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**SD2010-03**



# **SDDOT 2011 Statewide Customer Satisfaction Assessment**

## **Study SD2010-03 Final Report**

**Prepared by  
ETC Institute  
Olathe, KS**

**August 2011**

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Toby Crow.....	Associated General Contractors	Ben Orsbon .....	Office of the Secretary
Kevin Goeden.....	Bridge Design	Scott Rabern .....	Operations Support
Tom Horan .....	Rapid City Region	Pat Sendelweck.....	Research
David Huft.....	Research	Megan Steever .....	Research
Lynn Kennison .....	Local Transportation Programs		

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16. Abstract <p>This report summarizes perceptions of the South Dakota Department of Transportation's performance in delivering services to residents and key customer groups across South Dakota. It is the sixth in a series of surveys that tracks and monitors attitudes and needs among SDDOT customers, including the general public, farmers, emergency vehicle operators, and trucker/shippers. The study includes opinions of 1,134 residents, 289 truckers/shippers, 141 emergency vehicle operators, 433 farmers, 423 senior citizens, and 50 state legislators.</p> <p>Key objectives that guided this research were to: assess the opinions of the public and key customer groups regarding the composition, importance, and delivered quality of the SDDOT's key products and services; assess the opinions of key business partners regarding the effectiveness of SDDOT's business practices and relationships; assess progress in addressing customer concerns through SDDOT's ongoing efforts to develop and execute strategic plans; and identify specific actions SDDOT can take to improve its performance and the perception of customer groups and business partners regarding its performance.</p> <p>By objectively assessing the opinions of the general public and key customer groups, this research provides a framework to help senior SDDOT managers continually identify and to respond to the needs of its customers over time.</p>					
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# Table of Contents

<b>DISCLAIMER</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>TECHNICAL REPORT STANDARD TITLE PAGE</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PURPOSE 1</b>	
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>RESEARCH APPROACH</b>	<b>1</b>
Stakeholder Interviews	1
Focus Groups	2
Customer Surveys	2
Contractor Survey	3
Executive Team Workshop	3
Executive Presentations	3
<b>SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS</b>	<b>3</b>
Highway Safety	3
Highway Maintenance	4
Highway Design	4
Transportation System Priorities	4
Communication	5
<b>CONSTRUCTION AND DETOURS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>TRAVEL BEHAVIOR OF RESIDENTS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CUSTOMER SERVICE</b>	<b>6</b>
Overall Perceptions of SDDOT	6
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>IMPLEMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>7</b>
Enhance External Communications	7
Emphasize Maintenance and Preservation	8
Emphasize Safety	8
Improve Interaction with Contractors	8
CLEARLY DEFINE AND COMMUNICATE THE DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR SENIORS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES	8
CLEARLY DEFINE AND COMMUNICATE THE DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN FUNDING LOCAL PROJECTS	9
<b>IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>TASK DESCRIPTIONS</b>	<b>13</b>

<b>TASK 1: INITIAL PANEL MEETING</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>TASK 2: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS</b>	<b>13</b>
Internal Stakeholder Interviews	13
External Stakeholders Interviews	14
<b>TASK 3: FOCUS GROUPS</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>TASK 4: SUMMARIZE FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS</b>	<b>16</b>
General Perceptions of SDDOT	17
<b>TASK 5: DEVELOP SURVEY INSTRUMENTS</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>TASK 6: CONDUCT SURVEYS</b>	<b>19</b>
Stakeholder Survey	19
Resident Survey	20
<b>TASK 7: TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>TASK 8: EXECUTIVE TEAM WORKSHOP</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>TASK 9: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>TASK 10: FINAL REPORT</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>TASK 11: EXECUTIVE PRESENTATIONS</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS</b>	<b>25</b>
RESIDENT AND STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS	25
HIGHWAY SAFETY FINDINGS	25
HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE	28
HIGHWAY DESIGN	30
TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES	31
COMMUNICATION ISSUES	32
CUSTOMER SERVICE	34
CONSTRUCTION AND DETOURS	36
TRAVEL BEHAVIOR OF RESIDENTS	36
ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP	37
OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF AND SATISFACTION WITH SDDOT	39
CONTRACTOR SURVEY FINDINGS	41
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>42</b>
OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH SDDOT IS HIGH AND HAS IMPROVED	42
SDDOT IS OUTPERFORMING OTHER DEPARTMENTS OF TRANSPORTATION	42
RESIDENTS FEEL SAFER DRIVING ON STATE HIGHWAYS THAN THEY DID FIVE YEARS AGO	42
SDDOT'S NEW METHODS FOR MANAGING WINTER MAINTENANCE HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE	43
SDDOT IS PROVIDING HIGH LEVELS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE	43
511 AND SAFETRAVELUSA.COM ARE MEETING THE NEEDS OF RESIDENTS	43
CONTRACTORS ARE GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH SDDOT	44

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>STEP ONE: THE PERFORMANCE-NEEDS ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>45</b>
Maintenance Priorities	45
Highway Design Priorities	46
<b>STEP 2: IMPLEMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>47</b>
Enhance External Communications	47
Emphasize Maintenance and Preservation	48
Emphasize Safety	48
Improve Interaction with Contractors	48
CLEARLY DEFINE AND COMMUNICATE THE DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR SENIORS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES	49
CLEARLY DEFINE AND COMMUNICATE THE DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN FUNDLING LOCAL PROJECTS	49
<b>IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>SUMMARY AND BENEFITS</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>APPENDICES (PUBLISHED SEPARATELY)</b>	
<b>APPENDIX A: POWERPOINT PRESENTATION GIVEN TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM</b>	<b>A-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS</b>	<b>B-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: SUMMARY OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS</b>	<b>C-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS</b>	<b>D-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX E: GIS MAPS OF SELECTED SURVEY RESULTS</b>	<b>E-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX F: RESIDENT SURVEY RESULTS BY DISTRICT</b>	<b>F-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX G: STAKEHOLDER SURVEY RESULTS FOR KEY CUSTOMER GROUPS</b>	<b>G-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX H: CONTRACTOR SURVEY RESULTS</b>	<b>H-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX I: RESIDENT AND KEY CUSTOMER GROUP SURVEY INSTRUMENT</b>	<b>I-1</b>
<b>APPENDIX J: CONTRACTOR SURVEY INSTRUMENT</b>	<b>J-1</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: STAKEHOLDER SAMPLE SURVEY SIZE BY CUSTOMER GROUP	19
FIGURE 2: RESIDENT SURVEY SAMPLE SIZE BY REGION	20
FIGURE 3: LOCATION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS	23
FIGURE 4: PERCEIVED BIGGEST SAFETY CONCERNS	26
FIGURE 5: TRAFFIC SAFETY RESPONSES	27
FIGURE 6: TRAFFIC SAFETY RESPONSES	27
FIGURE 7: SATISFACTION WITH HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE	28
FIGURE 8: REGIONAL COMPARISON OF HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE SATISFACTION	29
FIGURE 9: HIGHWAY FEATURES TO EMPHASIZE	30

FIGURE 10: SATISFACTION WITH HIGHWAY DESIGN FEATURES .....	31
FIGURE 11: TRANSPORTATION FUNDING PRIORITIES .....	32
FIGURE 12: 511 TRAVELER INFORMATION SYSTEM USE.....	33
FIGURE 13: FAMILIARITY WITH DYNAMIC MESSAGE SIGNS .....	33
FIGURE 14: PREFERRED METHODS FOR RECEIVING INFORMATION.....	34
FIGURE 15: SDDOT CONTACT DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS .....	35
FIGURE 16: EASE OF CONTACTING RIGHT PERSON AT SDDOT .....	35
FIGURE 17: SUCCESS OF GETTING QUESTIONS ANSWERED AT SDDOT .....	36
FIGURE 18: MILES DRIVEN PER YEAR .....	37
FIGURE 19: IMPORTANCE OF CONSIDERING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT .....	38
FIGURE 20: PERCEIVED ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP OF SDDOT.....	38
FIGURE 21: OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH SDDOT SERVICES .....	40
FIGURE 22: HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE EFFECTIVENESS NEEDS ASSESSMENT .....	46
FIGURE 23: HIGHWAY DESIGN PERFORMANCE NEEDS ASSESSMENT .....	47
FIGURE 24: TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS .....	49

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: FOCUS GROUP ATTENDANCE .....	16
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## PURPOSE

In 2011, the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) conducted a Customer Satisfaction Assessment of residents and key customer groups, including senior citizens, truckers, farmers/ranchers and emergency vehicle operators. The purpose of the assessment was to gather statistically valid data from residents and persons who impact transportation decisions in the State of South Dakota to help identify short-term and long-term transportation priorities for the Department. The assessment findings presented in this report will be used as part of SDDOT's on-going strategic planning process. SDDOT previously completed statewide Customer Satisfaction Assessments in 1997, 1999, 2002, 2004, and 2006.

## OBJECTIVES

The 2011 SDDOT Customer Satisfaction Assessment had four primary objectives.

1. To assess the opinions of the public and key customer groups regarding the composition, importance, and delivered quality of the SDDOT's key products and services.
2. To assess the opinions of key business partners regarding the effectiveness of SDDOT's business practices and relationships.
3. To assess progress in addressing customer concerns through SDDOT's ongoing efforts to develop and execute strategic plans.
4. To identify specific actions SDDOT can take to improve its performance and the perception of customer groups and business partners regarding its performance.

## RESEARCH APPROACH

The 2011 SDDOT Customer Satisfaction Assessment involved numerous data collection elements. The survey design process was composed of interviews with internal and external stakeholders and focus groups with residents and key customers groups. Quantitative input was obtained through statistically valid surveys that were administered to senior citizens, shippers/truckers, emergency vehicle operators, and farmers/ranchers.

The major components of the Customer Satisfaction Assessment are described below.

### STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The purpose of the internal and external stakeholder interviews was to assess the perceptions that senior SDDOT managers and external stakeholders have about the delivery of services provided by the South Dakota Department of Transportation. A total of 40 interviews were conducted during June 2006. The information from the internal and external interviews was used to develop questions for the focus groups that were administered in January 2011.



### **FOCUS GROUPS**

During January 2011, ETC Institute facilitated a total of 12 focus groups with residents and key customer groups of the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT). The focus groups were conducted with transportation stakeholders at four sites across the State of South Dakota including Aberdeen, Pierre, Rapid City and Sioux Falls. Each city hosted three focus groups. The purpose of the focus groups was three-fold: (1) to identify the core expectations residents and key customer groups have with regard to the delivery of transportation services, (2) to understand how residents and key customer groups evaluate the SDDOT's performance in different areas, and (3) to identify ways that residents and key customer groups think the SDDOT could improve the delivery of specific services.

### **CUSTOMER SURVEYS**

The South Dakota Department of Transportation conducted a survey of residents and key customer groups during the spring of 2011. The purpose of the surveys was to gather statistically valid data from residents and transportation stakeholders to objectively assess the relative importance of a wide range of issues that were identified during survey design process.

The methodology for each survey is briefly described below.

- Stakeholder Survey. The stakeholder surveys were administered to a stratified random sample of persons who influence transportation decisions in the State of South Dakota. The sample was designed to obtain data from five major customer groups, including: (1) senior citizens (2) truckers/shippers, (3) emergency vehicle operators, (4) farmers/ranchers, (5) Legislators. The goal was to obtain a total of 750 completed surveys from persons in these five groups. The actual number of completed surveys included 289 truckers/shippers, 141 emergency vehicle operators, 433 farmers, 423 senior citizens, and 50 legislators (customer groups were not mutually exclusive). The precision of the results for each stakeholder group at the 95% level of confidence is as follows: truckers/shippers (+/-4.8%), emergency vehicle operators (+/-6.2%), 433 farmers (+/-4.7%), 423 senior citizens (+/- 4.8%), and 50 legislators (+/-9.8%).
- Resident Survey Methodology. The resident survey was administered to a stratified random sample of 1,134 South Dakota residents during the months of April and May 2011. The sample was stratified to ensure the completion of at least 250 surveys in each of the four SDDOT regions. The survey was administered by phone and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The statewide sample of 1134 residents has a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least  $\pm 3.0\%$ .
- Benchmarking Survey. In addition to the surveys that were administered to residents and key customer groups in South Dakota, ETC Institute also administered a regional Benchmarking Survey to residents of other North Central States, including North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming and Montana. The benchmarking survey contained many of the same questions that were asked of residents in South Dakota to allow valid comparisons of the results of the 2011 resident survey to the results from other states.

### **CONTRACTOR SURVEY**

A separate contractor survey was administered to contractors who do business with the Department. The survey was designed to gather qualitative input from contractors regarding the perceptions of working with the Department. A total of 266 contractors completed the contractor survey.

### **EXECUTIVE TEAM WORKSHOP**

On July 21, 2011, ETC Institute facilitated a consensus building workshop with members of the Executive Team. The workshop included a presentation of the survey findings and a discussion of the issues that should be prioritized as a result of the survey. The recommendations contained in this report reflect the recommendations that were developed by the members of the Executive Team who participated in the workshop.

### **EXECUTIVE PRESENTATIONS**

In August 2011, ETC Institute made a final presentation of the results to SDDOT's Research Review Board and the South Dakota Transportation Commission. The presentations focused on the results of the survey, recommendations for action, and the implications that the survey results have for the Department's Strategic Plan.

## **SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS**

Major findings of the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment are provided below. The findings are grouped according to the topic areas that were addressed on the survey.

### **HIGHWAY SAFETY**

- Thirty percent (30%) of the *residents* surveyed indicated that South Dakota highways were “much safer” or “somewhat safer” than they were five years ago; 55% rated highways safety “about the same”; 12% thought highways were “more dangerous” and 3% did not have an opinion.
- Forty-two percent (42%) of the residents surveyed thought that “winter conditions” was one of the biggest safety concerns on highways. In 2006, forty-eight percent (48%) of the residents thought it was a concern. “Rough roads” (increased 11% from 2006) was second at 24%.
- Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the residents surveyed thought that the SDDOT did a good job of providing signage in work zones on state highways. This rating significantly increased since 2006 when eighty-five percent (85%) of the residents surveyed that the SDDOT did a good job of providing signage in work zones on state highways. The map at the bottom of the following page shows how well residents thought SDDOT was providing signage in work zones based on the location of the respondent’s home. The shading reflects the mean rating that was given by all respondents in each county. Counties with fewer than 20 respondents were merged with adjacent counties to ensure the results would be statistically significant. The entire state is shaded in blue, which indicates that residents generally thought SDDOT was doing a good job in all areas of the

state. Red and orange shading would have identified areas where residents did not think SDDOT was doing a good job.

### **HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE**

- Overall satisfaction with the quality of maintenance on state highways has increased significantly since 2002. Of the 13 highway maintenance areas that were assessed on the survey, satisfaction increased in 9 areas.
- The highway maintenance activities that had the highest levels of satisfaction were: maintaining guard rails, visibility of signs, cleaning rest areas, and providing roadside care.
- The areas that had the lowest levels of satisfaction were removing roadway and shoulder debris, maintaining the surface of highways, striping on the sides of road, and maintaining bridges.
- Areas of maintenance that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next two years were: (1) maintaining road surfaces, (2) removing roadway and shoulder debris, (3) maintaining bridges, and (4) striping on the sides of roads.
- Residents in South Dakota were more satisfied than residents in bordering states with 9 of the 13 maintenance areas that were assessed on the benchmarking survey that was conducted.

### **HIGHWAY DESIGN**

- Of the 12 highway design attributes that were assessed on the survey, overall satisfaction increased significantly in 4 of the 13 areas that were rated (note: changes of 3% or more were statistically significant). The only significant decrease involved satisfaction with smoothness of rural two lane highways.
- Highway features that had the **highest** levels of satisfaction from residents were: the adequacy of shoulders on Interstate, overflow of traffic on highways, and the adequacy of lighting at interchanges along Interstates in urban areas.
- Highway features that had the **lowest** levels of satisfaction among residents were: the frequency of roadside rest areas on non-Interstate highways, the adequacy of shoulders on rural 2-lane highways, and the smoothness of rural 2-lane highways.
- The two highway features that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next two years were: (1) the adequacy of shoulders on rural 2-lane highways and (2) the smoothness of rural 2-lane highways.

### **TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM PRIORITIES**

- The transportation system priorities that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next five years were: maintaining existing highways (51%), expanding transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities (28%), adding shoulders to highways (23%) and adding passing lanes to highways (22%).
- Some customer groups placed significantly more importance on various transportation priorities than other groups. For example, expanding transportation services for seniors and persons with

disabilities was significantly more important to seniors (32%). Widening highways and adding passing lanes were significantly more important to farmers/ranchers and truckers/shippers.

- Residents were much more likely to think that rural two-lane highways (57%) should receive priority for additional funding than they were to think Interstate highways (23%) should receive priority for additional funding.
- State legislators placed more importance on repairing and maintaining existing highways than any other customer group.

