



RP 205B

Assessing the Idaho Transportation Department's Customer Service Performance

By

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RESEARCH REPORT

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Executive Summary

The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) is taking sincere and meaningful steps to measure its customers' satisfaction and to improve its performance. As part of those efforts, ITD contracted with the University of Idaho to survey state residents regarding their satisfaction with the state's transportation system and with the department.

This report examines the survey results and compares them to similar survey results from other states. Generally, the ITD public survey results compare favorably, if not better than, the peer state's examined. Key areas of public service such as courteousness of DMV staff was higher in Idaho than in peer states. In the important area of whether Idaho residents felt ITD gave them good value, the ITD ratings were significantly higher than comparable national ones.

However, the results from the Idaho survey and analyses of customer-service practices in other states reveal that ITD can adopt additional strategies to further improve its customer service. The

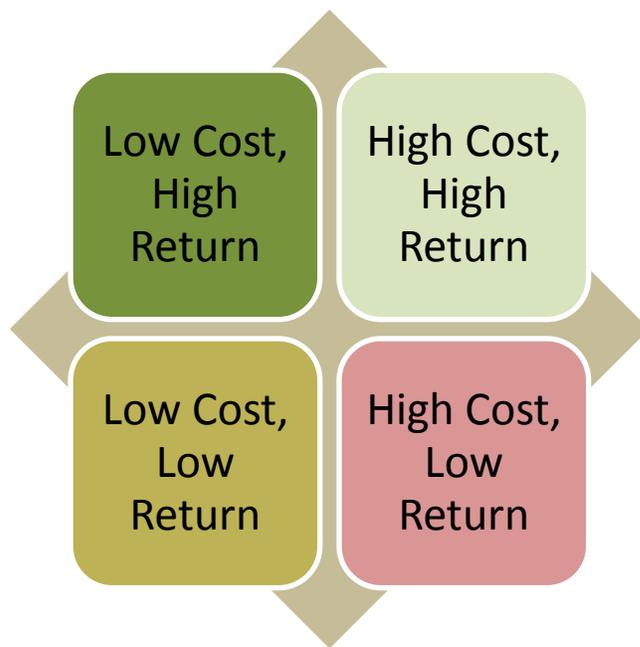


Figure 1. Recommendations are Organized Using this Framework.

report recommends several strategies that are grouped in accordance with Figure 1. The first strategies recommended are those that would be in the far, upper left area, being ones with relatively low cost and potentially high return in terms of increased public satisfaction with the ITD or the transportation system. Second, are the upper right recommendations being ones with potentially high cost but also high return in terms of public satisfaction. Finally, are the recommendations that have low cost but little return. No recommendations are made for strategies with high costs and low returns.

The leading recommendation for low-cost, high-return customer

service is to investigate more fully whether Idaho residents truly are satisfied with the two aspects of the transportation system they rate as most important - pavement ride quality and the visibility of pavement markings. On the one hand, the results to close-ended questions indicate general satisfaction with what was termed "condition of the pavement" and "highway maintenance." However, a line-by-line review of comments to open-ended questions found more than 420 statements addressing roadway surfaces and 178 references to potholes. Comments about the need for more visible pavement markings appeared 149 times.

Pavement surfaces and pavement markings are disproportionately important for two reasons. First, they were rated number one and number two in importance when Idaho residents were asked what attributes described a well-maintained highway. Second, survey results from other states reveal that improvements in pavement conditions and pavement markings correlated strongly with improvements in public satisfaction. Roadway surfaces and pavement markings are literally the primary interface between a highway agency and the public. The number of times the public interacts with pavement surfaces dwarves any other type of direct or indirect interaction they have with a transportation department. Therefore, as ITD embarks on an enhanced customer-service effort, this report recommends that it seriously investigate whether its public is satisfied with its most prominent products - pavement surfaces and pavement markings. Such an enquiry is timely as well. ITD recently adopted new pavement and maintenance management systems that will increase its sophistication in managing pavement and roadway conditions.

Idaho residents indicated they would like additional options for non-highway travel, convenient ways to communicate with the department and they are not completely satisfied with opportunities to comment on pending highway projects. This report makes the following recommendations ranked by the highest returns for the lowest cost.

Low-Cost, High Return strategies include:

- Fully understanding whether the public is satisfied with ride quality and pavement marking visibility;
- Increase awareness of online DMV services that offer the public convenient means to renew vehicle registrations;
- Adopting low-cost public involvement techniques for increasing public engagement during the development of highway projects.

High-Cost, High-Return Strategies include:

- Increasing investments in pavement smoothness, ride quality and pavement markings;
- Increasing opportunities for safe bicycle and pedestrian travel.

The report does not recommend unquestioned increases in spending on pavements or bicycle/pedestrian facilities. Instead, it notes that, if possible, increased levels of service in both categories would address key areas of public priorities.

Low-Cost, Low-Return strategies are limited to one:

- Although DMV overall was given very high marks, some particular counties scored below average on staff courtesy. Improving the perceived courteousness of DMV staff in those counties may be appreciated by their residents, but it will have little effect on the already-high statewide DMV ratings.

Two final recommendations are for ITD to develop a customer-service policy and a customer relationship management (CRM) system appropriate for its needs. Currently, ITD is pursuing many separate initiatives to improve customer service without an overarching policy to rationally connect them. This report recommends that a customer service policy flow directly from the department's strategic plan and that it serve as a framework for the department's many improvement efforts. The report also recommends creation of an ITD-appropriate customer

relationship management system. A CRM system can compile customer complaints, analyze trends and track the resolution of the complaints. A CRM system can bring a systematic, comprehensive approach to understanding the nature of complaints and seeking ways to reduce their root causes. A CRM system can cost millions of dollars, which ITD does not have. However, the report recommends that ITD understand how CRM systems work and that it tailor a low-cost customer relationship system appropriate for its unique needs.

Background and Report Organization

The scope of work for this project has four main objectives that are:

1. Assessing ITD customer service performance based on review of survey results, comparison to past surveys and other states, and knowledge of the transportation field;
2. Developing recommendations to improve ITD customer service based on research findings, and prioritizing them based on their likely return on investment to ITD;
3. Reviewing ITD management efforts to assess customer service;
4. Developing recommendations ITD management could consider to improve the way the department assesses its customer service performance.

The analysis was requested by the ITD's Customer Service Council and paid for through ITD's Research Program. This research is another component of the ITD's major focus upon assessing and improving customer service.

The report format adheres to the report objectives and is organized accordingly.

Section 1 assesses ITD customer service performance based on the results of the 2009 and the 2011 surveys. The report does not restate in detail the conclusions of the University of Idaho's Social Science Research Unit that already has produced an admirable summation and interpretation. Instead, this report examines key findings from the responses to open-ended questions that appear to raise issues not originally sought by the ITD survey. Those secondary themes address issues of ride quality, pavement surfaces, potholes and pavement markings. Survey results emphasize these are high-priority issues for the public and ones which elicited a substantial number of comments to open-ended questions. The concerns raised in the responses to open-ended questions appear to indicate that Idaho residents display less satisfaction with ride quality than have respondents in other states. The results of selected states are compared and contrasted with the Idaho survey results. Section 1 also includes observations from the author in evaluating the Idaho survey results based upon general knowledge of the transportation field and comparison with peer states.

Section 2 recommends ways to improve ITD customer service based on the research findings. These recommendations are provided in a hierarchy leading with those items with the highest perceived return for the lowest cost to those recommendations with the lowest returns and the highest costs. Some of the public's suggestions appear to be feasible with relatively low outlay of resources, while others may not be achievable even with substantial financial outlay. The "biggest bang for the buck" prioritizes the Section 2 recommendations.

Section 3 reviews the ITD management efforts to assess customer service. This review is based upon an analysis of the Department's customer service documents, its customer-input efforts, interviews with key staff and a review of audits and other documents.

Section 4 includes recommendations for how the ITD could improve the way it assesses its customer services. This section compares and contrasts ITD customer service processes with "best in class" customer relationship management (CRM) practices. This section does not recommend that Idaho adopt an expensive customer relationship management software or create an

expensive process. The section does, however, recommend that ITD understand fully how modern CRM systems work and that it consider developing low-cost, Idaho-appropriate customer relationship management processes. These processes would include increasing the opportunities for customers to comment upon their needs, quantifying the number and types of comments and working through a continuous-improvement process to reduce the issues that generate customer complaints. This section briefly summarizes customer-service processes from the "quality frameworks" of Six Sigma, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the Baldrige process. These quality frameworks provide a systematic process for measuring customer satisfaction and addressing the root causes of customer dissatisfaction. This section also illustrates how customer relationship management practices could be emulated in low-cost fashion by the ITD. This section is guided by Director Ness' vision that ITD be the best transportation department in the country. With that intent, the section describes how ITD could create a best-in-class customer service function that complies with the financial restraint expected of the department.

Section 1. Assessing ITD Customer Service

Overall, Idaho residents gave the Idaho Transportation Department relatively high ratings for customer service comparable to other state transportation agencies who have sampled their publics. Basic functions of the ITD were given grades of "A" or "B" by a majority of residents in a 2011 survey as seen in Figure 2.

