

Reporting and Reducing Non-response in Travel Surveys

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Abstract

Since the passage of ISTEA and the infusion of resources for data collection, many MPOs have embarked on household travel surveys to replace data collected 15 to 20 (and sometimes 30) years prior. In addition, with the year 2000 approaching, many other MPOs are looking forward to data collection for the new millennium. In current practice, MPOs typically use either transportation planning and engineering firms, or market research firms to collect the data. However, the multitude of firms engaged in this effort has resulted in different methods and different ways of reporting survey results.

This FHWA-sponsored project on survey non-response is part of an effort to standardize reporting practices across travel surveys and to provide practitioners with guidelines for conducting household travel surveys. The project is devoted to establishing a set of best practices for handling non-response in household travel surveys. It focuses on three issues: 1) how to measure and report non-response, 2) how to reduce non-response, and 3) how to weigh and input survey data to adjust for the effects of non-response. An expert review panel of representatives from MPOs and transportation survey firms, and experts in the field of transportation survey methodology, are participating in the collaborative effort to develop guidelines in these areas. The results of this work will be disseminated to practitioners in the field of transportation.

This presentation will summarize the results of this work in the first two areas. The first part of the presentation will focus on best practices for measuring and reporting non-response in household travel surveys. It will discuss such issues as: 1) the appropriate level of measurement — individual or household — for reporting travel survey response rates, 2) establishing criteria for classifying sample members as respondents and non-respondents, 3) the treatment of sample members whose eligibility is unknown, and 4) breaking down the overall response rate into component parts for purposes of evaluating the effectiveness of the field procedures. The second part of the presentation will discuss the relative efficiency and effectiveness of various methods for reducing non-response and address the issues of how to select methods for a particular survey.