### **COMMUNICATION**

- Eighty-two percent (82%) of the residents surveyed are satisfied with SDDOT's efforts to keep them informed about road conditions.
- Three-fourths (76%) of the residents surveyed thought SDDOT adequately involved their community during the planning of highway improvements in their area.
- Four-fifths (85%) of the residents surveyed are familiar with 511. Of those residents who are familiar with 511, 60% indicated that they have actually called the service.
- Four-fifths (84%) of the residents surveyed had seen variable message boards along Interstate highways in South Dakota.
- The ways residents surveyed preferred getting or receiving information from the SDDOT were TV local public access channel (38%), radio (32%), and internet/webpage (29%).

### **CONSTRUCTION AND DETOURS**

- Forty percent (40%) of the residents surveyed indicated they experienced a delay due to road construction.
- Most (87%) of the residents surveyed who had experienced a delay caused by construction on state highways reported that the length of the work zone was acceptable.

### **TRAVEL BEHAVIOR OF RESIDENTS**

- Only 5% of the resident survey respondents indicated that they had used public transit, such as buses, for mobility within South Dakota during the past 12 months.
- Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the residents surveyed indicated that they drove 15,000 miles or more each year compared to 62% of the truckers/shippers, 64% of the farmers/ranchers, and 68% of the emergency vehicle operators.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**

- Eighty-three percent (83%) of the residents surveyed indicated that it was "very important" or "somewhat important" that the SDDOT consider the impact transportation improvements will have on the environment.

- Seventy-five percent (75%) of the residents surveyed thought that SDDOT was a good steward of the environment, and 21% did not have an opinion. Only 4% did not think SDDOT was a good steward of the environment.

## **CUSTOMER SERVICE**

- Among residents who had contacted a SDDOT employee during the past two years, 81% indicated that it was “easy” or “very easy” to contact the right person the last time they contacted the SDDOT; over 80% also reported that they were able to get their question answered or get the information needed the last time they contacted the SDDOT.

## **OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF SDDOT**

- The percentage of each customer group who thought SDDOT designs safe highways were as follows: 91% of state legislators, 88% of farmers/ranchers, 88% of residents, 88% of emergency vehicle operators, 88% of seniors, and 81% of truckers/shippers.
- The percentage of each customer group who thought SDDOT does a good job planning for future needs were as follows: 78% of seniors, 74% of farmers/ranchers, 72% of emergency vehicle operators, 69% of residents, 68% of state legislators, and 64% of truckers/shippers.
- The percentage of respondents in each customer group who thought SDDOT is an efficient organization were as follows: 82% of state legislators, 81% of seniors, 74% of emergency vehicle operators, 73% of residents, 72% of farmers/ranchers, and 62% of truckers/shippers.
- The percentage of respondents in each customer group who were satisfied with the overall quality of all services provided by SDDOT were as follows: 91% of state legislators, 88% of seniors, 83% of emergency vehicle operators, 82% of residents, 82% of farmers/ranchers, and 76% of truckers/shippers.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The following conclusions were made based on the results of the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment. The supporting evidence and rationale for each conclusion is provided in the main body of this report.

- **Overall Satisfaction with SDDOT Is High and Has Improved.** Eighty-two percent (82%) of the residents surveyed in 2011 indicated that they were satisfied with the overall performance of SDDOT compared to 81% in 2006 and 78% in 2004.
- **SDDOT Is Outperforming Other Departments of Transportation (DOTs).** SDDOT’s overall satisfaction rating of 82% was significantly higher than other Departments of Transportation in the North Central U.S., which includes in the states of Wyoming, North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri. The average overall satisfaction rating for these North Central states was 75%. In addition, SDDOT rated better than other DOTs in all 12 of the highway design attributes that were rated.
- **South Dakota Residents Feel Safer Driving On State Highways than They Did Five Years Ago.** The percentage of residents who indicated they felt safe driving through work zones

increased from 80% in 2006 to 84% in 2011. Overall, 85% of those surveyed thought South Dakota highways were safer or just as safe as they were five years ago.

- **SDDOT's New Methods for Managing Winter Maintenance Have Been Effective.** Overall satisfaction with SDDOT's winter maintenance operations (plowing, sanding, and salting of roadways) increased from 74% in 2006 to 75% in 2011. Although this increase is small, the increase occurred even though SDDOT significantly reduced the number of hours that the Department provides snow and ice removal during winter storms.
- **511 and SafeTravelUSA.com Are Meeting the Needs of Residents.** Eighty five percent (85%) of those surveyed who had visited SafeTravelUSA.com thought the website was "very easy" or "easy" to use, and only 2% thought the information provided by SafeTravelUSA.com was "not accurate." In addition, 85% of those surveyed who had called 511 thought the service was "very easy" or "easy" to use, and only 4% thought the information provided by 511 was "not accurate"
- **Contractors Are Generally Satisfied with SDDOT.** Eighty percent (80%) of the contractors surveyed were "extremely satisfied" or "satisfied" with the overall performance of SDDOT; only 7% were dissatisfied; 13% rated the Department's overall performance as average. In addition, 72% thought SDDOT was a customer-oriented organization; only 13% did not; the remaining 15% had a neutral opinion on the issue.

## **IMPLEMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The results of the surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews provide SDDOT with a comprehensive set of information to identify and manage customer-oriented improvements over the next few years. Although there are many applications for the data from the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment, the research team recommends that following actions based on the results of the survey and feedback from members of the Executive Team.

### **ENHANCE EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS**

**SDDOT should consider enhancing the quality of external communication with customers.** Specific actions that should be considered in support of this recommendation could include:

- Proactively educating the public and key customer groups about initiatives that have been implemented or will be implemented in response to concerns that were identified on the survey. For example, many shoulder improvements and highway resurfacing projects are planned for 2012-2016.
- Promoting the success and cost savings that resulted from the changes the Department made in the way winter maintenance services are provided.
- Using external communications to shape and manage customer expectations regarding the Department's ability to deliver core services, particularly with regard to the following issues: the smoothness of highways, bridge conditions, and shoulders along rural 2-lane highways.
- Increasing awareness and use of the Department's website.

### **EMPHASIZE MAINTENANCE AND PRESERVATION**

**SDDOT should emphasize the maintenance and preservation of the existing highway system because “repairing and maintaining highways” was clearly the top priority for residents on the 2011 survey.** Specific actions that should be considered in support of this recommendation include:

- Educating the public about the amount of resurfacing that has taken place on state highways over the past two years
- Informing the public and key customer groups about how SDDOT is planning to maintain and preserve the state highway system in future years.
- Ensuring that projects that support the preservation of the existing highway system are given a high priority in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.
- Continuing to emphasize the importance of maintaining the surface of state highways to all SDDOT employees so the organization will continue to be responsive to customer expectations in this area.

### **EMPHASIZE SAFETY**

**SDDOT should continue to emphasize operational investments and activities that support travel safety on state highways in South Dakota.** Specific operational activities that should be considered included the following:

- Enhancing the quality of centerline and roadside striping. Although satisfaction levels with roadside striping increased from 2006 to 2011, satisfaction with centerline striping decreased slightly. Both types of striping continue to be priorities for residents and key customer groups. Residents placed significantly more importance of centerline striping in 2011 than they did in 2006.
- Removing debris from state highways. Although this issue is significantly less important than it was in 2006, it is still one of the most important maintenance services to residents and key customer groups.

### **IMPROVE INTERACTION WITH CONTRACTORS**

**SDDOT should continue to improve the way it works with contractors.** Specific actions that that should be considered in response to this recommendation could include the following:

- Reviewing the process for developing and reviewing construction plans with contractors to ensure it is as efficient as possible.
- Doing more outreach with all contractors, including those who are not members of AGC. This could begin by hosting a webinar or other forum with contractors to share the results of the survey and how the Department plans to use the results.

### **CLEARLY DEFINE AND COMMUNICATE THE DEPARTMENT’S ROLE IN SUPPORTING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR SENIORS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

Transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities was identified as the second most important transportation priority. It was second only to repairing and maintaining existing highways.

Given the importance of this issue, the Department needs to clearly define and externally communicate what its role in this area will be. If the Department does not take action to manage expectations in this area, residents and other key customer groups may develop unrealistic expectations for the Department, which could have a negative impact on overall satisfaction in future years.

#### **CLEARLY DEFINE AND COMMUNICATE THE DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN FUNDING LOCAL PROJECTS**

Several focus group participants and external stakeholders suggested that SDDOT provide more funding to support local transportation projects. Although SDDOT is not responsible for maintaining local systems, customers may expect the Department to provide more support for local transportation projects if the condition of these systems continues to decline. In order to manage expectations, the Department should clearly define what, if any, role SDDOT will have in providing funding for local projects over the next three to five years. If the Department does not take action to manage expectations in this area, residents and other key customer groups may develop unrealistic expectations for the Department, which could have a negative impact on overall satisfaction in future years.

### **IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE**

The recommendations described above should be implemented in three steps as described below.

#### **Step 1: SDDOT Should Market the Results of the Survey to External Customers**

- During the late summer of 2011, SDDOT should consider issuing press releases to the media and informational notices to leaders of key customer groups to report the findings of the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment and announce the Department's plans to respond to the findings.

#### **Step 2: SDDOT Should Establish Awareness and Accountability within SDDOT**

- During the fall of 2011, SDDOT should consider sharing the results of the survey with all employees in the Department.
- During the winter of 2011/2012, the Executive Team should consider having subordinate managers from the Area Engineer level and above to identify specific ways that they will use the results of the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment to improve organizational performance over the next two years.
- During the late summer or early fall of 2012, SDDOT should consider having managers from the Area Engineer level and above provide an update to their immediate supervisor regarding how they have used the results of the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment to improve their work unit's performance as part of their performance review process.

#### **Step 3: SDDOT Should Initiate Another Assessment**

- During the winter of 2012/2013, SDDOT should initiate the necessary actions to conduct another Customer Satisfaction Assessment in 2013.



## **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 the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment clearly demonstrate that SDDOT's on-going efforts to gather input from customers 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 have improved in almost every area that has been rated over the past five years.

Despite significant progress, the Department still has room for improvement. To continue achieving success, SDDOT should respond to the results of this survey and be prepared to respond to new issues that will emerge in the years ahead.

## PURPOSE

In 2011, the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) conducted a Customer Satisfaction Assessment of residents and key customer groups, including senior citizens, truckers, farmers/ranchers and emergency vehicle operators. The purpose of the assessment was to gather statistically valid data from residents and persons who impact transportation decisions in the State of South Dakota to help identify short-term and long-term transportation priorities for the Department. The assessment findings presented in this report will be used as part of SDDOT's on-going strategic planning process. SDDOT previously completed statewide Customer Satisfaction Assessments in 1997, 1999, 2002, 2004, and 2006.

## OBJECTIVES

The 2011 SDDOT Customer Satisfaction Assessment had four primary objectives.

1. *To assess the opinions of the public and key customer groups regarding the composition, importance, and quality of the Department of Transportation's key products and services.* This objective was addressed by asking customers to objectively assess the Department's performance in key areas of service delivery. Stakeholder interviews and focus groups were used to identify the expectations and concerns of external customers. Internal interviews with SDDOT managers were implemented to identify the informational needs of SDDOT employees. The "Findings" section of this report has been developed to address this objective.
2. *To assess the opinions of key business partners regarding the effectiveness of SDDOT's business practices and relationships.* PLEASE INCLUDE DISCUSSION
3. *To assess progress in addressing customer concerns through SDDOT's ongoing efforts to develop and execute strategic plans.* This objective was accomplished by linking each question on the survey to specific elements in the Department's Strategic Plan. By identifying the relationship between survey questions and the Strategic Plan prior to the administration of the survey, SDDOT was able to link the results of the survey to specific components of the Strategic Plan. The "Conclusions" Section of this report has been developed to address this objective.
4. *To identify specific actions that the Department can take to improve its performance and the perception its customers have of the Department.* This objective was addressed by using the results of the survey to identify the areas that should be priorities for the Department over the next two years. The "Recommendations" Section of this report has been developed to address this objective.

## TASK DESCRIPTIONS

The 2011 SDDOT Customer Satisfaction Assessment consisted of eleven major tasks. Each of these tasks is described below.

### **TASK 1: INITIAL PANEL MEETING**

*Initial meeting with the project's technical panel to review the project's scope and work plan.* During November 2010, ETC Institute met with members of the project's technical panel and the Executive Team to ensure that all members of the project team had the same understanding of the goals and objectives for the project. At this meeting, the details of the research design strategy were discussed and the research objectives were finalized. A list of transportation stakeholders and the SDDOT managers to be interviewed were also developed along with a list of questions that should be asked of these individuals. In addition, ETC Institute began reviewing prior surveys and research administered previously by the SDDOT to ensure that the research efforts for this project would build on previous studies.

### **TASK 2: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS**

*Interviews with senior SDDOT managers along with interviews with key transportation stakeholders from across the State of South Dakota.* Based on issues identified at the initial planning meeting, ETC Institute designed and administered a short open-ended interview that was administered to internal stakeholders (SDDOT managers) and external stakeholders throughout the State. The purpose of the internal and external stakeholder interviews was to assess the perceptions that senior SDDOT managers and external stakeholders have about the delivery of services provided by the South Dakota Department of Transportation. A total of 40 interviews were conducted in January 2011. The information from the internal and external interviews was used to develop questions for the focus groups that were administered during January 2011.

#### **INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS**

ETC Institute conducted 13 one-on-one interviews with members of the Executive Team in January 2011. The purpose of the senior manager interviews was to gather input about a wide range of issues related to SDDOT's external customer survey. Some of the findings from the internal interviews with senior SDDOT managers are listed below:

- Every member of the Executive Team rated the overall quality of the State's transportation system as good or excellent.
- All members of the Executive Team thought the survey was valuable to the Department and most thought the results of the survey should be open shared with employees.
- Most (10 of 13) of the senior managers who were interviewed thought the State's transportation system has gotten better over the past five years.
- Winter maintenance and resource allocation were the two items that were mentioned most frequently as strengths of SDDOT.

- Senior Managers were asked if there had been any significant internal or external changes that could have affected customer expectations for or satisfaction with SDDOT, two items were frequently mentioned by half of the managers who were interviewed: (1) the loss of the 90/10 program and (2) the Department's emphasis on preservation.

### **EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWS**

ETC Institute conducted 40 one-on-one interviews by phone with leaders of organizations outside the Department of Transportation who use transportation services or influence transportation decisions in the State of South Dakota. The interviews were conducted in January, 2011. The purpose of the external stakeholder interview was twofold. First, it was designed to help identify issues that should be addressed in the 2011 External Customer Survey. Second, it was designed to involve external customers in the survey development process to educate key customer groups about the Departments process for gathering customer input. Some of the findings from the internal interviews with senior SDDOT managers are listed below:

- Thirty-two (32) of the 40 stakeholders rated South Dakota's transportation system as either "excellent" (9) or "good" (23). Seven stakeholders rated it as "average," and only one rated it as "poor."
- More than half of the external stakeholders (22) said South Dakota's transportation system has gotten better compared to 5 years ago. Sixteen (16) external stakeholders thought the system has stayed the same, and two thought it has gotten somewhat worse.
- The two items that were most frequently mentioned by external stakeholders as the things SDDOT does best were: (1) removal of snow/ice from highways and (2) maintenance of highway pavement.
- Areas for improvement that were suggested by external stakeholders included: improving the Department's website, collaborating more with county/city agencies regarding safety issues, continuing to improve public information processes to ensure residents and businesses are informed about DOT's plans and current activities, improving the surface and shoulders on secondary highways, reducing the length of work zones, increasing opportunities for public involvement, and reducing the time it takes to complete major construction projects.
- External stakeholders were asked if they had any specific concern about travel safety on State highways. More than half (24 of 40) did not have any concerns.
- External stakeholders were asked if they had any specific concerns about construction and maintenance on State highways in South Dakota. More than half (23 of 40) did not have any concerns.
- External stakeholders were asked if they think the South Dakota Department of Transportation uses the resources it has wisely. All but two (38 out of 40) external stakeholders said "yes."

## **TASK 3: FOCUS GROUPS**

***Conduct focus groups.*** During January 2011, ETC Institute facilitated a total of 12 focus groups with residents and key customer groups of the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT). These

key customer groups included residents, farmers, emergency vehicle operators, truckers/shippers and senior citizens. The focus groups were conducted with transportation stakeholders at four sites across the State of South Dakota including Aberdeen, Pierre, Rapid City and Sioux Falls. Each city hosted three focus groups. Focus groups were designed and administered to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Identify the core expectations that residents and key customer groups had with regard to the delivery of transportation services. This involved a discussion about which services are most important and why. Since expectations for transportation services change over time, the focus groups were used to validate the types of information that are being gathered on the survey and to measure satisfaction with services that had not been assessed in previous surveys.
2. Understand how residents and key customer groups evaluate the SDDOT's performance in different areas. This involved a discussion about what constitutes good (or bad) service delivery in order to identify performance measures that will assist SDDOT in better evaluating the delivery of specific services.
3. Identify ways that residents and core customer groups think the SDDOT could improve the delivery of specific services. This involved the solicitation of ideas regarding improvements to existing services as well as a discussion regarding the need for services that are not currently provided.