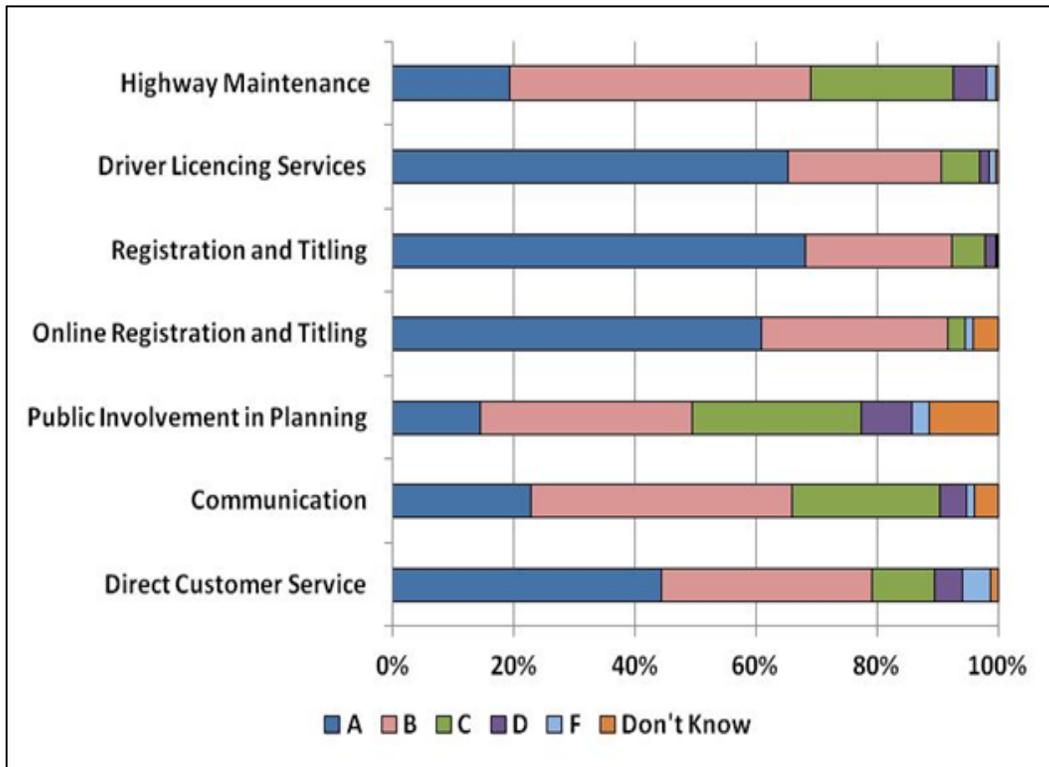


Figure 2. Overall Grades Awarded to ITD for Selected Performance Areas

To summarize these numbers briefly, Idaho respondents gave the department generally high marks with more than two-thirds of residents expressing either satisfaction or awarding high grades to basic, core ITD business functions of driver licensing and vehicle titling, pavement smoothness, winter maintenance, safety, construction and traffic flow.

This overall general satisfaction is restated in a different way with questions regarding the value that respondents perceive from the ITD and its services as seen in Figure 3. Over half of respondents (51 percent) felt that ITD provided "good" value for the funding invested in Idaho's transportation system. In addition, 13 percent of respondents stated ITD provided "excellent" value. A sizable portion (22 percent) felt ITD provided "fair" value, while just 5 percent felt ITD provided poor value for the investment. Nine percent of respondents weren't sure. In other words, 86 percent reported receiving "fair" or better value from ITD.

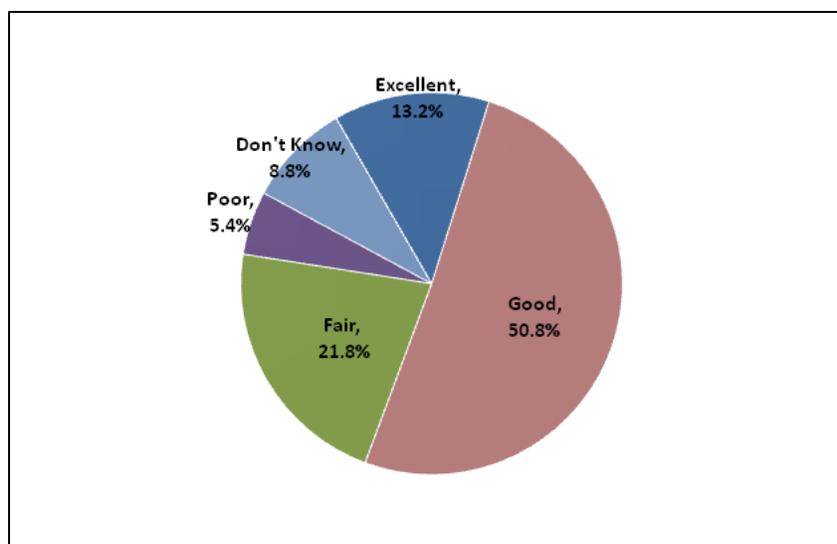


Figure 3. Perceived Value of ITD Services

These relatively high ratings will be examined below based upon a line-by-line review of the comments to open-ended questions. The responses to open-ended questions elaborate on the closed ended survey responses and appear to provide opportunity for ITD to address important customer-satisfaction concerns, particularly in regard to pavement smoothness, rutting, potholes and pavement markings.

Highway Maintenance and Quality

Sixty-nine percent of respondents gave ITD a grade of "A" or "B" for highway maintenance, while 74 percent of respondents were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the condition of the pavement. Sixteen percent were "very" or "somewhat" dissatisfied with pavement conditions. These compare to 70 percent in 2009 who gave ITD a grade of "A" or "B" for highway maintenance and 70 percent who said they were satisfied with pavement conditions. While maintenance ratings dropped by only 1 point, pavement smoothness ratings rose 4 percentage points from 2009's to 2011's survey.

As seen in Figure 4, 81 percent were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with ITD's winter maintenance efforts, but 11 percent were "very" or "somewhat" dissatisfied. Seventy seven percent of respondents said they were satisfied with the overall flow of traffic on the highways while 15 percent were "very" or "somewhat" dissatisfied.

Eighty-two percent of survey respondents said they were either "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the overall safety of the state highway system.

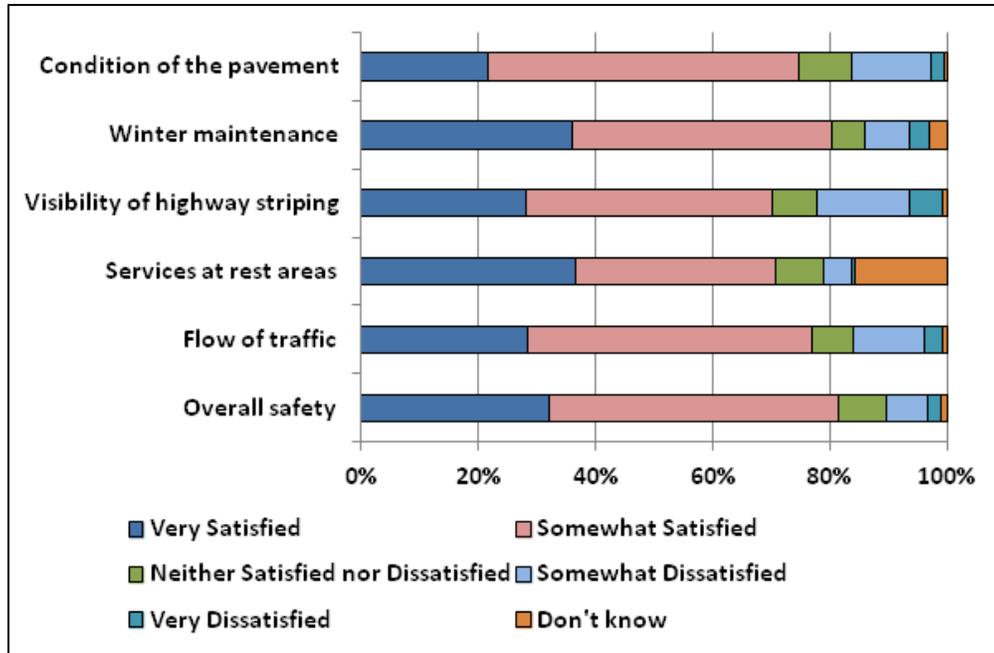


Figure 4. Satisfaction with ITD Highway Maintenance

Similar to the 2009 Customer Satisfaction study, Idaho residents were generally satisfied with ITD highway maintenance in 2011. As shown in Figure 5, 19 percent of respondents gave ITD the grade of “A” with respect to highway maintenance, up from 16 percent in 2009. Nearly 50 percent of respondents gave ITD the grade of “B”. Only 6 percent of respondents gave ITD a grade of “D” or “F”.

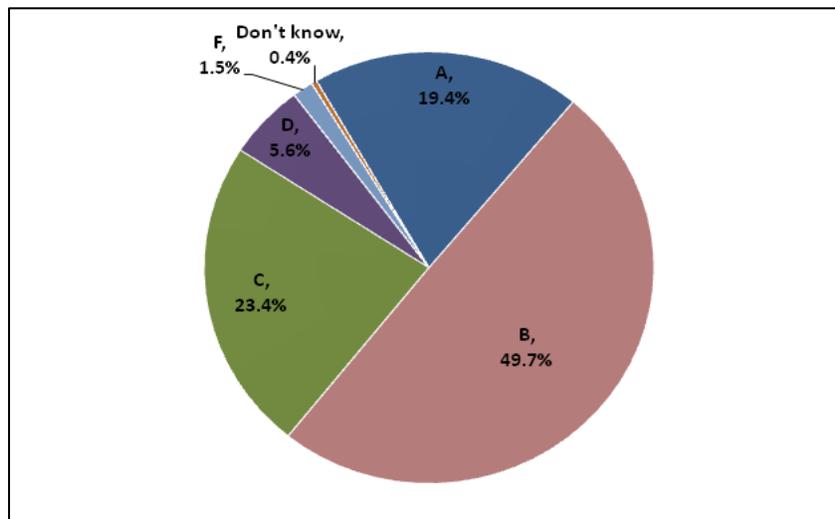


Figure 5. Overall Grade for ITD Highway Maintenance

Motor Vehicle Services

This report will touch only briefly on the Division of Motor Vehicle responses because they were adequately addressed in the University of Idaho report. The DMV ratings, as the university noted, were quite good with 65 percent of respondents scoring the driver licensing service an "A" and another 25 percent scoring it a "B". These results were from respondents who had renewed their license within the past two years. Only 2.6 percent of respondents rated the service as a "D" or "F". Another 71.7 percent rated the service as "very courteous" and 21.4 percent as "somewhat courteous." Similarly, 72 percent rated the staff as "very knowledgeable" and another 23.2 percent rated the staff as "knowledgeable."

Similarly high ratings were received for vehicle titling and registration. Slightly lower ratings were received for wait times with 65.4 percent being "very satisfied" and 23.4 percent "somewhat satisfied."

As noted in the University of Idaho report, usage of online DMV services is relatively low with only 14 percent of respondents reported having availed themselves of the online services, up only one percent from 2009. A possible influence on the low usage is that Idaho's rural nature reduces internet speed, availability and general use.

The University of Idaho report recommends increased emphasis, promotion and support of the online services as a way to increase customer convenience and satisfaction. This recommendation will be revisited in Section 2 and Section 4. It will not be elaborated on in this section because the University of Idaho report captures the issue well and notes that this is a promising area where ITD could improve customer service by promoting the convenience of on-line DMV services.

