yes

No

If yes, how many miles (one way)? -----

How many minutes (one way)? -----

6.) As a result of the new regional airport at Highfill, flying in and out of Northwest Arkansas is easier than when we used local, municipal airports.

☐ Agree

☐ I have no opinion

☐ Disagree

7.) Some states are relying more heavily on toll roads in new road construction. Some argue Arkansas should rely more on toll roads, rather than other state funds, to help pay for new highway construction.

☐ I support new toll roads

☐ I have no opinion

☐ I am against new toll roads

8.) Local governments should charge "impact fees" to developers to help pay for the public sewer, water, roads, and other services that will be needed for new private businesses or residential areas.

☐ I support impact fees

☐ I have no opinion

☐ I am against impact fees

9.) Some local governments are putting more time and money into developing municipal airports for private planes and other purposes.

☐ I support increased municipal airport development

☐ I have no opinion

☐ I am against increased resources for municipal airports

**10.) Since we don't have enough money to pay for improving everything we would like, we have to make choices. Please circle the TOP TWO areas below where you would want more money spent for transportation improvements.**

Railroad Passenger Service

Highways

Local Roads

Bicycle Paths

Air Travel

Local Public Transportation

Sidewalks and paths for walking

Parking spaces

**11.) In general, how should transportation improvements be funded? Please check the source of money that you feel should be used to fund improvements in transportation.**

☐ User fees (tolls, tickets, weigh stations) collected by government agencies

☐ General Governmental Funding (taxes)

☐ Transportation should developed by private businesses who charge fees for use

**For statistical purposes, it is important to know some things about you. Under no circumstances will these answers be linked to any specific individual. Please check appropriate box.**

**1.) The area I live in is best described as..** ☐ Rural ☐ Urban

**2.) Are you male or female?** ☐ Male ☐ Female

**3.) How many years of schooling have you completed?** \_\_\_\_\_ years.

**4.) Do you own (or are in the process of buying) or rent your home?**

☐ Own (or buying) ☐ Rent

☐ Currently live with another family Other \_\_\_\_\_

**5.) Which range does your household's annual income fall into?**

☐ Less than 10,000 ☐ 30,000 to 39,999 ☐ 60,000 to 69,999

☐ 10,000 to 19,999 ☐ 40,000 to 49,999 ☐ 70,000 to 79,999

☐ 20,000 to 29,999 ☐ 50,000 to 59,999 ☐ above 80,000

**6.) What best describes your current employment status (Please check one.)?**

☐ Full time ☐ Part time ☐ Retired ☐ Full Time Student

☐ Part Time Student ☐ Unemployed ☐ Unemployed, not looking

**7.) In your household, how many children are there who are:**

Under 6 years old \_\_\_\_\_ 7 to 18 \_\_\_\_\_ Over 18 years old \_\_\_\_\_

**8.) How many years have you lived in Northwest Arkansas?** \_\_\_\_\_ Years.

**Lastly, all things considered, do you think life in Northwest Arkansas will get better, get worse, or**

stay the same?

☐ Better

☐ Worse

☐ Same

**Thank you for completing this survey. If you have any additional comments please enclose them with the questionnaire. If you would like a summary of survey results, please write your name and address on the back of the return envelope, not on the questionnaire.**