In order to ensure that the focus groups met their intended purposes, the following steps were carried out:

- A moderator's script was developed by ETC Institute based on input from SDDOT staff and others as appropriate; moderators met with SDDOT staff to ensure that the project's goals were understood and achieved.
- A time line was developed for the focus groups ensuring that each of the major topic areas was covered in the 90-minute period. The moderator(s) rehearsed the script with a test audience at ETC Institute's focus group facility before the focus groups were conducted.
- A notebook was developed to ensure that note taking efforts are uniform. The notebook contained an outline of the moderator's script and provided ample room to write comments. Different notebooks were used to record comments from each of the focus groups.
- Debriefings were conducted at the end of each focus group to ensure that all pertinent points were captured and recorded.
- Notes from the completed focus group sessions were compiled and reviewed by the senior staff at ETC Institute for content and accuracy. The notes were compared to audio recordings of each meeting to ensure that all the information was accurate.

A total of 108 persons attended the 12 focus groups. Four focus groups were conducted with residents. Two focus groups were conducted with seniors (age 65+), farmers/ranchers, and emergency vehicle operators. One focus group was conducted with truckers/shippers and one was conducted with contractors. Of the 108 individuals who attended the focus groups, there were 18 emergency vehicle operators, 19 farmer/agriculture participants, 17 seniors, 8 truckers/shippers, 10 contractors, and 36 residents. A breakdown of attendance by location is provided in the table below.

**Table 1: Focus Group Attendance**

Type	# of Groups#	Participants				
		Aberdeen	Pierre	Rapid City	Sioux Falls	Sum
Emergency Vehicle Operators	2			10	8	18
Farmers/Ranchers	2	11	8			19
Seniors	2	7	10			17
Truckers/Shippers	1				8	8
Residents	4	8	9	9	10	36
Contractors	1			10		10
TOTALS	12	26	27	29	26	108

A wide range of topics were covered during the focus groups. These topics were grouped into the nine major areas of discussion listed below.

- General perceptions of transportation in South Dakota
- Perceptions of state highways
- Construction and detours.
- How SDDOT interacts with local communities
- Urban/rural transportation issues, including public transportation
- Airport service issues
- Rail service issues
- Environmental issues
- SDDOT efforts to keep the public informed.

At the end of each focus group, all participants were given an opportunity to make closing comments on any topic.

#### **TASK 4: SUMMARIZE FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS**

*Summarize findings of focus groups and interviews and present the summary to SDDOT's technical panel and Executive Team.* Once the interviews and focus groups had been completed, ETC Institute prepared a report that summarized the methodology for gathering the data and the major findings. A copy of the Summary Report for the focus groups is provided in Appendix D. Some of the major findings from the focus groups are provided below.

## **GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF SDDOT**

Eighty percent (86 out of 108) of the people who attended the focus groups thought the quality of the transportation system in the state of South Dakota was either “good” or “excellent;” 19% (21 out of 108) of the participants gave a rating of “average” and 1% (2 out of 108) rated the transportation system as “poor.”

Many of the concerns that focus group participants had about the state transportation system related to the length of construction projects, limited shoulder widths, poor striping, and lane width. Several participants commented that they thought SDDOT did an excellent job with the budget they have available. Only four of the 108 participants thought the value received from their transportation dollars in South Dakota was poor.

### **Interaction with Local Communities**

Focus group participants were asked to indicate whether or not they were generally satisfied with SDDOT’s process of notifying the public about major construction projects on state highways. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of the participants said “YES”; 20% did not have an opinion, and 11% said “NO”. Some of the specific comments on this subject are listed below.

- Would be nice if there were more options to involve the public.
- DOT does a good job informing the public about highway construction. I’ve seen public meetings available to discuss issues for anybody who wants to attend.
- I’ve experienced them letting us know of highway construction ahead of time. It really helped make issues related to the construction more understandable.
- I’ve contacted DOT, and they were very helpful.
- They’ve kept me well informed.
- They had meetings frequently for a recent DOT construction project (bridge on Haynes), and the meetings were really helpful.
- If you ask for info you’ll get good information, including get invited to meetings, but you have to seek it out

### **Public Information**

Seventy-six percent (76%) of *residents* surveyed thought that SDDOT does a good job of keeping the public informed about plans for future road work; 82% thought the Department does a good job keeping the public informed about road conditions..

Eighty-five percent (85%) of *seniors* thought that SDDOT does a good job of keeping the public informed about plans for future road work; 85% thought the Department does a good job keeping the public informed about road conditions..



Seventy-two percent (72%) of truckers/shippers thought that SDDOT does a good job of keeping the public informed about plans for future road work; 80% thought the Department does a good job keeping the public informed about road conditions..

Eighty-two percent (82%) of state legislators thought that SDDOT does a good job of keeping the public informed about plans for future road work; 82% thought the Department does a good job keeping the public informed about road conditions..

Seventy-two percent (72%) of emergency vehicle operators thought that SDDOT does a good job of keeping the public informed about plans for future road work; 81% thought the Department does a good job keeping the public informed about road conditions..

Seventy-six percent (76%) of farmers and ranchers thought that SDDOT does a good job of keeping the public informed about plans for future road work; 79% thought the Department does a good job keeping the public informed about road conditions..

Some of the comments that were made by focus group participants about the Department's efforts to keep residents informed are listed below.

- I hear reports on the news a lot.
- Seem to be getting a little better about telling us when roads will be closed for maintenance.
- There's always room for improvement, but it seems like they do a really good job.
- I've heard stuff on the radio, TV, and in the newspaper.
- There are many avenues they use to keep you informed.
- It's always on the news, in the newspaper, even on the internet.
- Seems like there's always something about DOT in the newspaper.
- They require contractors to publicize transportation issues.
- I've viewed the road 511 cameras, and they are really useful.

## **TASK 5: DEVELOP SURVEY INSTRUMENTS**

Based on the results of the interviews, focus groups, and feedback from the Executive Team, ETC Institute designed multiple survey instruments. One survey was designed to gather input from residents. In addition, ETC Institute developed and refined survey instrument(s) for key customer groups including truckers/shippers, emergency vehicle operators, farmers, contractors, and senior citizens. After several drafts of each survey were conducted, ETC Institute provided the Technical Panel with copies for review. Based on the comments received from the Technical Panel, ETC Institute submitted a revised draft to the SDDOT for approval.

The resident survey was approximately 20 minutes in length and was administered by phone. The surveys for key customer groups varied in length and were administered by a combination of mail, phone, and fax.

## TASK 6: CONDUCT SURVEYS

The South Dakota Department of Transportation conducted a survey of key stakeholder groups and a statewide survey of residents during the spring of 2011. The purpose of the surveys was to gather statistically valid data from transportation stakeholders and residents to objectively assess the relative importance of a wide range of issues that were identified during survey design process.

### STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

The stakeholder survey was administered to a stratified random sample of persons who influence transportation decisions in the State of South Dakota. The sample was designed to obtain data from five major customer groups, including: (1) senior citizens (2) truckers/shippers, (3) emergency vehicle operators, (4) farmers/ranchers, (5) Legislators. The actual number of completed surveys included 289 truckers/shippers, 141 emergency vehicle operators, 433 farmers, 423 senior citizens, and 50 legislators (customer groups were not mutually exclusive). **Error! Reference source not found.** illustrates the distribution of the external surveys by customer group. The precision of the results for each stakeholder group at the 95% level of confidence is as follows: truckers/shippers (+/-4.8%), emergency vehicle operators (+/-6.2%), 433 farmers (+/-4.7%), 423 senior citizens (+/- 4.8%), and 50 legislators (+/-9.8%).

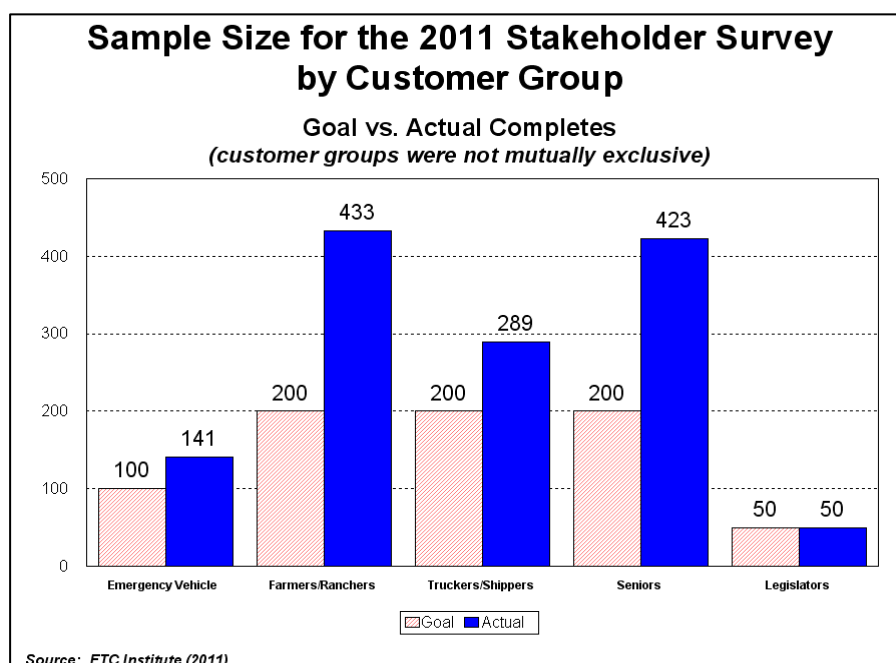


Figure 1: Stakeholder Sample Survey Size by Customer Group

**CONTRACTOR SURVEY.** A separate contractor survey was administered to contractors who do business with the Department. The survey was designed to gather qualitative input from contractors regarding the perceptions of working with the Department. A total of 266 contractors completed the contractor survey.

### **RESIDENT SURVEY**

The resident survey was administered to a stratified random sample of 1,134 South Dakota residents during the months of April and May 2011. The sample was stratified to ensure the completion of at least 250 surveys in each of the four SDDOT regions. The survey was administered by phone and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The statewide sample of 1,134 residents has a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least  $\pm 3.0\%$ . Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the resident survey by region

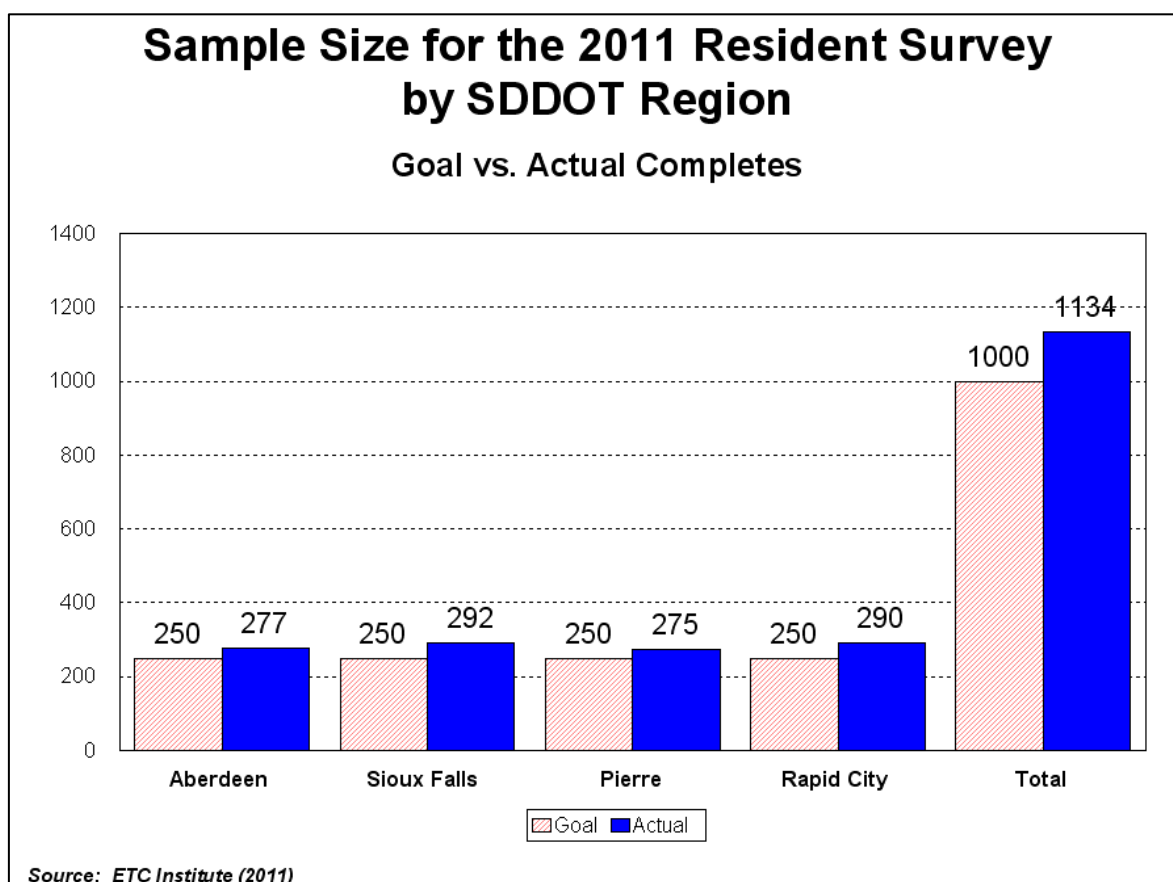


Figure 2: Resident Survey Sample Size by Region

### **BENCHMARKING SURVEY**

In addition to the surveys that were administered to residents and key customer groups in South Dakota, ETC Institute also administered a regional Benchmarking Survey to residents of other North Central States, including North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming and Montana. The benchmarking survey contained many of the same questions that were asked of residents in South Dakota to allow valid comparisons of the results of the 2011 resident survey to the results from other states.

The benchmarking survey was approximately 10 minutes in length and was administered by phone January 2011. The overall results of the benchmarking survey have a precision of at least  $\pm 5\%$  at the 95% level of confidence.

**Areas Where South Dakota Performed BETTER than Neighboring States.** South Dakota rated better than neighboring states in 21 of the 25 areas that were assessed, including:

- Maintaining guard rails
- Visibility of signs
- Cleaning rest areas
- Providing roadside care
- Frequency of signs
- Maintaining shoulders along roads
- Plowing/salting/sanding of roadways
- Striping on the sides of road
- Maintaining surface of highways
- Lighting at interchanges in cities
- Overall flow of traffic on highways
- Shoulders on Interstate/divided highways
- Frequency of roadside rest areas on Interstates
- Stormwater runoff/drainage from highways
- Lighting at interchanges in rural areas
- Landscaping/snow fences along highways
- Regulation on billboards/business signs
- Smoothness of Interstates/divided highways
- Shoulders on rural 2-lane highways
- Frequency of roadside rest areas on highways
- Smoothness of rural 2-lane highways

**Areas Where South Dakota Rated WORSE than Neighboring States.** South Dakota rated worse than neighboring states in four of the 25 areas that were assessed, including:

- Posting speed zones
- Center line striping
- Maintaining Bridges
- Removing roadway/shoulder debris

## **TASK 7: TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM**

ETC Institute prepared and submitted a technical memorandum that summarized the survey results, compared the results to previous assessments and identified issues that are most deserving of action by the SDDOT.

## **TASK 8: EXECUTIVE TEAM WORKSHOP**

On July 21, 2011, ETC Institute facilitated a consensus building workshop with members of the Executive Team. The workshop included a presentation of the survey findings and a discussion of the issues that should be prioritized as a result of the survey. The recommendations contained in this report reflect the recommendations that were developed by the members of the Executive Team who participated in the workshop.