As with the pavement conditions, online services, and the issue of courtesy of DMV staff will be re-visited in Sections 2 and 4. It appears that the responses to open-ended questions provide considerable additional, yet anecdotal, comments indicating that some improvement is possible in regard to the courtesy perceived by respondents.

Alternative Transportation

ITD is interested in strengthening its customer service and sought answers to three areas that typically challenge transportation departments - project planning, overall communication with the public and the perceived satisfaction with non-automobile travel modes. The ratings in the areas of Planning, Communication and Alternative Transportation are somewhat lower than they were for the areas of core highway functions and DMV operations. However, these ratings should be interpreted in the light of the subject matter. Each of the three topics relate to difficult areas of public demands that are often contradictory and subjective. The issue of alternative transportation will be examined first.

A total of 47 percent said they were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the availability of alternative transportation options. This compares to 24 percent who were "very" or "somewhat" dissatisfied with transportation options, and with 17 percent who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the availability of transportation options.

While these ratings are lower than those received for highway maintenance and DMV services, they should be reviewed in light of the Idaho travel environment. It is a low-density state lacking the high-population, high-density areas conducive to transit success. The percent of persons who use transit nationally is relatively low. According to the National Personal Transportation Survey, 92 percent of all people use personal vehicles for commuting and use personal vehicles for 83 percent of all trips. Nationally, only 3.7 percent of all commute trips are by transit and 1.09 percent of all trips move by transit in the US. According to the US Census Transportation Planning Products, only 0.9 of 1 percent of Idaho commute trips were by transit in 2005, which is down from 1.9 percent in 1990. However, the 2005 Idaho percentage of commuting by transit is within the approximate midpoint of other predominately rural states. Oklahoma was at 0.5, Montana 0.6, New Mexico 0.8, Wyoming 1.5, Utah at 2.1 and Oregon at 3.4.

These low percentages are attributed to such factors as a substantial increase in vehicles, drivers, workers and number of households since 1969 in comparison to growth in total population as seen in Figure 6. More people live in smaller householders, a higher percentage of the total population works and a higher percentage of the total population owns automobiles. These trends substantially increased total miles of travel and the use of the single occupant vehicle.

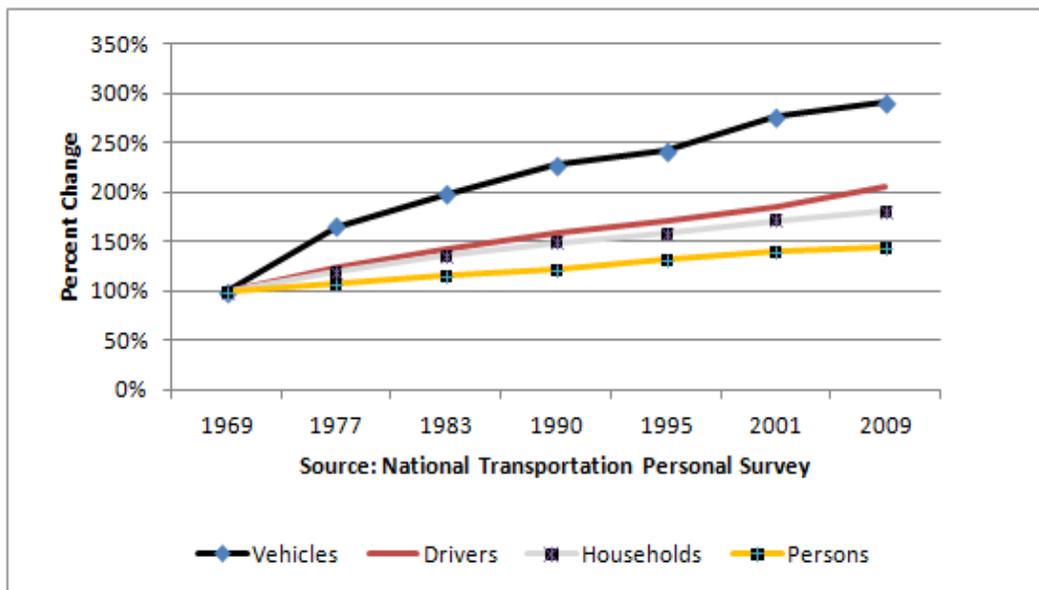


Figure 6. Growth in Vehicles and Drivers Outpaced Growth in Population

The number of person trips and Personal Miles Traveled nearly doubled between 1969 and 1995 before leveling somewhat with the economic downturn of the late 2000s as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Changes in Person Trips and Miles Traveled Each Day

	1969	1977	1983	1990	1995	2001	2009
Daily Person Trips	2.02	2.92	2.89	3.76	4.3	3.74	3.79
Daily Person Miles Traveled	19.51	25.95	25.05	34.91	38.67	36.89	36.13

This low transit usage nationally contrasts with the Idaho survey results that indicated 61 percent of respondents thought it is either “very important” or “important” to have access to public transportation, such as buses, rideshare, or van pool in their community, and only 20 percent felt it was either “unimportant” or “very unimportant” to have access to those services. Similar results have been seen in other transportation surveys.^(1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) Respondents say it is important to have access to public transit, even if they don't use it frequently, as seen in Figure 7 below.

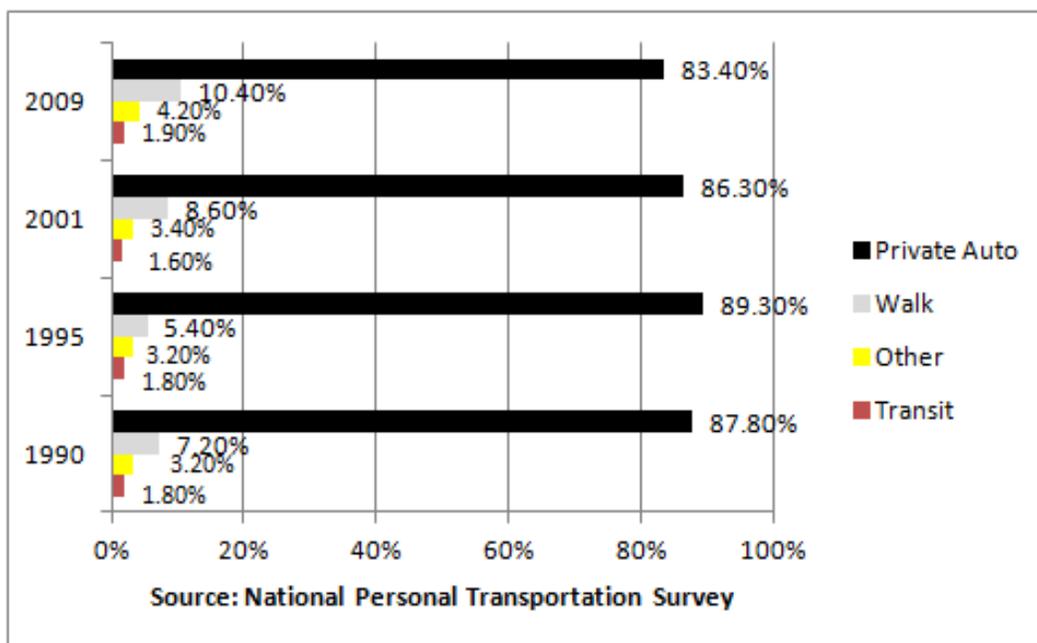


Figure 7. Percent of Trips by Mode Nationally

However, the stated preference for public transit does not always equate to support for increased spending for it. The Ohio Department of Transportation's (ODOT) surveys in 2002 and 2004 indicated more than 67 percent of respondents rated public transportation to be "somewhat important" to "very important," particularly in southwest Ohio. Expanding transit services was reported to be the single highest priority among respondents. However, a 2002 ballot issue to enact light rail in Cincinnati failed by a 68 to 32 percent margin. A 2011 proposal to create a Cincinnati trolley faces opposition by 53 percent of those polled.⁽⁷⁾ In 2010, 22 of 30 ballot measures related to transit nationwide were approved at the polls, according to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA).⁽⁸⁾ However, many of the 22 approved ballot measures cited by APTA did not involve increased taxes or fees. Of 21 transit-related ballot issues in Michigan tracked by the APTA, 14 that were approved involved renewals of existing transit levies.⁽⁹⁾ Of the Michigan ballot issues that involved increased taxes for transit, three passed and two failed. Two 2010 sales tax measures for transit expansion failed in Florida (Polk and Clayton counties).⁽¹⁰⁾ Another five ballot issues that passed were in affluent northern California. The transit issue in Ponderay, Idaho, passed but was based on a hotel bed tax. Bed taxes generally don't affect local residents. So although the Idaho survey respondents expressed that transit is important, that importance may or may not translate into support for increased expenditures which will be discussed later in the Recommendations.

The most common alternative mode respondents use is walking, with 35 percent saying they walk regularly as shown in Figure 8. That was followed by bicycling at 23 percent. When respondents were asked about the importance of safe walking or bicycle routes, 87 percent felt they were either "very important" or "important," compared to seven percent who felt they were "unimportant" or "very unimportant." This is very high ranking of importance, obviously, and provides opportunities for customer-service enhancement that will be discussed in Sections 2 and 4. While the low-density of Idaho geography makes substantial transit expansion expensive, the wider-spread focus on walking and bicycling may offer the ITD more affordable customer-service opportunities.

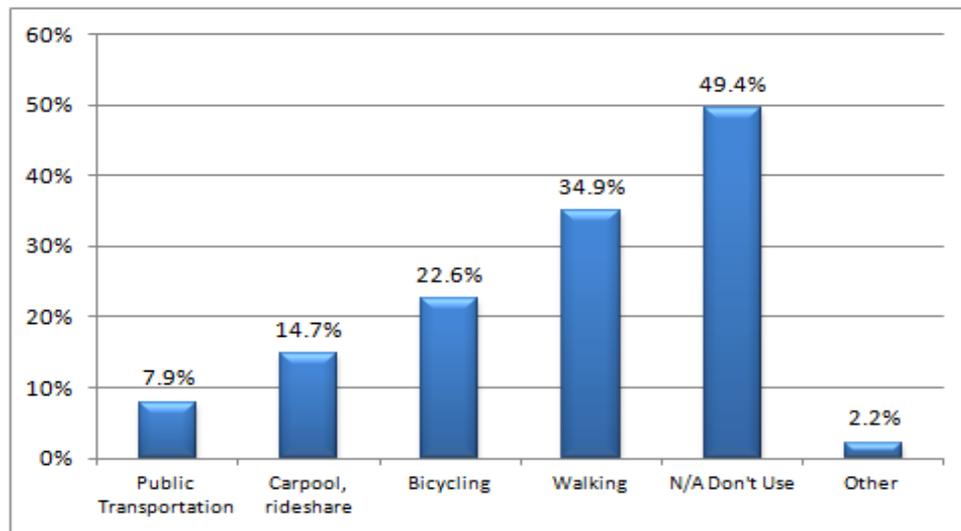


Figure 8. Non-Automotive Modes Used by ITD Survey Respondents

Public Involvement

Some comparatively low ratings were received in response to questions regarding ITD's solicitation of public input on highway projects. Thirty-nine percent either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that ITD does a good job of getting public input on projects. However, the largest single category of responses was "neutral" at 37 percent. Sixteen percent "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed", which is a relatively high negative response, as seen in Figure 9.

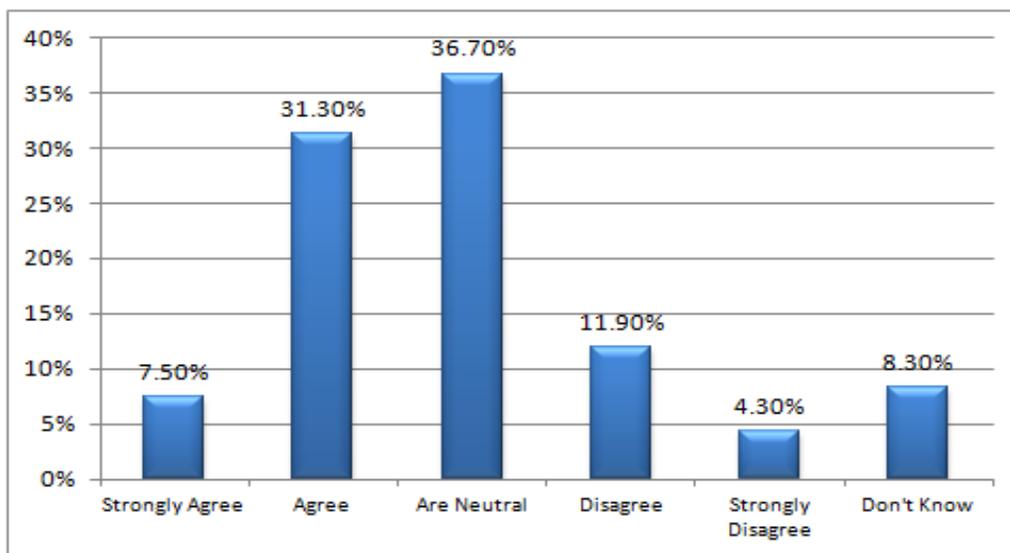


Figure 9. Responses to "ITD Does a Good Job on Getting Public Input"

The high neutral rating should be viewed in the context that only 17 percent of respondents had provided input during the public involvement process, either by attending a meeting or through other means. The majority of the respondents had not had the opportunity to evaluate the public-involvement process. The low percentage is probably indicative of two factors. First, constrained budgets have not allowed ITD to build many new capacity projects, which are the types of projects that tend to spur public meetings and generate significant public responses. Secondly, if the majority of residents are satisfied with ITD performance as noted in earlier responses, their motivation for providing input is diminished.

The University of Idaho notes that when the results are compared to the percent who have provided feedback, a statistically significant difference exists in the opinion of those who have participated in public meetings and those that haven't. Those who have provided input were more likely to strongly agree that ITD does a good job as well as to strongly disagree. Those who have participated in the public involvement process were more polarized than the other respondents.

Such polarization may well reflect the polarizing nature of highway projects that often involve the taking of right of way, the closing of existing access points or the creation of environmental impacts. Projects often inflict impacts on a small number who are highly vocal but the projects create a substantial benefit for a large number of dispersed users who tend not to engage in the public involvement process.

ITD can and should seek ways to improve customer service in soliciting public input during the project-development process. Innovations to do so will be discussed in Sections 2 and 4.

The somewhat high negative responses in the public involvement process should be interpreted in the above light that some projects have unavoidable impacts. Also, a careful reading of the responses does not reveal a sense of strong negatives. The comments lack harsh words and contain little in the way of direct criticism. The comments could easily be interpreted as respondents offering comments only because they were asked. Most of the comments tended

toward the neutral such as the following:

They probably do a good job.

They ought to make more of an effort to involve people, and pay attention to the input they receive.

Try to make the public more aware of what is going on.

Try to get the public more involved.

Try to get it out there more; get more advertising!

Town hall meetings and senior centers would be a good place to hold the public forums for the ITD.

These relatively neutral comments are in fairly sharp contrast to those that will be discussed later regarding potholes, pavement markings and ride quality. The following are among the most negative found in the "public input" section of responses to open-ended questions and they are not particularly strong.

When the public is adamantly against something, like the mega load project, the ITD should not do it.

They should take into consideration the people who are going to be affected by the roads that go by their houses or through their communities. I think it was a slap in the face to the taxpayers what they did with the mega loads.

They could ask the people who owned the property. They should ask before cutting trees and invading property. They make a mess and then leave.

They can listen to what the public has to say.

Actually do something when people give input, rather than doing what they're already planning on.

They are working on the bridge in American Falls right now, and there should have been more information given to the public about the project.

Talk to people in the town and not just the powers that be. Get everyone's input.

Take to heart the input they are given.

Although somewhat negative, these comments are among the strongest out of 802 responses to open-ended questions in the public-involvement category. The large majority of comments tended toward neutral. The University of Idaho categorized only 8.91 percent of the comments as leaning toward the negative, but as noted, many of those comments were not vehement.

Communication from ITD

The 2011 survey results indicated a majority of respondents were satisfied with ITD communication efforts, giving the department's communication efforts an "A" or a "B" as seen in Figure 10.

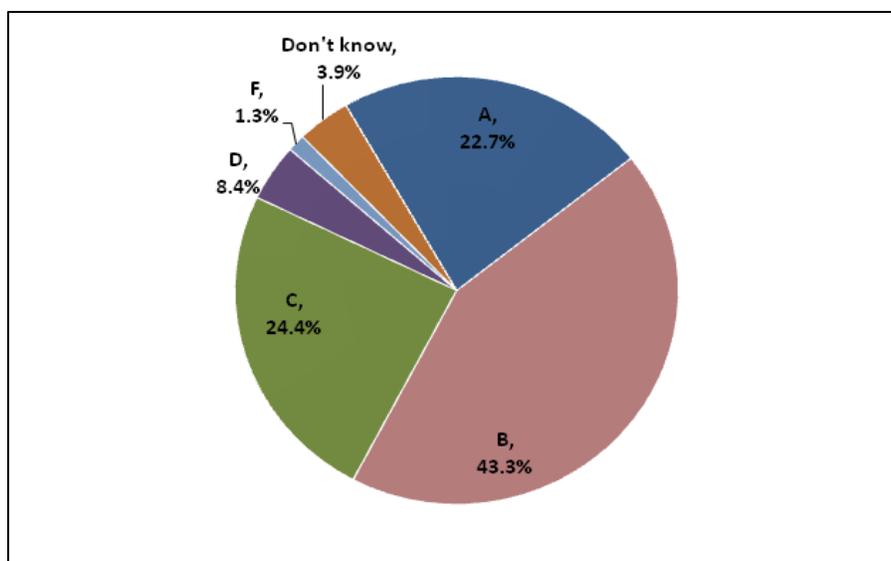


Figure 10. Grades for ITD Communication Efforts

As the University of Idaho noted, 23 percent of respondents awarded ITD a grade of "A" for its efforts to communicate with the public, up from 18 percent in 2009. An additional 43 percent of respondents awarded a grade of "B," and 28 percent awarded a grade of "C". Approximately 10 percent graded it a "D" or "F" for communication.

The University of Idaho report did an admirable job of mining the responses to open-ended questions to identify secondary themes. As with the public involvement section, the responses to open-ended questions tended toward the neutral and there weren't a substantial number of strong responses. As a result, this section will not elaborate on the communication findings other than to confirm that the University of Idaho report captured the responses well. The summation indicates the means by which the public would prefer to receive information, which allows ITD to tailor its public communication efforts.

Direct Customer Service

The direct customer service results indicated opportunities to improve but did not indicate strong concerns raised by the respondents. Just 12 percent of respondents said they had contacted ITD directly for services in the past year. For those who had contacted ITD directly, satisfaction with services provided was high as seen in Figure 11. Forty-four percent of respondents awarded a grade of "A" to ITD, with an additional 35 percent awarding a grade of "B". In other words, 79.1 percent gave the department an "A" or a "B" for direct customer service.

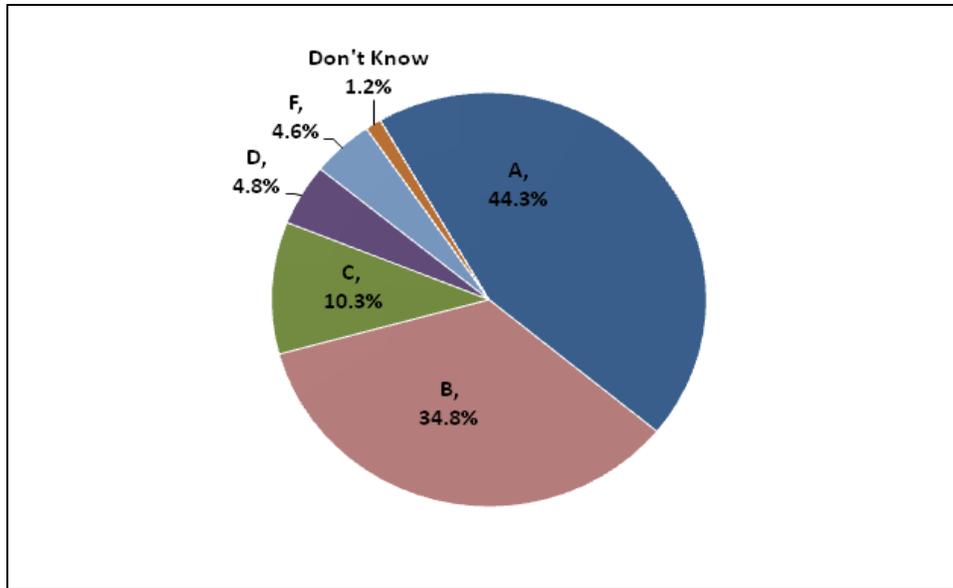


Figure 11. Grades for ITD Direct Customer Service

The responses to open-ended questions indicated repeated concerns that staff could be quicker to respond, could be more polite or more knowledgeable. However, the number of responses to open-ended questions, 75, was small compared to other categories. The University of Idaho categorized these comments sufficiently and they will not be restated here.