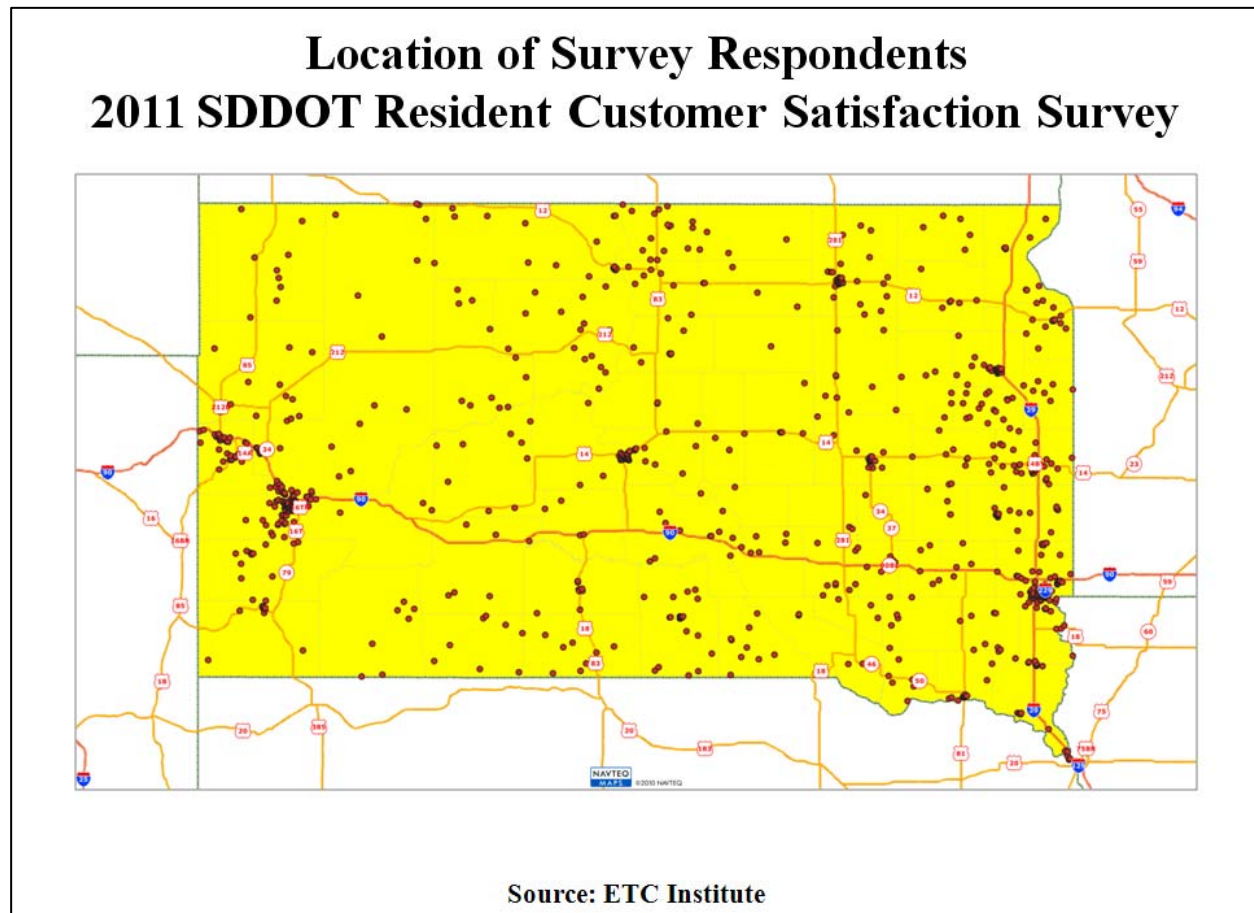
## **TASK 9: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION**

The tools that were used to develop the recommendations that are contained in this report are described below.

- Trend Analysis. Differences between the 2011 and previous surveys were reviewed. Significant differences are identified in the appropriate sections of this report.
- Benchmarking Analysis. The results of the 2011 Survey were compared to the results of the regional benchmarking survey that was described on page 10.
- Performance/Needs Assessment. Performance/Needs Assessment is a unique tool that allows organizations the ability to assess the quality of service delivery and to use survey data to help set organizational priorities. The Importance-Satisfaction rating is based on the concept that public agencies will maximize overall customer satisfaction by emphasizing improvements in those areas where the level of satisfaction is relatively low and the perceived importance of the service is relatively high. ETC Institute developed a Performance/Needs Matrix for the SDDOT to display the perceived importance of core services against the perceived quality of service delivery. These matrices are provided in the recommendations section of this summary report.
- Regional analysis/cross tabulation of the survey data. Although the primary objective of the Customer Satisfaction Assessment is to evaluate the delivery of services statewide, overall findings may camouflage important differences that exist within regions of the state. To ensure that potential differences are identified when they occur, individual analysis has been conducted for each of the four regions (Aberdeen, Mitchell, Pierre and Aberdeen) that constitute the SDDOT. The results for each question on the survey were tabulated by region and significant differences are noted where applicable in subsequent sections of this report.
- Comparison of the results among different customer groups. In addition to the survey conducted among South Dakota residents, surveys were also conducted with key customer groups who have a prominent stake in the delivery of SDDOT services. These key customer groups included farmers/ranchers, shippers/truckers, emergency vehicle operators, contractors, and senior citizens.

To ensure that potential differences between key customer groups were identified, individual analysis was conducted for each of the customer groups that were surveyed. Significant differences are noted where applicable in subsequent sections of this report.

- **GIS Mapping.** GIS Mapping is a method to identify potential areas of concern based on the geographic location of the respondent's home. Survey results were geocoded to the home address of respondents to the resident survey. This technique allowed the survey data to be integrated with geographic information systems (GIS), which allowed ETC Institute to prepare maps that show overall satisfaction with specific SDDOT services. The maps are provided in subsequent sections of this report. The map below shows the location of respondents to the survey.



**Figure 3: Location of Survey Respondents**

The actual recommendations for action are provided in the “Recommendations for Action” section of this report.

## **TASK 10: FINAL REPORT**

ETC Institute prepared a draft of the final report summarizing research methodology, findings, conclusions and recommendations, as well as copies of the survey instrument that were used. This report included, but was not limited to, the following items:

- Executive summary of survey methodology and findings
- Benchmarking analysis that shows how the results of SDDOT's customer satisfaction survey compares to regional norms
- Charts depicting the overall results of the survey
- Tabular data that shows the overall results for each question on each survey along with cross tabulations of the results by region and other variables as appropriate
- Conclusions and recommendations for action
- Copies of the survey instruments
- Summary reports for the stakeholder interviews and focus groups

## **TASK 11: EXECUTIVE PRESENTATIONS**

In August 2011, ETC Institute made a final presentation of the results to SDDOT's Research Review Board and the South Dakota Transportation Commission. The presentations focused on the results of the survey, recommendations for action, and the implications that the survey results have for the Department's Strategic Plan.

# SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

## RESIDENT AND STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS

The 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment was designed to evaluate SDDOT's performance in ten major areas:

- Driving Behavior
- Construction and Detours
- Highway Safety
- Highway Maintenance
- Highway Design
- Communication
- Environmental Stewardship
- Transportation System Priorities
- Travel Characteristics of Residents
- Overall Perceptions of and Satisfaction with SDDOT

Significant findings for the Resident and Stakeholder surveys for each of these areas are described below.

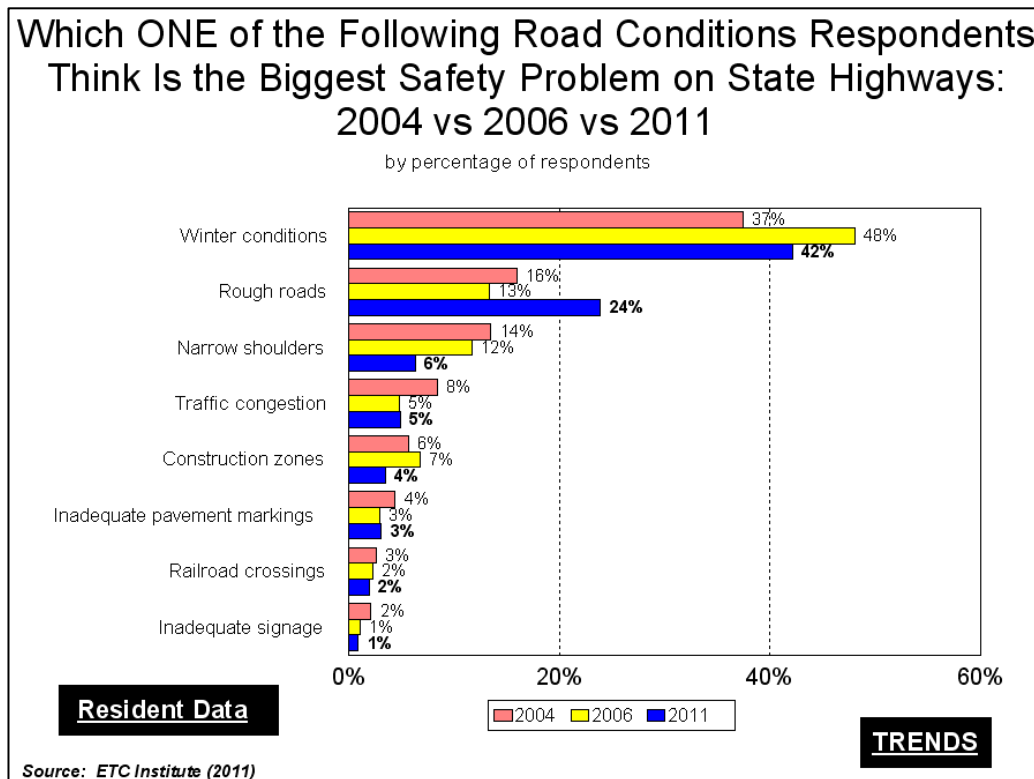
## HIGHWAY SAFETY FINDINGS

During the focus groups, residents and key customer groups across the state indicated that they thought highway safety should be one of the top priorities for SDDOT. Some of the specific findings that were related to highway safety are listed below.

- Thirty percent (30%) of the residents surveyed indicated that South Dakota highways were “much safer” or “somewhat safer” than they were five years ago; 55% rated highways safety “about the same”; 12% thought highways were “more dangerous” and 3% did not have an opinion.
- Forty-two percent (42%) of the residents surveyed thought that “winter conditions” was one of the biggest safety concerns on highways. In 2006, forty-eight percent (48%) of the residents thought it was a concern. “Rough roads” (increased 11% from 2006) was second at 24%.
- Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the residents surveyed thought that the SDDOT did a good job of providing signage in work zones on state highways. This rating significantly increased since 2006 when eighty-five percent (85%) of the residents surveyed that the SDDOT did a good job of providing signage in work zones on state highways. The map at the bottom of the following page shows how well residents thought SDDOT was providing signage in work zones based on the location of the respondent's home. The shading reflects the mean rating that was given by all



respondents in each county. Counties with fewer than 20 respondents were merged with adjacent counties to ensure the results would be statistically significant. The entire state is shaded in blue, which indicates that residents generally thought SDDOT was doing a good job in all areas of the state. Red and orange shading would have identified areas where residents did not think SDDOT was doing a good job.



**Figure 4: Perceived Biggest Safety Concerns**

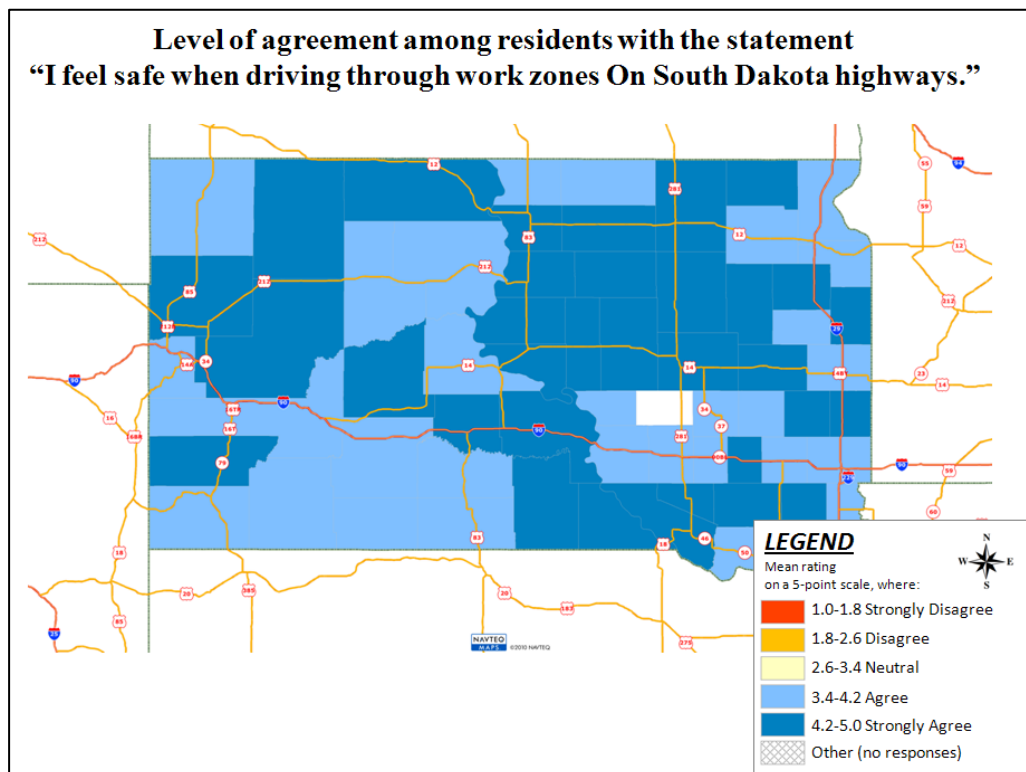


Figure 5: Traffic Safety Responses

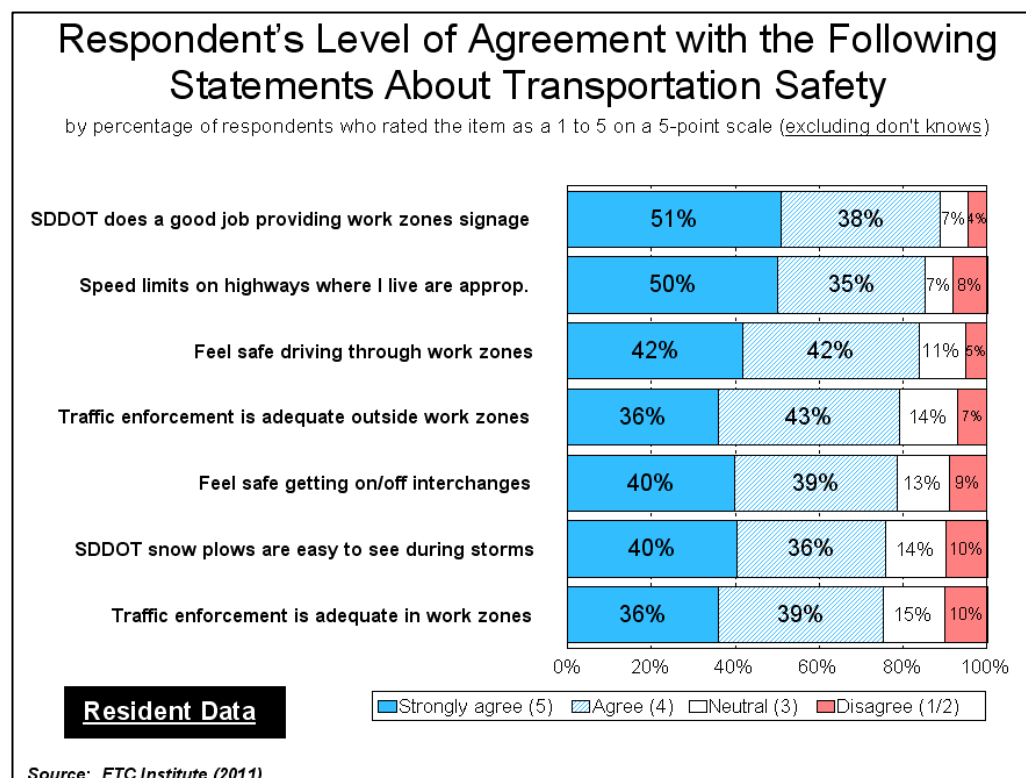
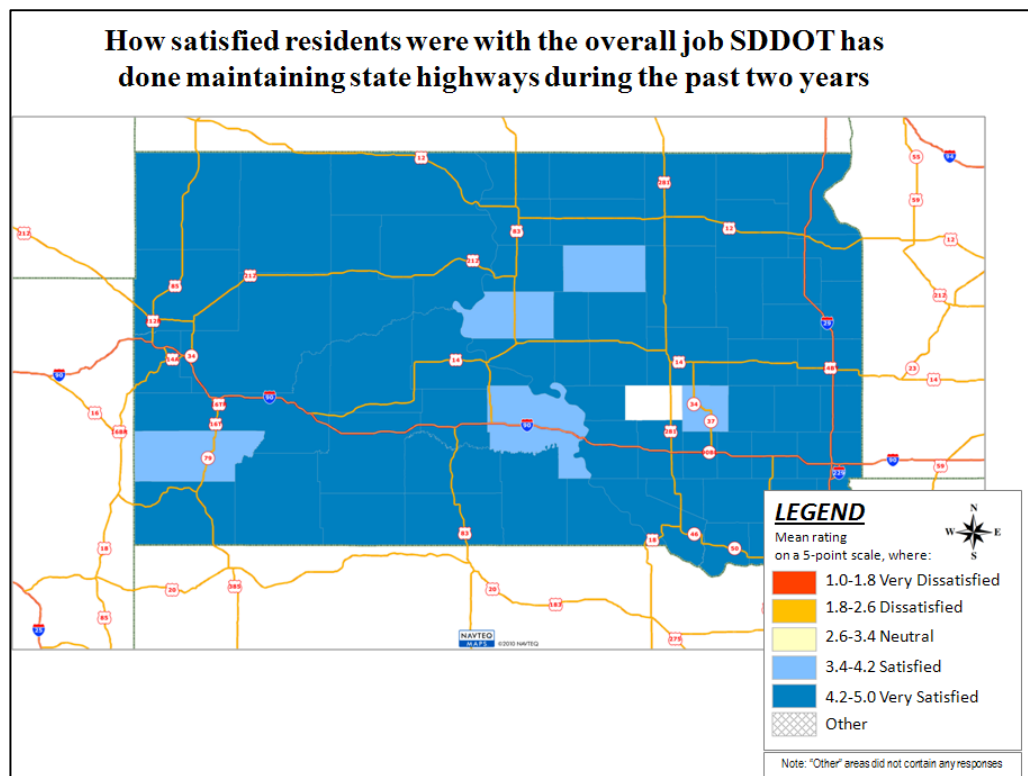