Concerns Over Pavements and Pavement Markings

A review of the responses to open-ended questions raises issues about two important areas that initially did not appear to be of concern. These are pavement ride quality and pavement markings. Each area is complex and the answers are not clear, however, the nature of responses to open-ended questions warrants additional inquiry by the ITD. These two areas directly affect customer service.

Pavement Conditions

In the 2009 customer survey, respondents were clear when asked to describe what they consider to be a well-maintained road. Fifty-nine percent cited the road surface as being most important, and more than half of those respondents wanted roads free of potholes or cracks. The second most common priority was clear pavement markings with 18 percent of all respondents citing this issue. Third most important were general issues that the 2009 survey report summarized as "road accessibility" and included issues such as adequate shoulder and lane widths. Other primary themes receiving less than 15 percent of the responses were winter maintenance, traffic flow, construction, safety, speed and bridges.

It is understandable why road surfaces would be so important in that they affect every driver, every day. The responses on direct customer service or public involvement indicate that 17 percent of the public had attempted to provide input to projects, and only 12 percent tried

to directly contact the agency on another issue. However, with more than 90 percent of all trips occurring by private vehicle, the pavement surface is the most direct and constant interface ITD has with the public. Pavement surfaces not only affect customer convenience but also customer safety and economics. Pavement surfaces that are polished have lower skid resistance while those that are rutted hold water and contribute to hydroplaning. Rough roads also increase vehicle operating costs by reducing fuel efficiency and increasing the need for vehicle repairs.

Initially, the overall survey results indicate that the public is pleased with highway maintenance and specifically with ride quality. Seventy-four percent of respondents were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the condition of the pavement, but 16 percent were "very" or "somewhat" dissatisfied. These 2011 results show higher public approval of road surfaces than in 2009.

Likewise, the department's Idaho Transportation System 2010 Pavement Performance Report shows substantial improvement in statewide pavement conditions over the past 20 years, with the majority of state routes achieving the pavement targets increasingly in the past three years. The federally reported Highway Performance Monitoring System shows mixed results with Idaho reporting above-average ratings for the International Roughness Index on Interstates and major routes. It reports that only 2.3 percent of Idaho's Interstate Highways are in "poor" condition, compared to 3.23 percent nationally, as seen in Figure 12. However, the HPMS Interstate conditions do show Idaho with more roughness deficiencies than peer states such as South Dakota, Montana, Oregon, North Dakota, New Mexico and Arizona.

On the other hand, the Pavement Serviceability Index data for ITD's rural routes reported to the HPMS seems to indicate Idaho routes have higher-than average deficiencies.

The Office of Performance Evaluation audit report noted this contradiction and indicated that the definitive data on whether Idaho roads are better or worse than other states' is lacking.

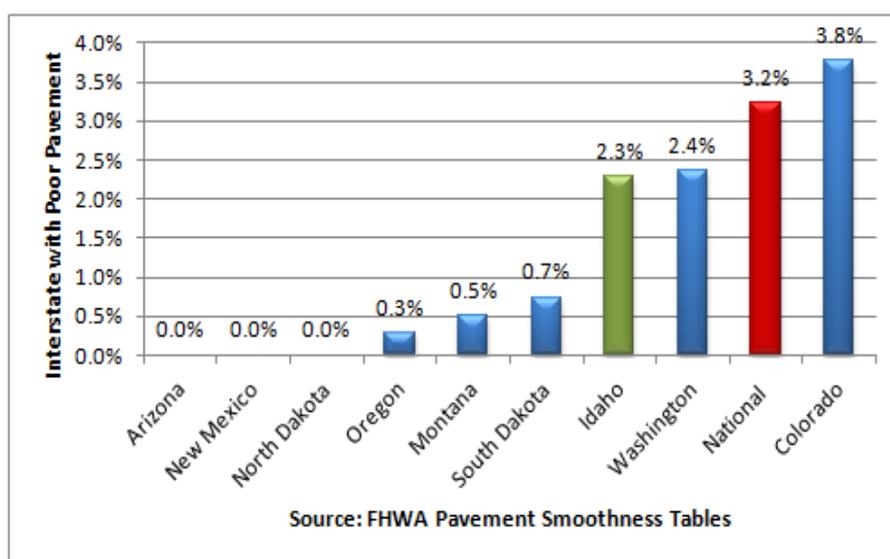


Figure 12. Poor Pavement on Interstate Highways, Idaho and Peers

Pavement Comments

A total of 965 responses were received to the survey item asking how ITD could improve highway maintenance and quality. Of these, 420 responses focused on improving road surfaces and 178 of these directly cited potholes as a concern. In fact, the number of comments and the emphatic nature of many of them appears in contrast to the closed-ended response that more than 70 percent of the public rated pavement surfaces as an "A" or "B." The comments below are just a sample of the direct quotes taken from the responses to open-ended questions about potholes.

Fill the potholes.

Fix the potholes.

Fill potholes quicker.

Fix the potholes and restripe the highways quicker.

Fix the potholes and uneven pavement.

Fix the potholes on I-15

Fix the potholes, if that could be done more quickly and efficiently.

Get the potholes filled. There are a lot of them right now.

Highway 12 needs a guardrail; and the potholes need fixed soon on Hwy 12.

Highway 57 has terrible potholes, between 11 and 22.

Highway 93 is very bad and fix the potholes.

Highway 95 needs maintenance especially in Sandpoint, the potholes need fixing. Highway striping needs more painting!

Hire more people to paint the roads and fix the potholes.

Although there were more responses to open-ended questions in other categories such as Communication, the nature of the comments in the roadway maintenance section were more emphatic, used sharper language and often referred specifically to routes or roadway sections of concern.

Of note are the high tolerances for pavement deficiencies seen in the ITD pavement standards. The rutting thresholds, in particular, appear to be much more lenient than other states'. ITD considers on its collectors that up to 0.99 inches of rutting would be considered 'fair.' That depth of rutting is more than twice as great as the acceptable threshold in several other states examined for this report. Cracking and pothole data are not as easily compared with other states. However, the large number of comments and other contradictory data warrant investigation by ITD as a possible high-value, customer service focus area. The responses to open-ended questions referenced some specific routes, such as US95 in Sandpoint. A review of ITD's Pathweb video log for US95 around Sandpoint showed obvious road construction that perhaps influenced the comment about the route. US95 and SH200 around Sandpoint both displayed obvious ride-quality problems in the photo log and those conditions were captured in

the International Roughness Index data in Pathweb for those sections. Another section cited was US93 in Twin Falls. The photo log and Pathweb showed obvious rutting, pavement "shoving" where the asphalt was pushed by stopping vehicles at intersections and high roughness levels, but those were most prevalent near intersections where the asphalt was shoved. It is far beyond the scope of this project to categorically describe ITD pavement conditions against those of peer states. However, the large number of anecdotal comments and the contradictory pavement condition data single this issue out for warranting further investigation.

Pavement Markings

Following in frequency the comments about pavement surfaces were the comments regarding pavement markings, reflectors and nighttime visibility. The Social Science Research Unit noted 149 comments to open-ended questions regarding pavement lines, strips, reflectors or markings such as these.

Paint the lines the better.

Paint lines better and some of the turnouts on Hwy 55 are dangerous.

Make sure the lines get painted, especially the fog lines.

Maintain lines better, especially for older people. It's hard to see on rainy nights. Fix potholes too.

Lines are the big issue.

Lines are a big issue in my county as well as some potholes occasionally.

Keeping the lines painted on Highway 21, widening the lanes.

Keep up with repaving the highways and restripe the lines sooner.

It would be helpful to have some better lines on some of the smaller highways, like Highway 19 for example.

Hwy 57, the lines need to be painted. Hwy 95 has potholes, sections on 95 need to be marked better.

Have raised buttons down the middle of the highway because sometimes I can't see the center lines.

Have more lines, the lines are hard to see when it's rainy. Have strips on the side of the road.

Pavement markings are an important safety feature and high reflectivity assists motorists with lane delineation at night and particularly in fog and rain. As was noted from the comments, reflective pavement markings and signage increases motorists sense of safety. Edge lines in particular have been shown to be an important safety feature with a high benefit/cost ratio in terms of reducing roadway departure crashes which are the most common type of crash in rural areas.

The studded snow tires and use of sand and "grit" during snow and ice operations increase the abrasive wear and tear on pavement markings. Keeping up with pavement markings,

particularly after a hard winter, is challenging for highway agencies. However, the substantial number of comments about pavement markings provide another opportunity for ITD to investigate whether customer service could be improved in an area that has important safety components. Also, pavement markings are much less expensive to address than the pavement concerns discussed in the previous section.

Comparisons to Other States' Results

ITD's survey results compare favorably overall with national trends and with selected other states whose survey results were reviewed. All the states examined used different questions so that question-to-question comparisons were impossible. However, most of the surveys included similar questions regarding overall satisfaction, roadway conditions, snow and ice, congestion, safety and other similar matters. From these general comparisons, some trends can be discerned that indicate Idaho compares favorably in overall customer satisfaction. As noted earlier for Idaho:

- 74 percent of respondents were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the condition of the pavement, but 16 percent were "very" or "somewhat" dissatisfied;
- 81 percent were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with ITD's winter maintenance efforts, but 11 percent were "very" or "somewhat" dissatisfied;
- 77 percent of respondents said they were "satisfied" with the overall flow of traffic on the highways. 15 percent were "very" or "somewhat" dissatisfied;
- 82 percent of survey respondents said they were either "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the overall safety of the state highway system;
- The most commonly cited suggestions for how to improve customer service in highway maintenance dealt with having quality road surfaces.

National Comparison

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) conducted a traveler opinion and perception survey in 2005, which updated similar surveys from 2000 and 1995.⁽¹⁰⁾ In the 2005 national survey, nearly 7 out of 10 travelers (69 percent) said they were satisfied with the transportation system - giving the system a rating of 6 or higher on an 11-point scale. ("0" means "not at all satisfied" and "10" means "extremely satisfied").

This represents a significant increase from 2000 when 58 percent of travelers said they were satisfied with the transportation options in their community and compares even more favorably to 1995 when only 50 percent expressed satisfaction. FHWA noted, however, the level of satisfaction remains only moderate - only 14 percent said they were "highly satisfied" (a rating of 9 or 10 on an 11-point scale) and the same percentage said they were "dissatisfied", a decrease from 2000 when 20 percent said they were dissatisfied.

FHWA reported in 2005 that 20 percent of commuters nationally were "dissatisfied" with their commute, primarily because of congestion. Sixty-seven percent were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their commutes.

When asked to rate the most important characteristics of a high-quality transportation system, national respondents expressed these priorities ranked in the following order:

1. Roadway safety.
2. Ability to travel easily.
3. Bridge conditions.
4. Pedestrian safety and mobility.
5. Pavement conditions.
6. Planning for future transportation needs;
7. Improving traffic flow.
8. Set up of work zones.
9. Maintenance response times.
10. Consideration of the environment.

There was not a comparable question asked in either the 2009 or 2011 ITD survey so a direct comparison of the national responses to comparable Idaho responses was not possible. However, based upon a preponderance of responses in the 2009 and 2011 Idaho survey, it appeared that Idaho residents were somewhat less concerned about congestion and safety than residents nationally. However, again it should be stressed that exactly comparable questions were not asked in the different surveys.

Nationally, respondents reported considerably less perceived value from the transportation system than did those in Idaho. Although the questions were different and were asked 6 years apart, the 2011 Idaho responses were similar to or better than those received nationally. Nationally, 42 percent of those surveyed in 2005 "strongly agreed" or "agreed" they got their money's worth from the nation's transportation system, Figure 13. In Idaho, 64 percent of those surveyed in 2011 said ITD provided "excellent" or "good" value for the funding invested in Idaho's transportation system, Figure 14.

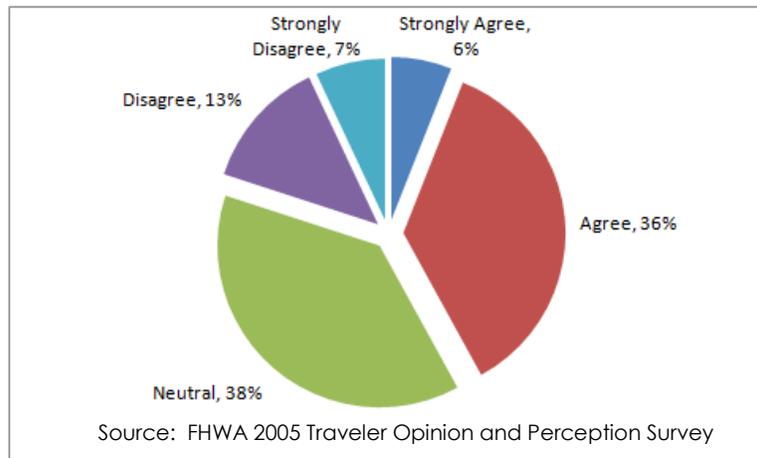


Figure 13. Percent of Respondents Nationally Who Felt They Got Their Money's Worth from the Nation's Transportation System

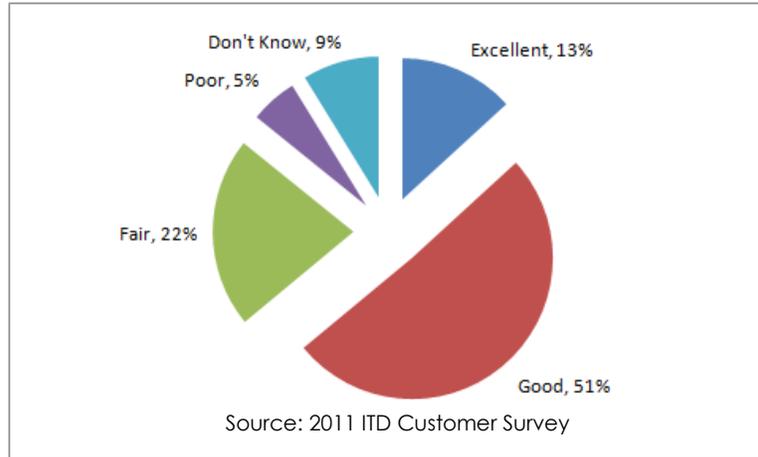


Figure 14. Perceived Value ITD Provides for the Funding Invested in Idaho's Transportation System

Although highly generalized, the national results do provide an "order of magnitude" comparison of the ITD survey results to some comparable national averages. Overall, the respondents to the ITD survey were as positive, or in some cases much more so, than were respondents nationally.

Regarding alternative modes of transportation, a total of 47 percent of Idaho respondents said they were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the availability of alternative transportation options. This compares to 24 percent who are "very" or "somewhat" dissatisfied, and with 17 percent neither "satisfied" nor "dissatisfied." That degree of satisfaction correlated well with the national results. Nationally, 16 percent said the transportation system was "excellent" at serving those who need alternative modes and 31 percent said it was "good." That totals 47 percent who rate the transportation system as "good" or "excellent" at serving people who use alternative modes. Although the questions were somewhat different, both the national and state ratings appear similar.

The 2005 national survey respondents provided the following grades for key attributes of the national highway infrastructure.

Overall	C+
Bridge conditions	B-
Overall road safety	B-
Efforts to reduce delay from road work	C+
Pedestrian Safety and mobility	C+
Pavement conditions	C+

Oregon Comparisons

ITD's customer-satisfaction ratings were comparable to Oregon's in most major categories. As seen in Figure 15, of those surveyed in Oregon, 66 percent rated the DOT's performance as "excellent" or "good," comparable to the "perceived value" ratings Idaho.⁽¹¹⁾

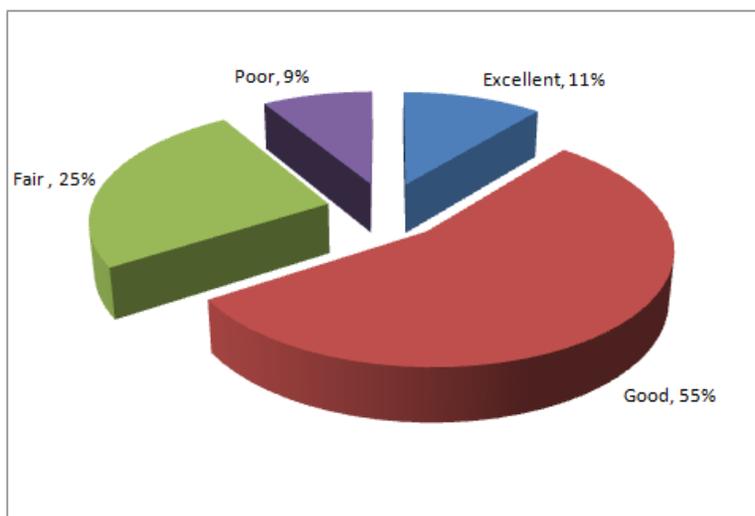


Figure 15. Oregon Approval Ratings⁽¹¹⁾

As will be shown with the Missouri DOT results below, the Oregon DOT's consistent use of customer surveys provides it trend line insights into changes in customer perception over time.

Among the issues the Oregon DOT tracks is the public's satisfaction with the department's environmental mitigation efforts, which are a major public concern in Oregon. The results indicate that 19 percent of the Oregon respondents were "very satisfied" with the Oregon DOT's environmental effort and 57.7 percent were "somewhat" satisfied, as shown in Figure 16. The department only published results for those two categories of rankings.

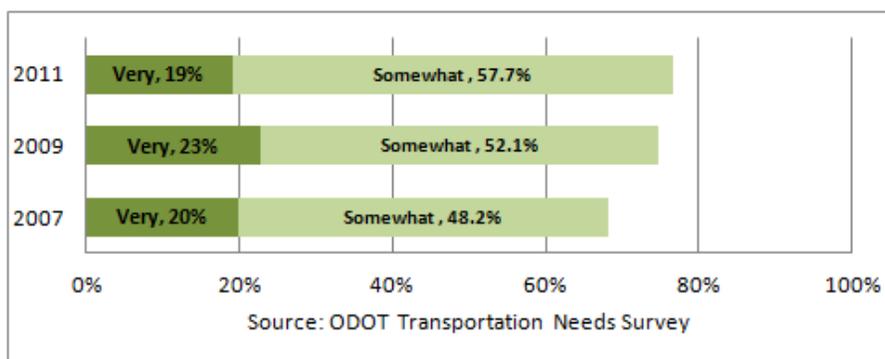


Figure 16. Satisfaction with Oregon DOT Environmental Mitigation

Regarding the Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles, 43.7 percent were "very satisfied" and 35.9 percent were "somewhat" satisfied, Figure 17. These were lower than Idaho's DMV ratings.

Regarding maintenance conditions, nearly 74 percent of respondents approved of the conditions, Figure 18. For pavements, 65 percent approved of pavement conditions and nearly 77 percent approved of bridge conditions, Figure 19. As a footnote to the bridge ratings from the public, they indicate a difference between perception and technical performance. Although the public approves generally of ODOT's bridge performance, National Bridge Inventory data indicates a five-fold increase in the percentage of structurally deficient bridges in Oregon between 1992 and 2008. The department's bridge inventory became a serious cause of concern and the focus of a major investment program by the Oregon DOT.