Figure 6: Traffic Safety Responses

## HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

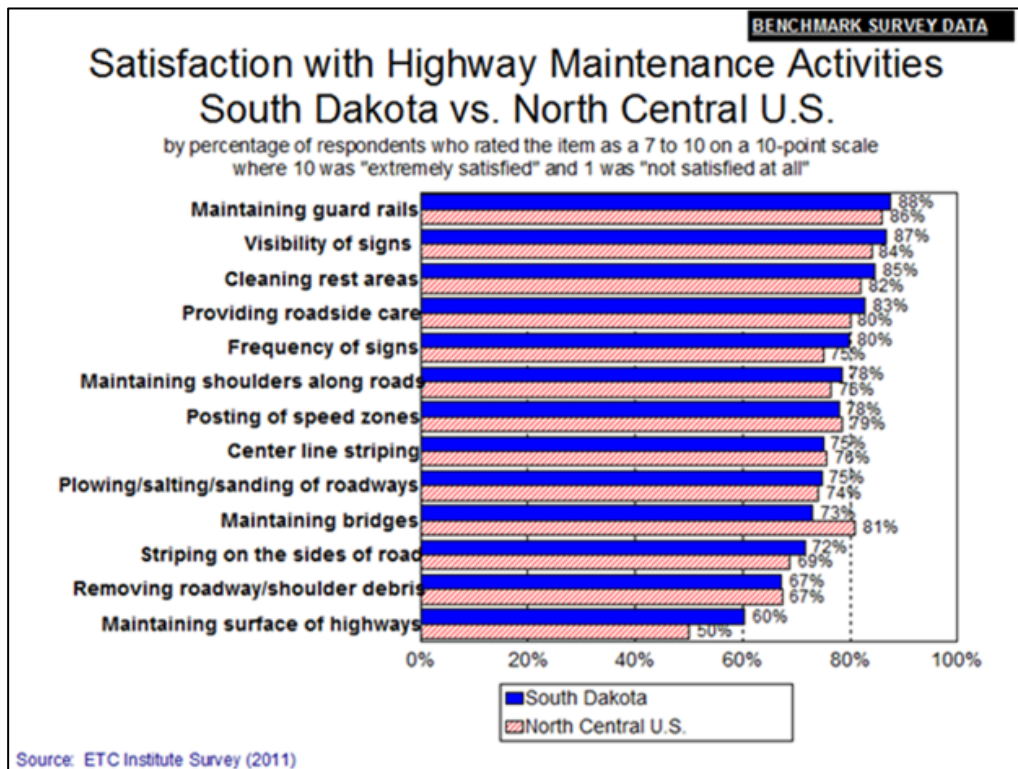
Highway maintenance was another topic that was identified as a priority during the focus groups and stakeholder interviews with residents and key customer groups. Some of the specific findings that were related to highway maintenance are listed below.

- Of the 13 highway maintenance areas that were assessed on the survey, overall satisfaction increased in 9 of the 13 areas that were rated. Maintaining road surfaces and bridges both declined. (Figure 5)
- Overall satisfaction with the quality of maintenance on state highways has increased significantly over the past years. In 2002, 80% of the residents surveyed indicated that they were satisfied (meaning they gave a rating of 7-10 on a 10-point scale) with the quality of maintenance on state highways in South Dakota. In 2011, 84% of the resident surveyed indicated that they were satisfied the overall quality of maintenance on state highways. Since 1999 the percentage of residents who indicated that they were dissatisfied with maintenance on state highways has decreased from 16% to 4%. . The map at the top of the following page shows how satisfied residents were with the overall job SDDOT has done maintaining state highways based on the location of the respondent's home. The shading reflects the mean rating that was given by all respondents in each county. Counties with fewer than 20 respondents were merged with adjacent counties to ensure the results would be statistically significant. The entire state is shaded in blue, which indicates that residents generally thought SDDOT was doing a good job in all areas of the state.



**Figure 7: Satisfaction with Highway Maintenance**

- The highway maintenance activities that had the highest levels of satisfaction were: maintaining guard rails, visibility of signs, cleaning rest areas, and providing roadside care.
- The areas that had the lowest levels of satisfaction were removing roadway and shoulder debris, maintaining the surface of highways, striping on the sides of road, and maintaining bridges. However, removing debris improved (+5%) since the 2006 survey.
- Areas of maintenance that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next two years were: (1) maintaining road surfaces, (2) removing roadway and shoulder debris, (3) maintaining bridges, and (4) striping on the sides of roads.
- The chart at the top of the following pages shows that overall satisfaction with state highway maintenance in South Dakota is significantly higher than neighboring states. Residents in South Dakota were more satisfied than residents in bordering states with 9 of the 13 maintenance areas that were assessed on the benchmarking survey that was conducted. Satisfaction was significantly higher in six of the 13 areas, including the cleanliness of rest areas, roadside striping, and the maintenance of roadway surfaces. The only area that rated significantly lower in South Dakota compared to neighboring states was maintaining bridges.



**Figure 8: Regional Comparison of Highway Maintenance Satisfaction**

## HIGHWAY DESIGN

In order to help SDDOT understand the expectations that residents have regarding the design of state highways, the survey contained several questions regarding satisfaction with specific highway features and the priority that should be placed on improvements.

- Highway features that had the **highest** levels of satisfaction from residents were: the adequacy of shoulders on Interstate, overflow of traffic on highways, and the adequacy of lighting at interchanges along Interstates in urban areas.
- Highway features that had the **lowest** levels of satisfaction among residents were: the frequency of roadside rest areas on non-Interstate highways, the adequacy of shoulders on rural 2-lane highways, and the smoothness of rural 2-lane highways.
- Overall satisfaction with the design of state highways improved in 6 of the 12 areas that were assessed in 2006 and 2011. There was a statistically significant improvement in four of the areas that were assessed (changes of 3% or more were statistically significant). Overall satisfaction with the smoothness of rural two lane highways decreased most significantly since 2006.
- The two highway features that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next two years were: (1) the adequacy of shoulders on rural 2-lane highways and (2) the smoothness of rural 2-lane highways. *Lighting on rural interstate interchanges” (16%) was significantly less important to residents in 2011 than in 2006 (31%).*

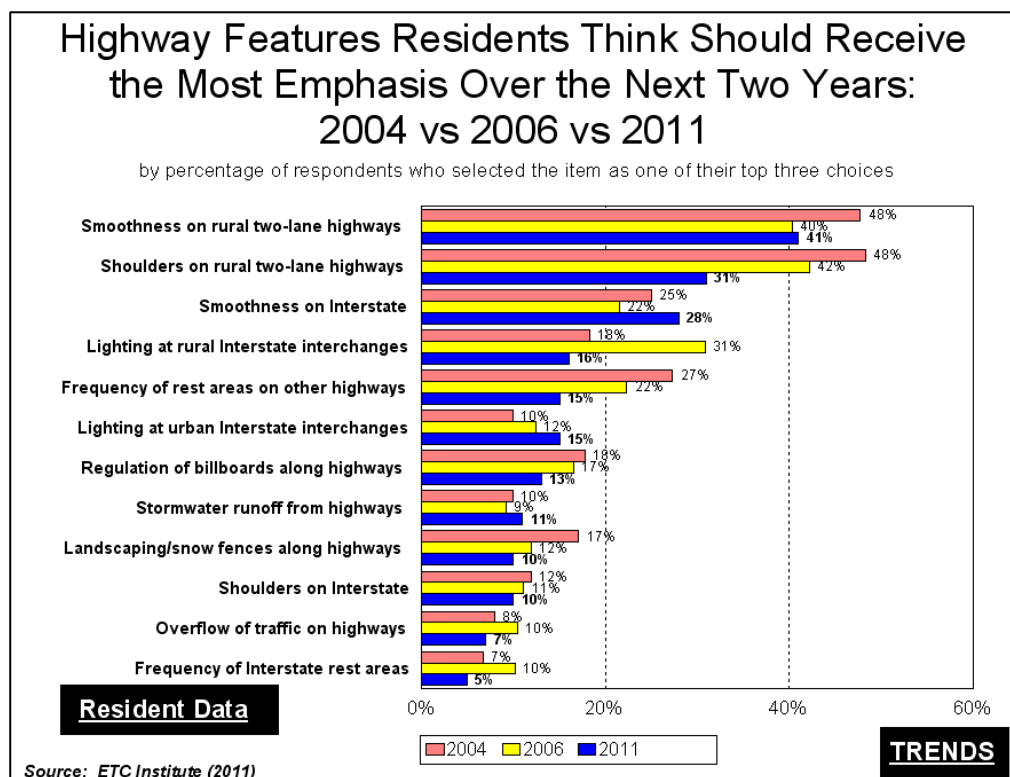


Figure 9: Highway Features to Emphasize

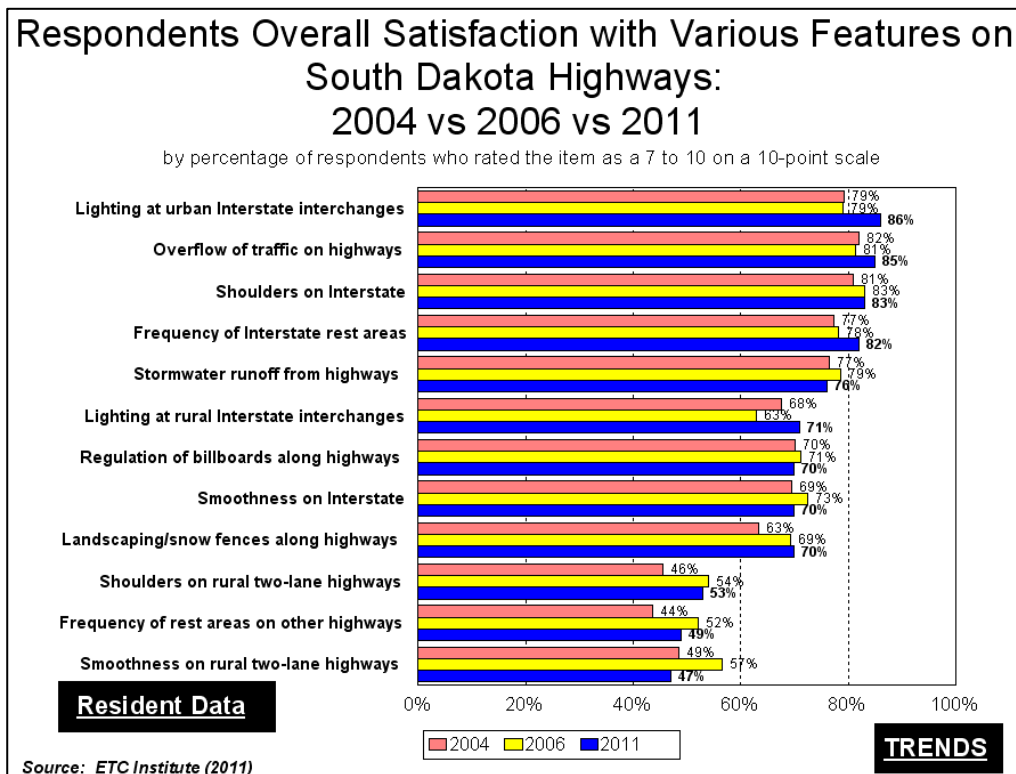


Figure 3: Satisfaction with Highway Design Features

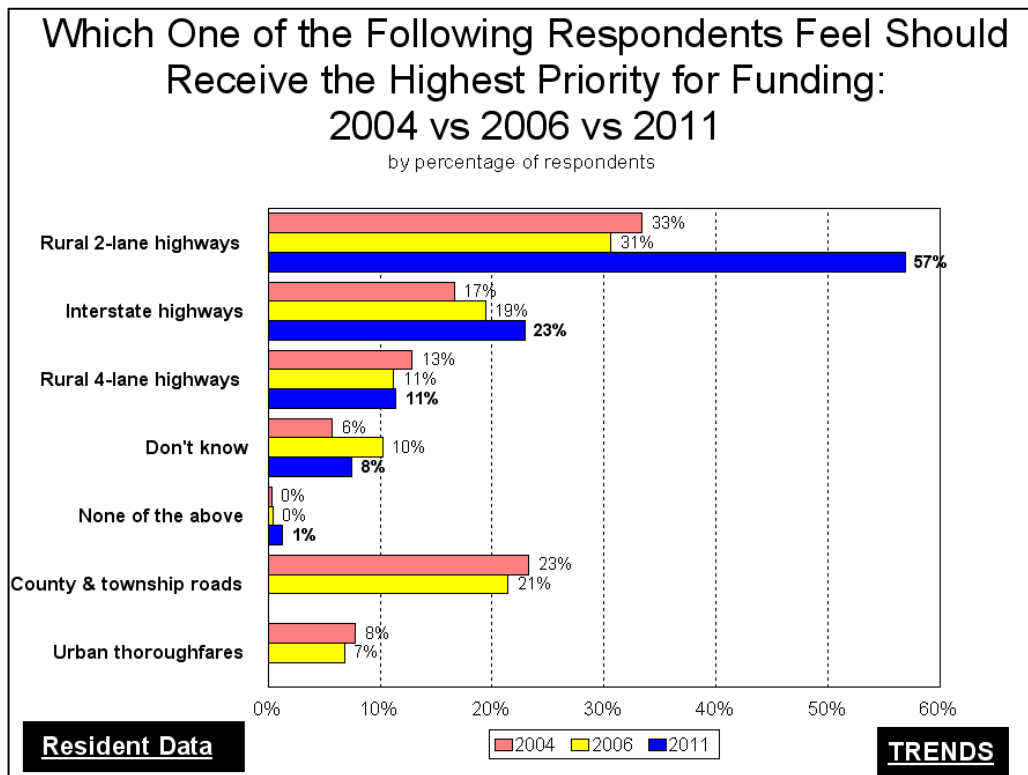
## TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES

In order to help SDDOT leaders set priorities for improvement to the State's transportation system, the survey included a series of questions that asked residents to rate the importance of various transportation priorities. The transportation system priorities that residents thought should receive the most emphasis over the next five years were: maintaining existing highways (51%), expanding transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities (28%), adding shoulders to highways (23%) and adding passing lanes to highways (22%).

Some customer groups placed significantly more importance on various transportation priorities than other groups. For example, expanding transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities was significantly more important to seniors (32%). Widening highways and adding passing lanes were significantly more important to farmers/ranchers and truckers/shippers. State legislators placed more importance on repairing and maintaining existing highways than any other customer group.

Other findings that may affect transportation priorities for the state are noted below.

- Residents were much more likely to think that rural two-lane highways (57%) should receive priority for additional funding than they were to think Interstate highways (23%) should receive priority for additional funding.



**Figure 4: Transportation Funding Priorities**

## COMMUNICATION ISSUES

Most members of the Executive Team who participated in the stakeholder interviews felt it was important for SDDOT to communicate well with residents and key customer groups. In order to assess the effectiveness of communication programs that are currently in place, the research team included several questions about communication. Some of the major findings in this area are listed below.

- Eighty-two percent (82%) of the residents surveyed are satisfied with SDDOT's efforts to keep them informed about road conditions.
- Three-fourths (76%) of the residents surveyed thought SDDOT adequately involved their community during the planning of highway improvements in their area.
- Ninety percent (90%) of the residents surveyed have actually used the website in the past year.
- Four-fifths (85%) of the residents surveyed are familiar with 511, up four percent (4%) from 2006. Of those residents who are familiar with 511, 60% indicated that they have actually called the service, up thirteen percent (13%) from 2006.
- Four-fifths (84%) of the residents surveyed had seen variable message boards along Interstate highways in South Dakota; 13% have not and 3% did not have an opinion.
- The ways residents surveyed preferred getting or receiving information from the SDDOT were TV local public access channel (38%), radio (32%), and internet/webpage (29%).

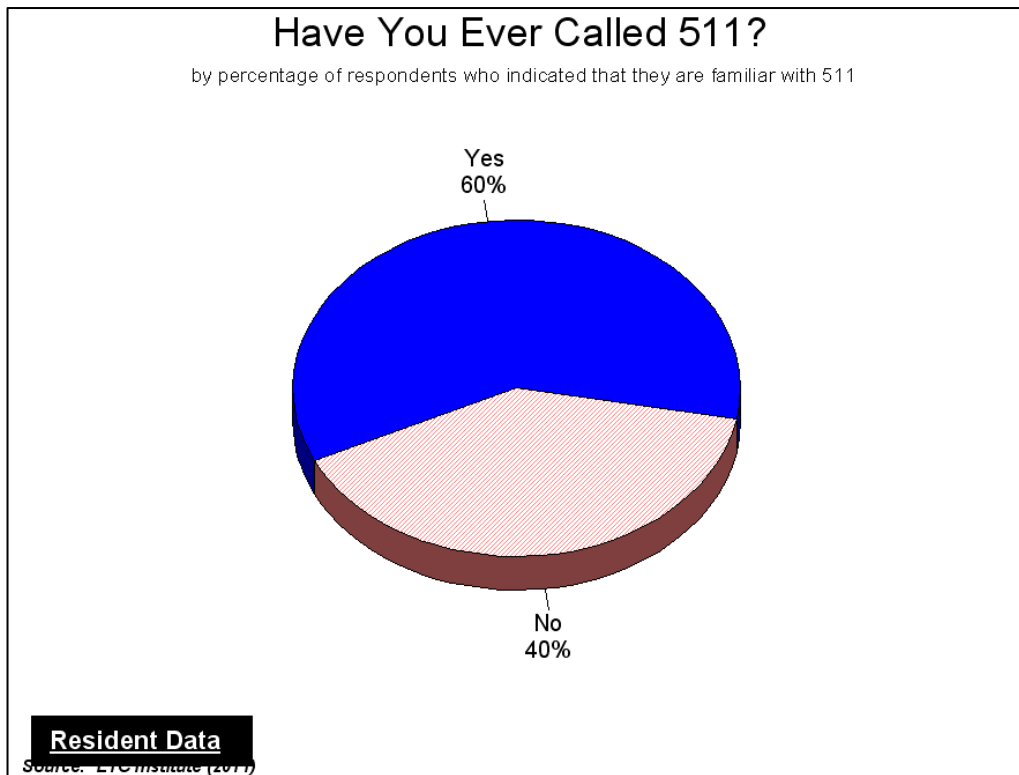


Figure 5: 511 Traveler Information System Use

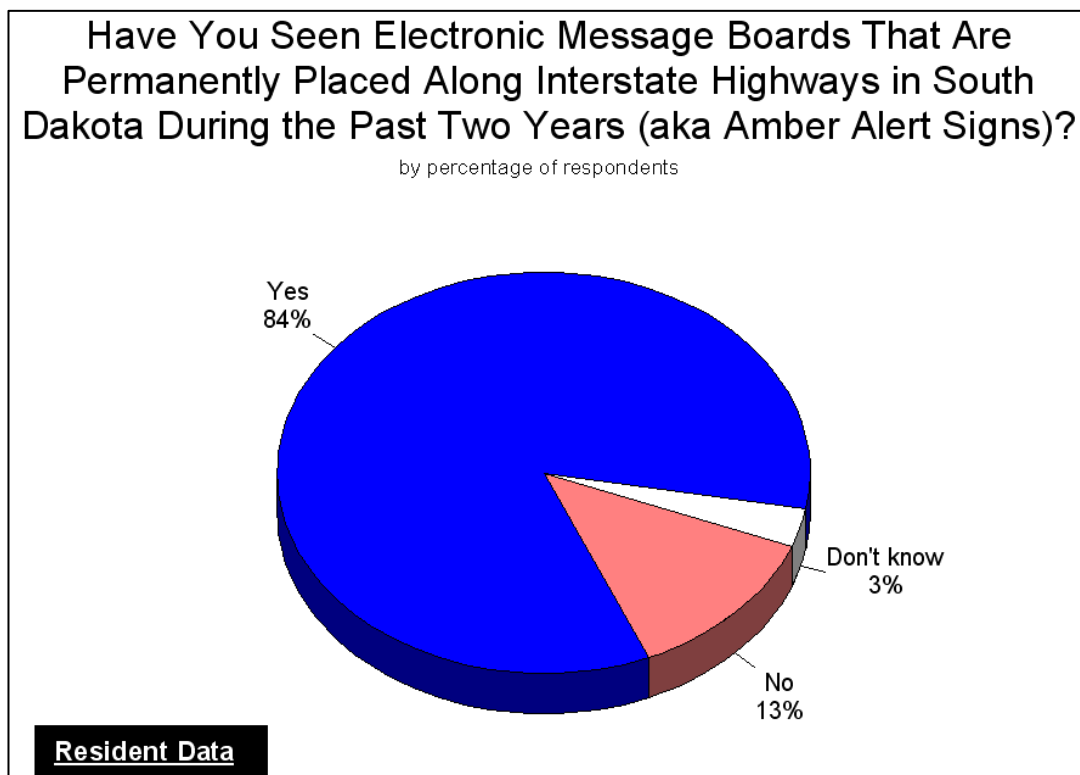
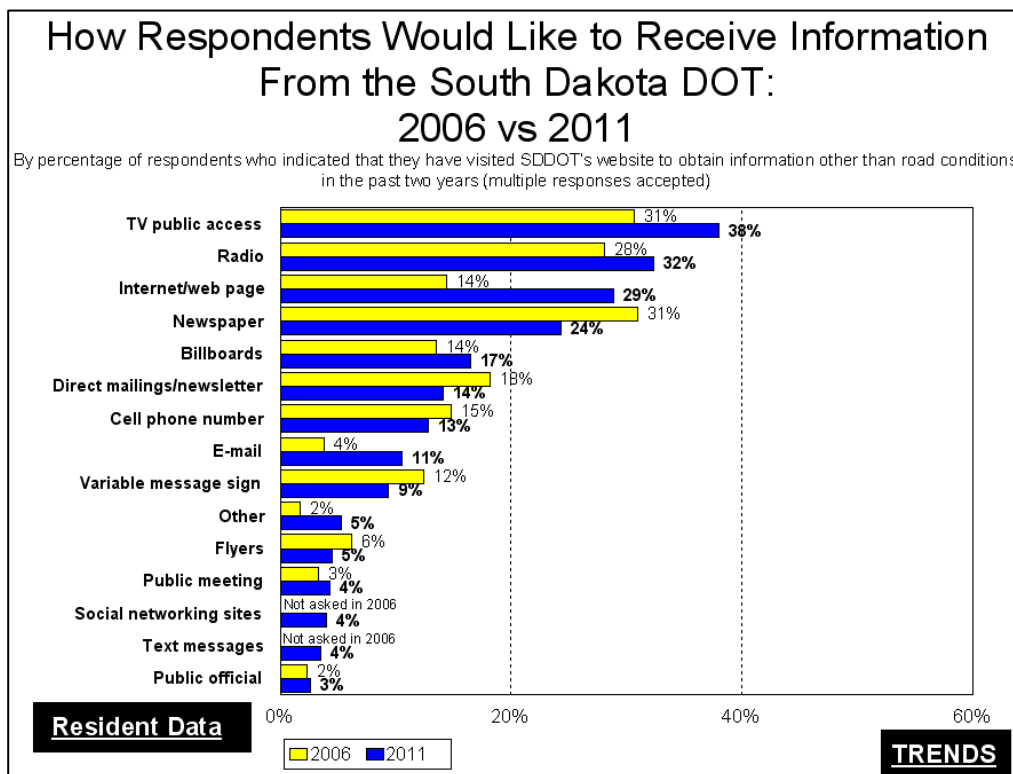


Figure 6: Familiarity with Dynamic Message Signs





**Figure 7: Preferred Methods for Receiving Information**

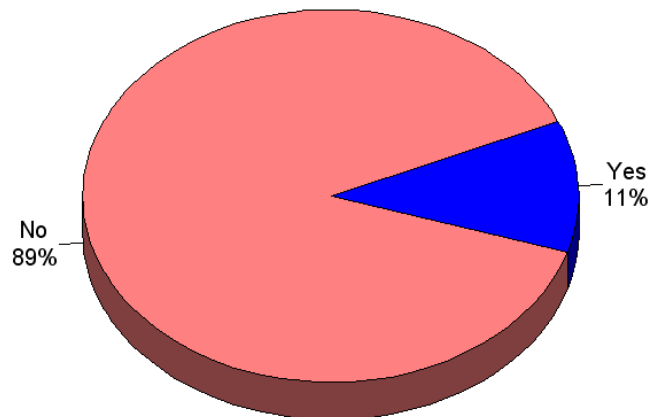
## CUSTOMER SERVICE

Although only 11% of the residents surveyed and fewer than half of the respondents from each of the key customer groups had contacted an SDDOT employee during the past two years, most of those surveyed who had contacted the Department gave positive ratings for the customer service issues that were assessed on the survey.

- Among residents who had contacted a SDDOT employee during the past two years, 81% indicated that it was “easy” or “very easy” to contact the right person the last time they contacted the SDDOT; over 80% also reported that they were able to get their question answered or get the information needed the last time they contacted the SDDOT.

## Have You Contacted a South Dakota DOT Office During the Past Two Years?

by percentage of respondents



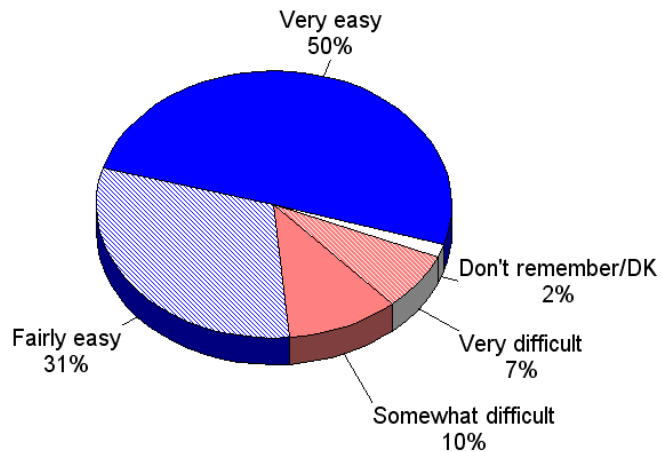
**Resident Data**

Source: ETC Institute (2011)

Figure 15: SDDOT Contact During the Past Two Years

## How Easy Was It to Contact the Right Person the Last Time You Contacted the South Dakota DOT?

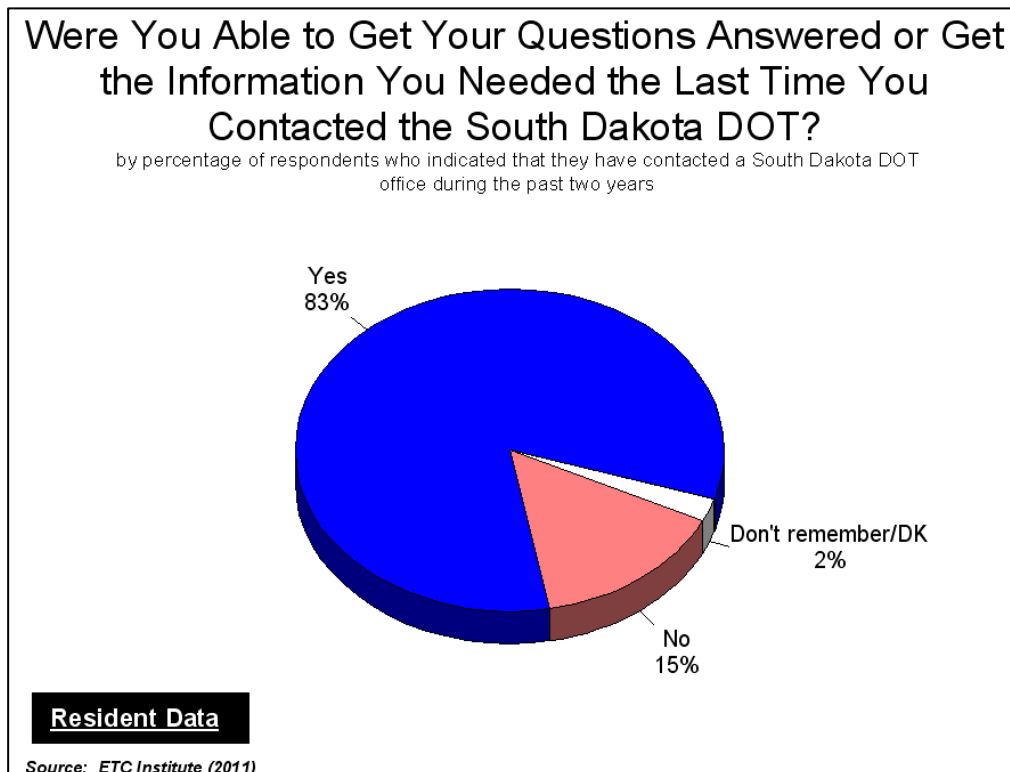
by percentage of respondents who indicated that they have contacted a South Dakota DOT office during the past two years



**Resident Data**

Source: ETC Institute (2011)

Figure 16: Ease of Contacting Right Person at SDDOT



**Figure 17: Success of Getting Questions Answered at SDDOT**

## CONSTRUCTION AND DETOURS

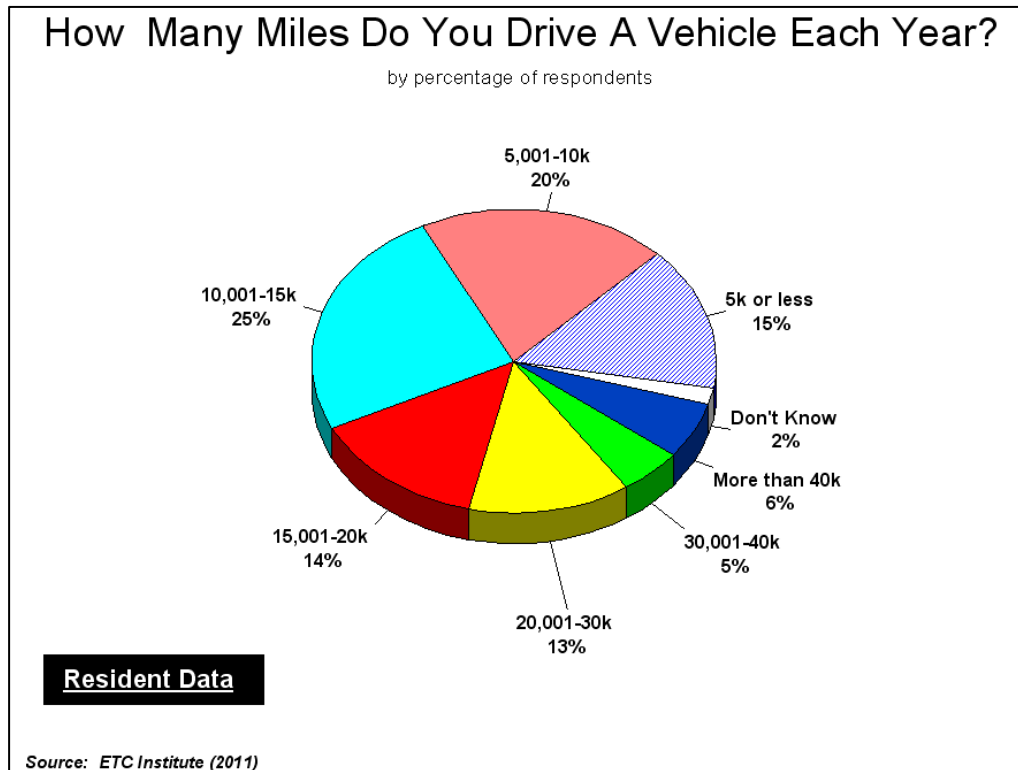
External stakeholders and members of the Executive Team thought it was important for SDDOT to gather input from the general public and key customer groups about construction and detours on state highways. Some of the major findings from this section of the survey are listed below.