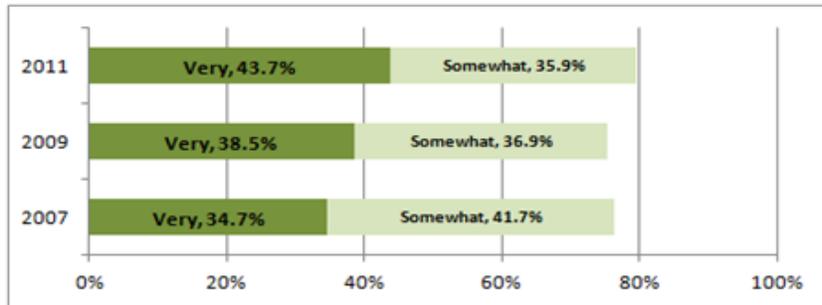


Figure 17. Satisfaction with Oregon DMV

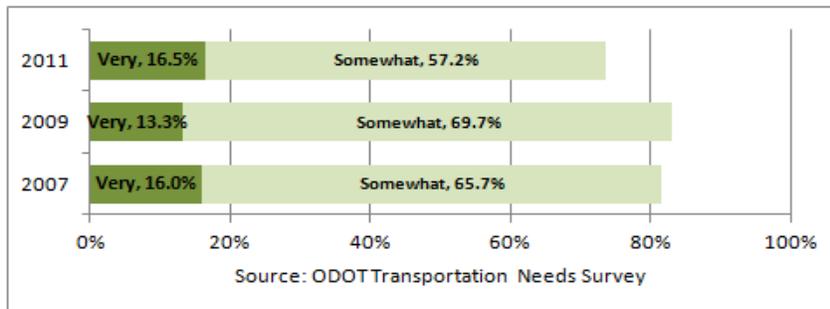


Figure 18. Satisfaction with Oregon Maintenance Conditions

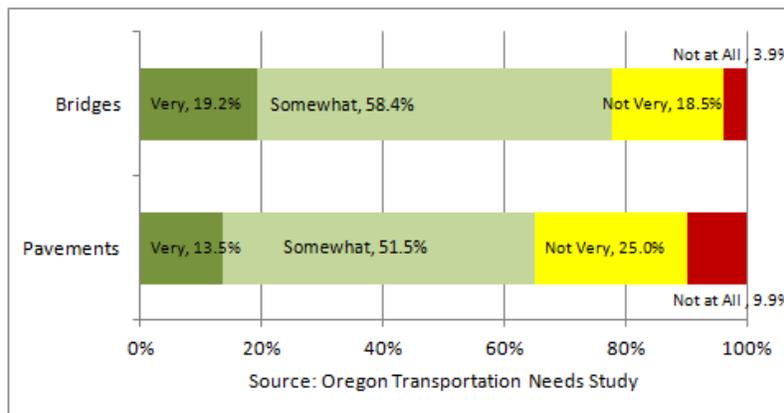


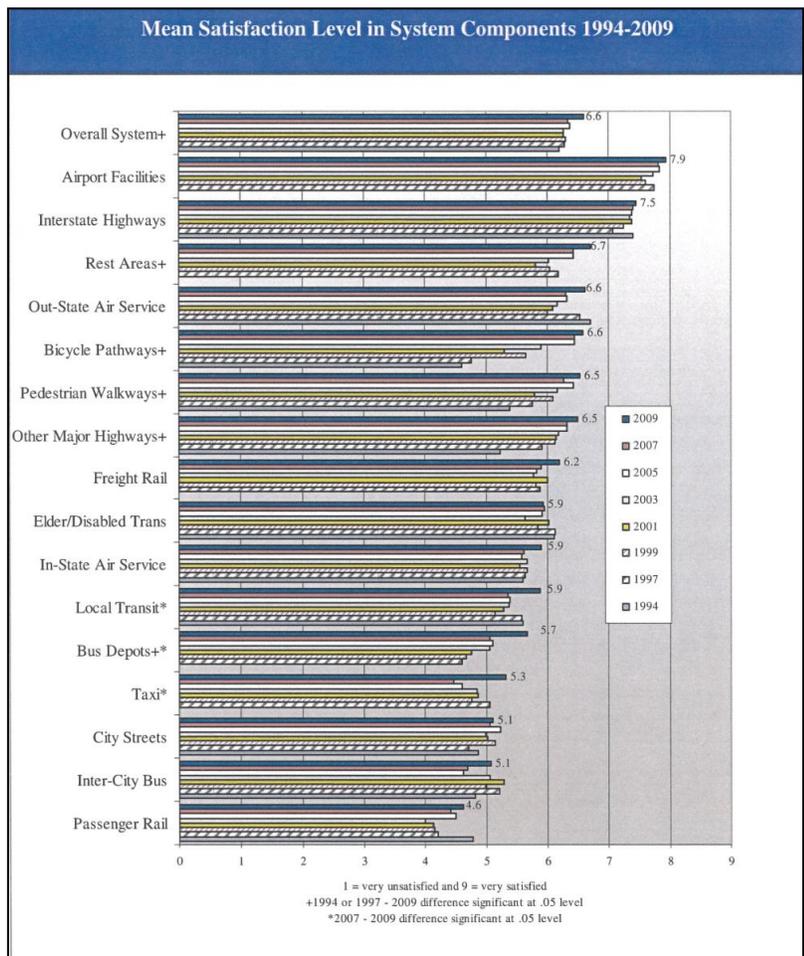
Figure 19. Satisfaction with Oregon Pavements and Bridges

Similar to Idaho, Oregon struggles to gain widespread use of online vehicle registration. In Oregon, 54 percent were not aware they could use online services. In Idaho, of the persons who did not use online services, 56 percent were unaware of them.

Montana Comparisons

The Montana Department of Transportation's survey process appears to represent a mature customer-service input model that bears benchmarking by the ITD. The Montana surveys have been conducted since 1997 and provide a significant trend line of performance allowing for continuous improvement. Also, the Montana DOT bifurcates its surveys and conducts them both for the public at large and for key stakeholder groups such as elected officials, regional planning organizations, tribal leaders and key advocacy groups such as business and environmental organizations. The two perspectives allow for the DOT to triangulate the responses to compare and contrast what it hears from the public with messages from professional stakeholders.

Results from Montana DOT's 2009 Statewide Public Involvement Survey (Figure 20) illustrate the



degree of change over time in public satisfaction. The data indicates that overall approval has increased since 1997. Between 2007 and 2009 satisfaction increased in 16 of 17 surveyed categories. Transit service for the elderly and disabled fell slightly.

The number of "D" and "F" rankings for the key customer service categories are relatively low, as seen in Figure 21. Overall, 64.6 percent rated

Figure 20. Change in Montana Satisfaction Rates Over Time (2009 Survey)

	A	B	C	D	F	DK	Mean	Total
Overall, how would you grade the current quality of service provided by MDT compared with the quality of service five years ago, in 2004?	19.4	45.2	16.4	1.5	0.2	17.3	3.00	1,006
What grade would you give MDT on the quality of service it provides?	14.5	55.6	22.4	1.9	.2	5.5	2.87	1,152
How would you grade MDT's overall performance during the past year, since April 2008?	11.6	54.7	27.6	2.2	0.1	3.9	2.79	1,172
What grade would you give MDT on overall quality of planning to meet statewide transportation needs?	13.6	43.4	28.0	3.9	0.8	10.2	2.72	1,094
What grade would you give MDT on its public notification process about construction projects in your area?	18.8	39.0	28.5	5.7	1.7	6.2	2.72	1,143
Overall, what grade would you give MDT on the convenience of travel through construction zones and maintenance projects?	14.7	46.4	29.5	4.3	2.1	3.0	2.69	1,182
What grade would you give MDT on its overall highway maintenance and repair?	12.6	47.8	31.9	4.6	0.7	2.3	2.69	1,191
What grade would you give MDT on its efforts to keep customers fully informed of all relevant information and upcoming decisions related to the transportation system?	13.7	42.0	29.6	4.6	2.0	8.1	2.66	1,121
What grade would you give Montana Department of Transportation for its responsiveness to customer ideas and concerns?	7.0	31.5	27.2	3.8	2.3	28.2	2.52	871

Figure 21. Grade Ratings by Category for Montana DOT

Montana DOT's quality as an "A" or a "B." These questions appear to address many of the key public-involvement questions of interest to ITD.

In Figure 22, The Montana DOT asks the public to rank transportation problems by their severity. A combined 62.3 percent ranked road pavement conditions as a Serious or Moderate problem, the highest-ranked problem overall. That high ranking was somewhat in contrast with the other rankings that show steady increases in the public's ranking of Interstate Highways and other routes. The next highest ranked problems were timely resolution of safety problems, congestion, impacts on the environment and debris on the roadways.

	Serious Problem	Moderate Problem	Small Problem	Not a Problem	Don't Know	Mean	Total
Road pavement condition	19.4	42.9	20.7	16.3	0.6	2.66	1,214
Timely resolution to safety issues	10.8	31.7	18.3	28.8	10.4	2.27	1,095
Traffic congestion	11.9	31.6	24.5	30.4	1.5	2.26	1,203
Impacts on the environment from the transportation system	10.6	25.1	27.3	31.4	5.6	2.16	1,154
Debris on roadways	11.3	23.8	32.2	31.2	1.5	2.15	1,203
Number of vehicles with only one occupant	15.1	23.0	16.2	39.0	6.7	2.15	1,139
Number and condition of rest areas	11.4	23.7	19.4	35.3	10.2	2.13	1,097
Vehicle carbon monoxide emissions	10.8	24.7	22.4	35.5	6.5	2.12	1,141
Vehicle damage from highway construction and maintenance	7.5	23.8	32.9	30.7	5.2	2.08	1,159
Lack of alternative routes for major roads	9.8	22.6	22.8	40.3	4.5	2.02	1,167
The ability to manage specific emergency situations like train derailments, bridge failures, or major accidents	6.4	19.9	23.1	37.5	13.1	1.94	1,062
Too many access points (including driveways) onto major roads	6.0	20.2	21.7	44.9	7.1	1.86	1,133
Air quality impacts from highway maintenance (i.e., excessive dust caused by winter sanding materials)	4.4	16.5	28.1	46.0	5.1	1.78	1,158
Adequate road signs	3.7	13.4	22.7	59.0	1.2	1.61	1,207

Figure 22. Most Important Transportation Issues Identified by Montana DOT Respondents

Also like ITD, the Montana DOT attempts to rank the public's priorities for investments or improvements in the transportation system. Because of possible loss or reduction of through-state rail passenger service, the preservation of rail service was ranked as the highest priority for system improvement. Next in order was maintaining pavement conditions, keeping the public informed about transportation issues, improving the physical condition of other roads and streets and improving transportation safety.

Montana asks the public which media it prefers for communication. Radio and television were clearly ranked as most useful, as shown in Figure 23, followed by toll-free phone lines, the website, newspapers, surveys and public meetings. Special mailings were ranked lowest by the public.