- Most (87%) of the residents surveyed who had experienced a delay caused by construction on state highways reported that the length of the work zone was acceptable. The percentage of other key customer groups who rated the length of the work zone as acceptable were: 84% of seniors, 86% of truckers/shippers, 86% of farmers/ranchers, 75% of emergency vehicle operators, and 100% of state legislators.
- Forty percent (40%) of the residents surveyed indicated they experienced a delay due to road construction. In 2006 the percentage that experienced a delay due to road construction was 46%.

## TRAVEL BEHAVIOR OF RESIDENTS

Although the primary purpose of the Customer Satisfaction Assessment was to assess satisfaction with the services provided by SDDOT, the survey was also designed to gather input about travel characteristics of residents and key customer groups. Some of the major findings from this section of the survey are listed below.

- Only 5% of the resident survey respondents indicated that they had used public transit, such as buses, for mobility within South Dakota during the past 12 months.
- More than one-third (38%) of the resident survey respondents indicated that they drove 15,000 miles or more each year compared to 62% of the truckers/shippers, 64% of the farmers/ranchers, and 68% of the emergency vehicle operators.



**Figure 18: Miles Driven Per Year**

## ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Increased public awareness about environmental issues combined with Federal mandates that govern the construction and reconstruction of highway have made it more important than ever for departments of transportation to be perceived as good stewards of the environment. For this reason, the research team included several questions on the survey about environmental stewardship on the survey. The major findings are described below.

- Eighty-three percent (83%) of the residents surveyed indicated that it was “very important” or “somewhat important” that the SDDOT consider the impact transportation improvements will have on the environment.
- Seventy-five percent (75%) of the residents surveyed thought that SDDOT was a good steward of the environment, and 21% did not have an opinion. Only 4% did not think SDDOT was a good steward of the environment.

# Overall, How Important Do You Think It Is For the South Dakota DOT to Consider the Impact that Transportation Improvements Will Have on the Environment?

by percentage of respondents

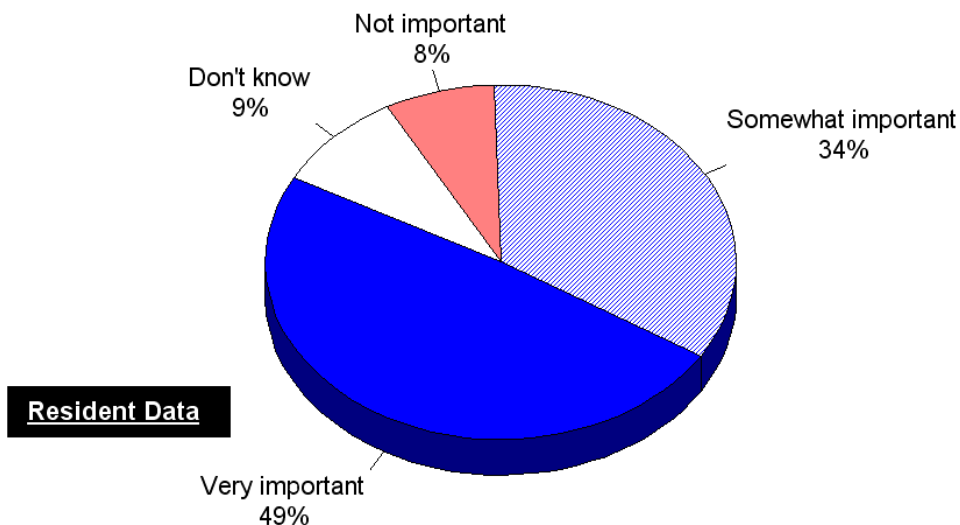


Figure 19: Importance of Considering Environmental Impact

# Do You Think the South Dakota DOT is a Good Steward of the Environment?

by percentage of respondents

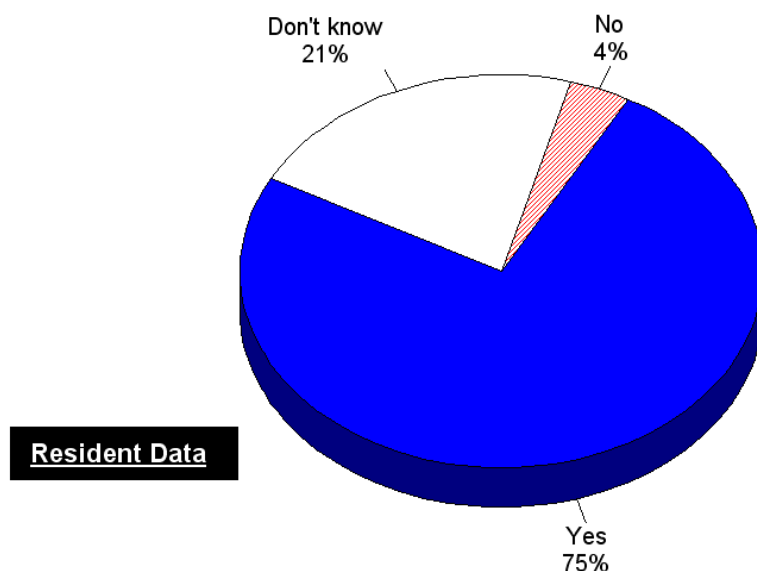
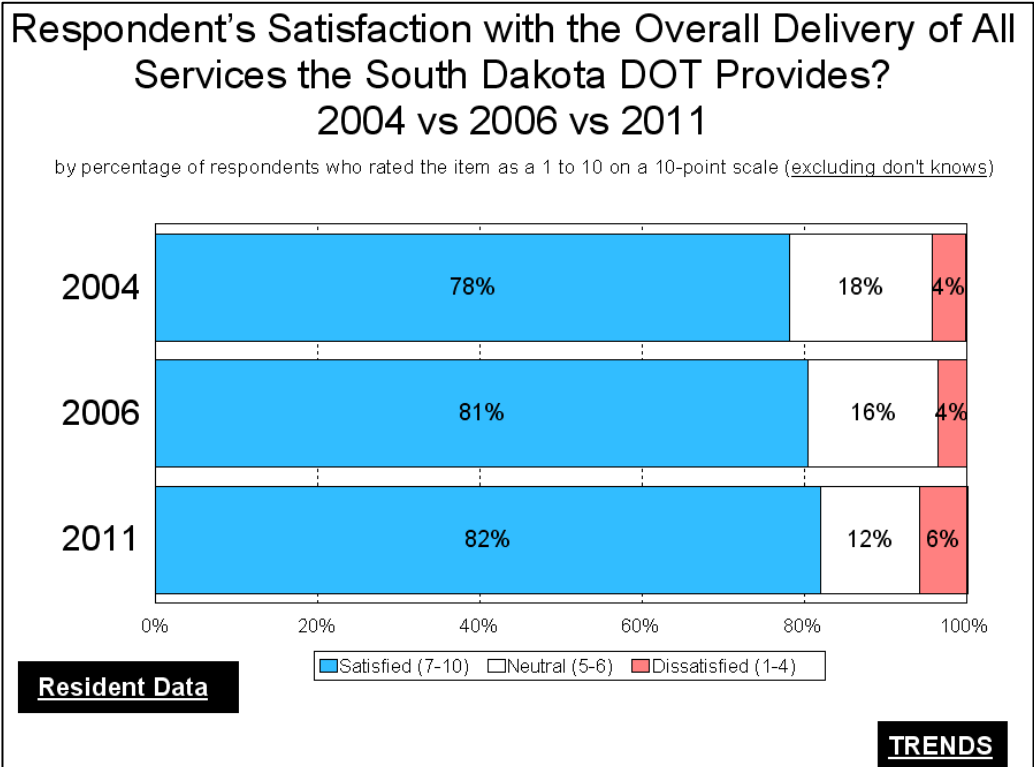


Figure 20: Perceived Environmental Stewardship of SDDOT

## OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF AND SATISFACTION WITH SDDOT

At the end of the survey, the research team included several questions to assess overall perceptions and satisfaction with SDDOT. The major findings are listed below.

- Percentage of respondents who thought SDDOT designs safe highways:
  - 91% of state legislators
  - 88% of farmers/ranchers
  - 88% of residents
  - 88% of emergency vehicle operators
  - 88% of seniors
  - 81% of truckers/shippers
- Percentage of respondents who thought SDDOT does a good job planning for future needs:
  - 78% of seniors
  - 74% of farmers/ranchers
  - 72% of emergency vehicle operators
  - 69% of residents
  - 68% of state legislators
  - 64% of truckers/shippers
- Percentage of respondents who thought SDDOT is an efficient organization:
  - 82% of state legislators
  - 81% of seniors
  - 74% of emergency vehicle operators
  - 73% of residents
  - 72% of farmers/ranchers
  - 62% of truckers/shippers
- Percentage of respondents who were satisfied with the overall quality of all services provided by SDDOT:
  - 91% of state legislators
  - 88% of seniors
  - 83% of emergency vehicle operators
  - 82% of residents
  - 82% of farmers/ranchers
  - 76% of truckers/shippers



**Figure 8: Overall Satisfaction with SDDOT Services**

# CONTRACTOR SURVEY FINDINGS

## OVERALL FINDINGS

The results of the contractor survey showed that most contractors are satisfied with SDDOT. In fact, 80% of the contractors surveyed were “extremely satisfied” or “satisfied” with the overall performance of Department; 13% rated the Department’s overall performance as average; only 7% were dissatisfied.

## SPECIFIC FINDINGS

In addition to rating the Department’s overall performance, contractors were asked to rate the Department’s performance in 23 specific area. The specific areas that were rated highest and lowest on the contractor survey are listed below.

**Areas Rated Highest By Contractors.** More than two-thirds of the contractors gave positive ratings for the Department in the following nine areas.

- SDDOT's overall construction process produces a high-quality product ( 89%)
- SDDOT does a good job enforcing traffic control requirements and ensuring a safe environment for workers (88%)
- SDDOT does a good job educating the public about highway work zones (86%)
- SDDOT treats my organization fairly (81%)
- SDDOT does a good job developing employees for senior positions (73%)
- SDDOT employees have the knowledge and experience required to manage contracts effectively (72%)
- SDDOT is a customer-oriented organization (72%)
- SDDOT inspectors are adequately trained (69%)
- SDDOT provides opportunities for contractors to provide input on project concepts prior to letting (68%)

**Areas Rated Lowest By Contractors.** Among the 23 specific areas that were rated on the survey only three areas received positive ratings from fewer than half of the contractors that were surveyed. These three areas included:

- SDDOT provides opportunities for contractors to suggest alternative approaches during construction (49%)
- The amount of paperwork required by SDDOT is reasonable (45%)
- The DBE Solicitation Process is convenient/efficient (43%)



## CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were made based on the results of the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment. The supporting evidence accompanies each conclusion.

### OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH SDDOT IS HIGH AND HAS IMPROVED

#### Supporting Evidence

- 82% of the residents surveyed in 2011 indicated that they were satisfied with the overall performance of SDDOT compared to 81% in 2006 and 78% in 2004.

### SDDOT IS OUTPERFORMING OTHER DEPARTMENTS OF TRANSPORTATION

#### Supporting Evidence

- SDDOT's overall satisfaction rating of 82% was significantly higher than other Departments of Transportation in the North Central U.S., which includes in the states of Wyoming, North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri. The average overall satisfaction rating for these North Central states was 75%.
- SDDOT rated **better** than other DOTs in nine of the 13 maintenance areas that were assessed. SDDOT rated significantly better in the following areas: visibility of signs, cleanliness of rest areas, frequency of signs, striping on the sides of the road, maintenance of the surface of highways, and providing roadside care (e.g., mowing, picking up trash, etc.). SDDOT rated significantly lower in just one area: maintenance of bridges.
- SDDOT rated **better** than other DOTs in all 12 of the highway design attributes that were rated. SDDOT rated significantly better in the following areas: lighting at interchanges, overall flow of traffic, shoulders on Interstates and rural 2-lane highways, landscaping, smoothness of Interstates and rural 2-lane highways, and the frequency of roadside rest areas.

### RESIDENTS FEEL SAFER DRIVING ON STATE HIGHWAYS THAN THEY DID FIVE YEARS AGO

#### Supporting Evidence

- Thirty percent (30%) of the residents surveyed indicated that South Dakota highways were “much safer” or “somewhat safer” than they were five years ago; 55% rated highways safety “about the same”; 12% thought highways were “more dangerous” and 3% did not have an opinion.
- The percentage of residents who thought signing in work zones was good increased from 85% in 2006 to 89% in 2011.
- The percentage of residents who indicated they felt safe driving through work zones increased from 80% in 2006 to 84% in 2011.

- The percentage of residents who thought traffic enforcement was adequate inside work zones increased from 73% in 2006 to 75% in 2011.

## **SDDOT'S NEW METHODS FOR MANAGING WINTER MAINTENANCE HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE**

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Overall satisfaction with SDDOT's winter maintenance operations (plowing, sanding, and salting of roadways) increased from 74% in 2006 to 75% in 2011. Although this increase is small, the increase occurred even though SDDOT significantly reduced the number of hours that the Department provides snow and ice removal during winter storms. The reduction in the level of service provided by SDDOT was accompanied by a public education effort that informed residents about the change. The public education effort encouraged residents not to drive during later evening and early morning hours because SDDOT would not be treating highways during these time periods. The overall increase in satisfaction shows that SDDOT was able to decrease expectations for winter maintenance service. The resulting outcome has reduced the cost of providing winter maintenance while increasing satisfaction among residents.

## **SDDOT IS PROVIDING HIGH LEVELS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE**

### **Supporting Evidence**

- 81% of the residents surveyed who had contacted SDDOT during the past year thought it was "very easy" or "easy" to contact the right person at the Department.
- 83% of the residents surveyed indicated that they were able to get the information they needed the last time they contacted the Department.

## **511 AND SAFE TRAVEL USA.COM ARE MEETING THE NEEDS OF RESIDENTS**

### **Supporting Evidence**

- 85% of those surveyed who had visited SafeTravelUSA.com thought the website was "very easy" or "easy" to use.
- Only 2% of those surveyed who had visited SafeTravelUSA.com thought the information provided was "not accurate".
- 85% of those surveyed who had called 511 thought the service was "very easy" or "easy" to use.
- Only 4% of those surveyed who had called 511 thought the information provided was "not accurate".

## **CONTRACTORS ARE GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH SDDOT**

### **Supporting Evidence**

- 89% of the contractors surveyed thought SDDOT overall construction process produces a high-quality product; only 1% did not; the remaining 10% had a neutral opinion on the issue.
- 81% of the contractors surveyed thought SDDOT treats their organization fairly; only 4% did not; the remaining 15% had a neutral opinion on the issue.
- 80% were “extremely satisfied” or “satisfied” with the overall performance of SDDOT; only 7% were dissatisfied; 13% rated the Department’s overall performance as average.
- 72% of the contractors surveyed thought SDDOT was a customer-oriented organization; only 13% did not; the remaining 15% had a neutral opinion on the issue.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The development of the recommendations for action was a two-step process. First, the research team analyzed the survey data and developed a “performance needs assessment matrix” that was used to identify “opportunities for improvement” for the Department based on the results of the survey. Second, members of the Executive Team developed a list of issues that they thought should be “potential priorities for action” over the next 2-3 years based on the results of the survey. Each step is described below.

### STEP ONE: THE PERFORMANCE-NEEDS ASSESSMENT

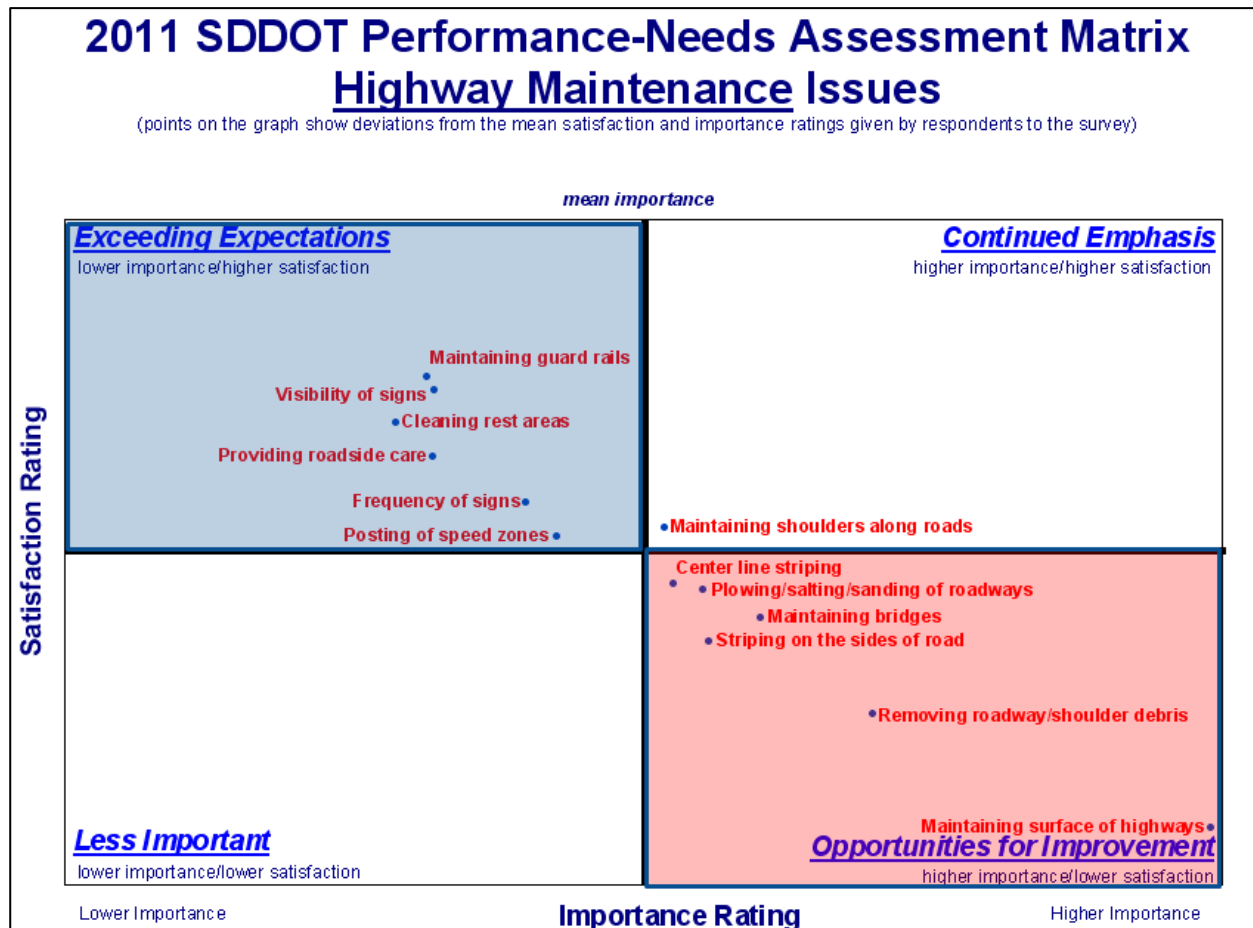
In addition to the findings presented previously in this report, the research team conducted a performance-needs assessment to identify maintenance and highway design priorities for the Department based on the results of the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment. The results of this analysis are provided below.

#### MAINTENANCE PRIORITIES

One method for using customer satisfaction data to help set organization priorities involves an assessment of both how well the organization is performing in an area and how important the activity is to the customers. Figure 9 shows the relative importance and satisfaction of each of the maintenance activities that were rated. Items on the right side of the chart were generally more important, while items on the left side were generally less important. Similarly, items listed on the top of the chart rated above average in satisfaction, which items listed on the bottom of the chart rated below average.

Based on the distribution in the chart, the areas that should receive the highest priority from the South Dakota Department of Transportation are those in the lower right quadrant labeled “opportunities for improvement.” The items in this quadrant are generally more important to residents, but the agency is underperforming relative to customer expectations. Based on the results of this analysis, SDDOT should consider increasing its emphasis on:

- Maintaining the surface of highways
- Removing roadway and shoulder debris
- Plowing/salting/sanding of roadways during winter storms
- Striping on the sides of the road
- Centerline striping
- Maintaining bridges



**Figure 9: Highway Maintenance Effectiveness Needs Assessment**

### HIGHWAY DESIGN PRIORITIES

Using the same method that was just described, the research team analyzed the results of the survey to identify highway design issues that should be addressed. Figure shows the relative importance and satisfaction of each of the highway design features that were rated.

Based on the distribution in the chart, the areas that should receive the highest priority from the South Dakota Department of Transportation are those in the lower right quadrant labeled “opportunities for improvement.” The items in this quadrant are generally more important to residents, but the agency is underperforming relative to customer expectations.

Based on the results of this analysis, SDDOT should consider increasing its emphasis in the following areas:

- smoothness on rural 2-lane highways
- shoulders on 2-lane rural highways
- smoothness on Interstate highways

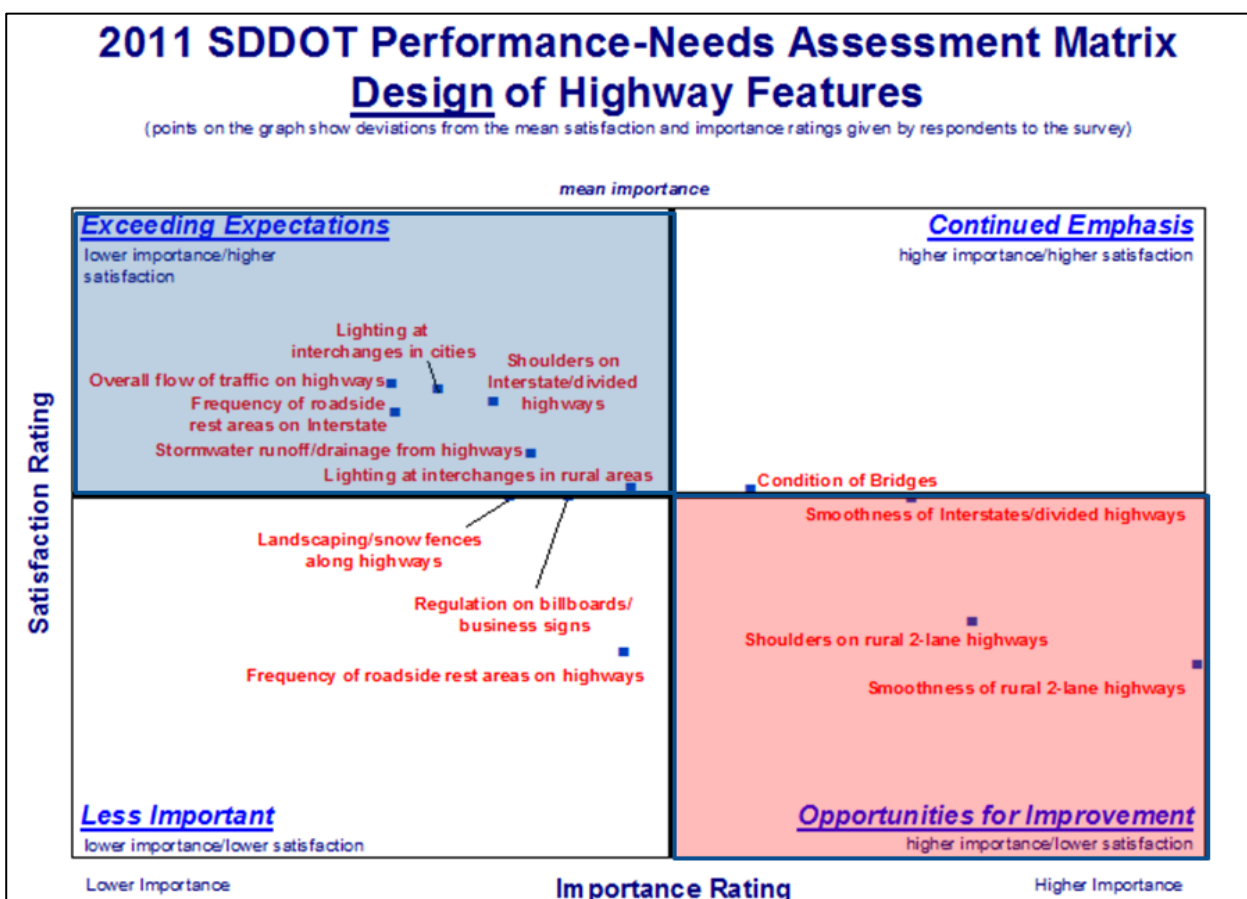


Figure 23: Highway Design Performance Needs Assessment

## STEP 2: IMPLEMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews provide SDDOT with a comprehensive set of information to identify and manage customer-oriented improvements over the next few years. Although there are many applications for the data from the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment, the research team recommends that following actions based on the results of the survey and feedback from members of the Executive Team.

### ENHANCE EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

**SDDOT should consider enhancing the quality of external communication with customers.** Specific actions that should be considered in support of this recommendation could include:

- Proactively educating the public and key customer groups about initiatives that have been implemented or will be implemented in response to concerns that were identified on the survey. For example, many shoulder improvements and highway resurfacing projects are planned for 2012-2016.

- Promoting the success and cost savings that resulted from the changes the Department made in the way winter maintenance services are provided.
- Using external communications to shape and manage customer expectations regarding the Department's ability to deliver core services, particularly with regard to the following issues: the smoothness of highways, bridge conditions, and shoulders along rural 2-lane highways.
- Increasing awareness and use of the Department's website.

#### **EMPHASIZE MAINTENANCE AND PRESERVATION**

**SDDOT should emphasize the maintenance and preservation of the existing highway system because “repairing and maintaining highways” was clearly the top priority for residents on the 2011 survey.** Specific actions that should be considered in support of this recommendation include:

- Educating the public about the amount of resurfacing that has taken place on state highways over the past two years
- Informing the public and key customer groups about how SDDOT is planning to maintain and preserve the state highway system in future years.
- Ensuring that projects that support the preservation of the existing system are given a high priority in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.
- Continuing to emphasize the importance of maintaining the surface of state highways to all SDDOT employees so the organization will continue to be responsive to customer expectations in this area.

#### **EMPHASIZE SAFETY**

**SDDOT should continue to emphasize operational investments and activities that support travel safety on state highways in South Dakota.** Specific operational activities that should be considered included the following:

- Enhancing the quality of centerline and roadside striping. Although satisfaction levels with roadside striping increased from 2006 to 2011, satisfaction with centerline striping decreased slightly. Both types of striping continue to be priorities for residents and key customer groups. Residents placed significantly more importance of centerline striping in 2011 than they did in 2006.
- Removing debris from state highways. Although this issue is significantly less important than it was in 2006, it is still one of the most important maintenance services to residents and key customer groups.

#### **IMPROVE INTERACTION WITH CONTRACTORS**

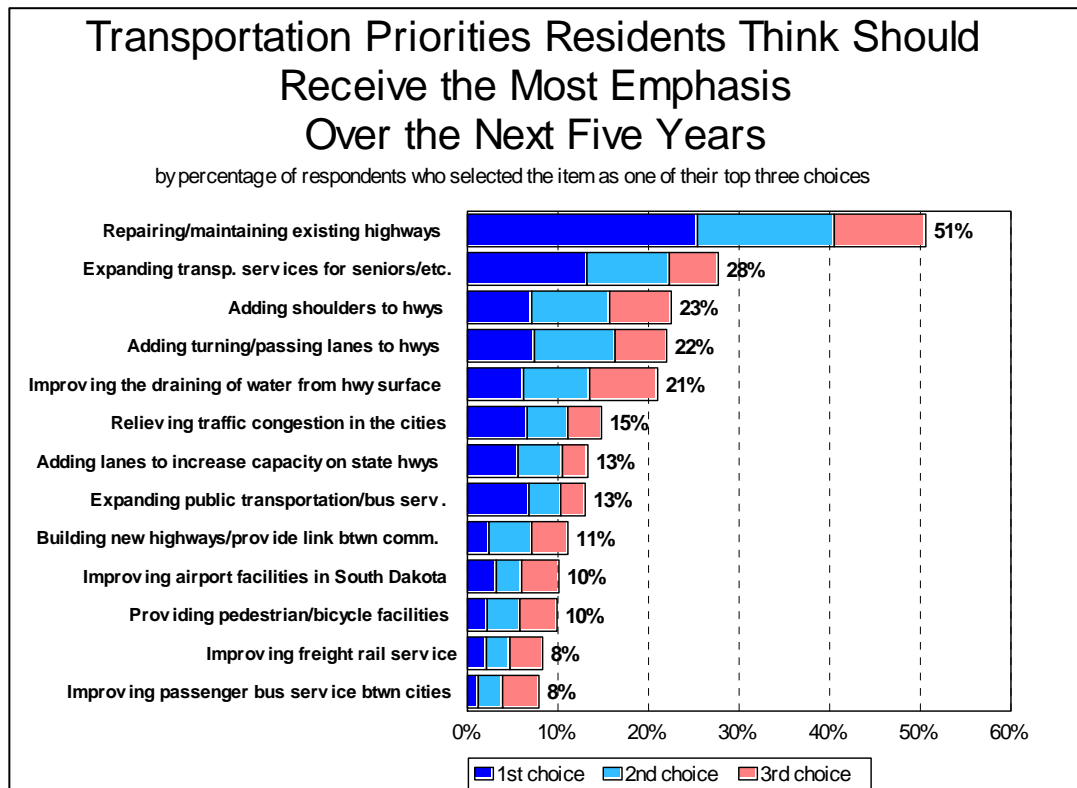
**SDDOT should continue to improve the way it works with contractors.** Specific actions that should be considered in response to this recommendation could include the following:

- Reviewing the process for reviewing/developing construction plans with contractors to ensure it is as efficient as possible

- Doing more outreach with all contractors, including those who are not members of AGC. This could begin by hosting a webinar or other forum with contractors to share the results of the survey and how the Department plans to use the results.

**CLEARLY DEFINE AND COMMUNICATE THE DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR SENIORS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

Transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities was identified as the second most important transportation priority. It was second only to repairing and maintaining existing highways as shown in Figure 25 below. Given the importance of this issue, the Department needs to clearly define and externally communicate what its role in this area will be. If the Department does not take action to manage expectations in this area, residents and other key customer groups may develop unrealistic expectations for the Department, which could have a negative impact on overall satisfaction in future years.



**Figure 24: Transportation Priorities Over the Next Five Years**

**CLEARLY DEFINE AND COMMUNICATE THE DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN FUNDLING LOCAL PROJECTS**

Several focus group participants and external stakeholders suggested that SDDOT provide more funding to support local transportation projects. Although SDDOT is not responsible for maintaining local systems, customers may expect the Department to provide more support for local transportation projects if the condition of these systems continues to decline. In order to manage expectations, the Department



should clearly define what, if any, role SDDOT will have in providing funding for local projects over the next three to five years. If the Department does not take action to manage expectations in this area, residents and other key customer groups may develop unrealistic expectations for the Department, which could have a negative impact on overall satisfaction in future years.

## **IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE**

The recommendations described above should be implemented in three steps as described below.

### **Step 1: SDDOT Should Market the Results of the Survey to External Customers**

- During the late summer of 2011, SDDOT should consider issuing press releases to the media and informational notices to leaders of key customer groups to report the findings of the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment and announce the Department's plans to respond to the findings.

### **Step 2: SDDOT Should Establish Awareness and Accountability within SDDOT**

- During the fall of 2011, SDDOT should consider sharing the results of the survey with all employees in the Department.
- During the winter of 2011/2012, the Executive Team should consider having subordinate managers from the Area Engineer level and above to identify specific ways that they will use the results of the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment to improve organizational performance over the next two years.
- During the late summer or early fall of 2012, SDDOT should consider having managers from the Area Engineer level and above provide an update to their immediate supervisor regarding how they have used the results of the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment to improve their work unit's performance as part of their performance review process.

### **Step 3: SDDOT Should Initiate Another Assessment**

- During the winter of 2012/2013, SDDOT should initiate the necessary actions to conduct another Customer Satisfaction Assessment in 2013.

## **SUMMARY AND BENEFITS**

Although the short-term benefits of customer surveys are difficult to measure, the long-term impact of such processes can have a dramatic and lasting impact on an organization. The results of the 2011 Customer Satisfaction Assessment clearly demonstrate that SDDOT's on-going efforts to gather input from customers has 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 have improved in almost every area that has been rated over the past seven years.

By conducting surveys every few years, SDDOT has been able to provide its senior managers and employees with objective feedback from residents and the key customer groups on a regular basis. This

has created a corporate culture that is customer-oriented, which has helped the Department meet the needs of its customers.

Although the customer satisfaction survey should not be the only tool the Department uses, it is a very important tool because it helps the Department balance feedback that would otherwise only be provided by special interest groups or those who have a direct stake in the outcome of major transportation planning and investment decisions. The Customer Satisfaction Assessment ensures that the needs of the general public and key customers who do not interact with SDDOT on a regular basis are incorporated into the Department's decision-making process.

Despite significant progress, the Department still has room for improvement. To continue achieving success, SDDOT should respond to the results of this survey and be prepared to respond to new issues that will emerge in the years ahead. If resources are available, SDDOT should share the result of the 2011 survey with all employees and administer the survey again in two years. Even if no change in the survey results occur, the overall assessment process engages community leaders, the general public, and key customer groups in a manner that demonstrates the Department's commitment to customer satisfaction. Knowing that things have not changed can be just as important as knowing that they have. This process will help build long-term customer loyalty, which will provide immeasurable benefits to the Department in the years ahead.