	Extremely useful	Very useful	Some what useful	Not very useful	Not at all useful	DK	Mean	Total
Radio and television	19.2	40.1	29.0	5.2	5.0	1.5	3.64	1,202
Toll-free call in number	14.3	21.3	33.0	11.4	16.6	3.4	3.06	1,179
Website	13.3	26.7	26.4	7.3	20.6	5.7	3.05	1,151
Newspapers	8.6	24.1	40.9	10.8	14.0	1.6	3.03	1,201
Surveys	3.6	16.2	42.8	14.5	18.7	4.2	2.70	1,170
Public meetings in your community	4.6	15.2	32.2	19.7	25.1	3.2	2.53	1,182
Special mailings (brochures, newsletters, postcards, etc)	2.9	10.1	35.3	21.8	26.5	3.3	2.39	1,180

Figure 23. Montana Residents' Responses to Preferred Media for Communication

Missouri DOT

The Missouri DOT is well known for its customer-focused performance management system. The DOT under former Director Pete Rahn made an impressive improvement in legislative and public perception of the agency. It instituted an annual customer survey process and focused heavily on direct measures of customer satisfaction, as well as focusing on items of importance to the public such as pavement conditions. Figure 24 shows that customer satisfaction with the Missouri DOT steadily improved.

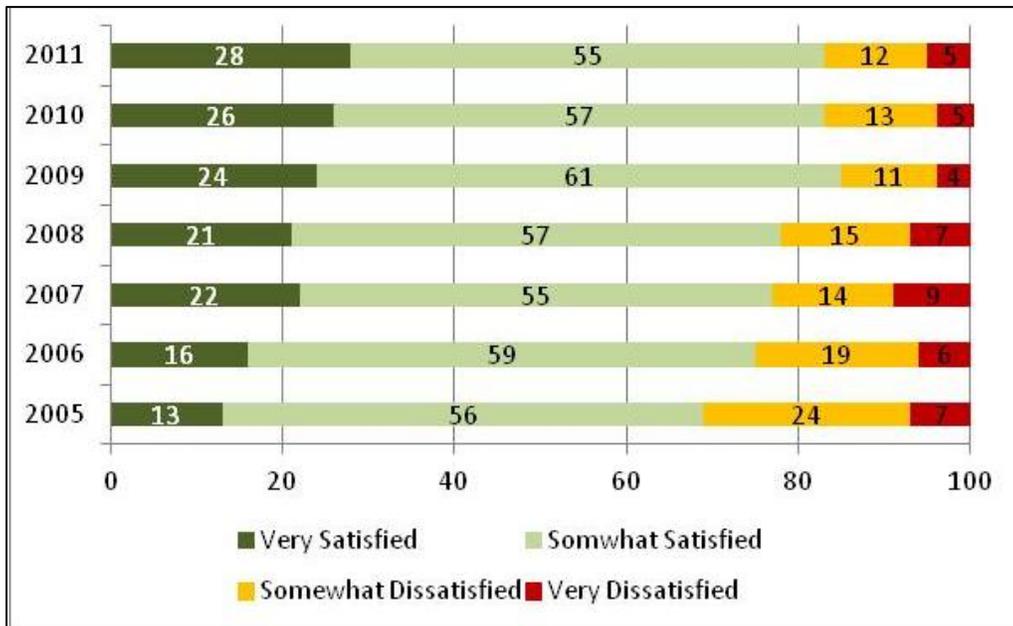


Figure 24. Customer Satisfaction Percentages for MoDOT Over Time

Figure 25 illustrates what conditions contributed most to MoDOT customer satisfaction. Having highways in good condition clearly dominated the scoring. In the mid-1990s, MoDOT was ranked nationally as having among the worst pavement conditions of any state. It placed heavy emphasis upon ride quality and dramatically reduced its pavement surface deficiencies in the past decade. It also put heavy emphasis upon pavement markings, shoulder drop offs, signage, guardrail and cable median barrier. These investments both improved ride quality and also increased safety and substantially improved the appearance of Missouri Highways.

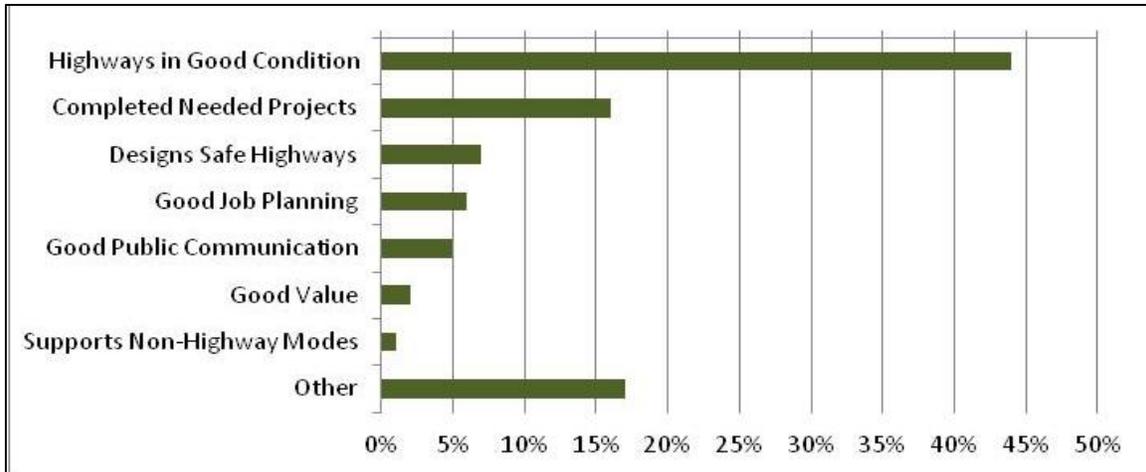


Figure 25. The Factors Influencing Those Who Say They are Satisfied with MoDOT

Conversely, were the categories that caused those who were dissatisfied to be so. Of the residents who indicated they were dissatisfied, the survey asked them what factors made them dissatisfied. Clearly, road conditions and specifically potholes caused the strongest negatives as seen in Figure 26.

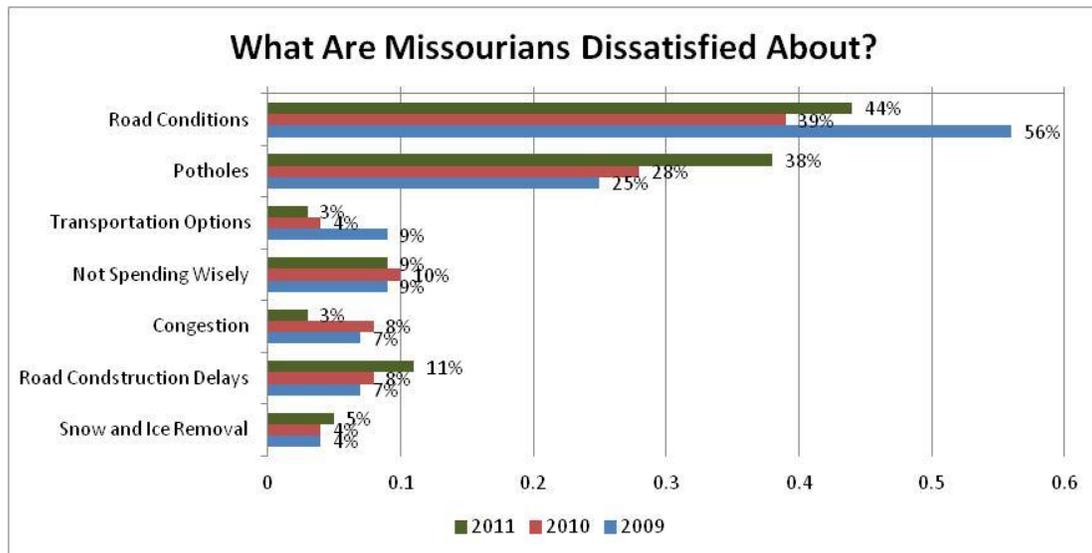


Figure 26. Factors Contributing to Those Who Were Dissatisfied with MoDOT

Basic roadway conditions and potholes were the single greatest determinant of whether Missourians were satisfied or dissatisfied with the department.

MoDOT also places considerable emphasis upon improving its credibility. Its reliance on performance measures, a greater openness to the public, a heavy campaign of public relations and more dynamic and outgoing leadership helped to boost the agency's credibility. The director consciously sought to disseminate the agency's accomplishments so as to raise its

stature, increase its credibility and reduce the degree of outside criticism it received. As seen in Figure 27, the number of respondents who said that MoDOT is the state's primary transportation expert rose steadily.

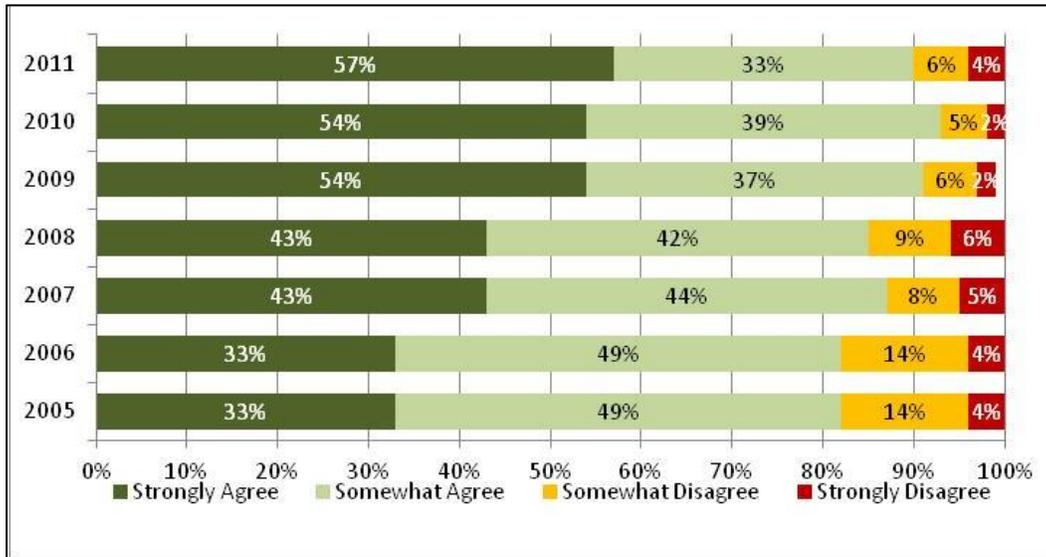


Figure 27. Percentage of Respondents Who Say MoDOT is the Primary Transportation Expert

Related to the issue of credibility was the issue of the timeliness and the quality of MoDOT communication to the public. Ratings in those areas steadily improved, as seen in Figure 28.

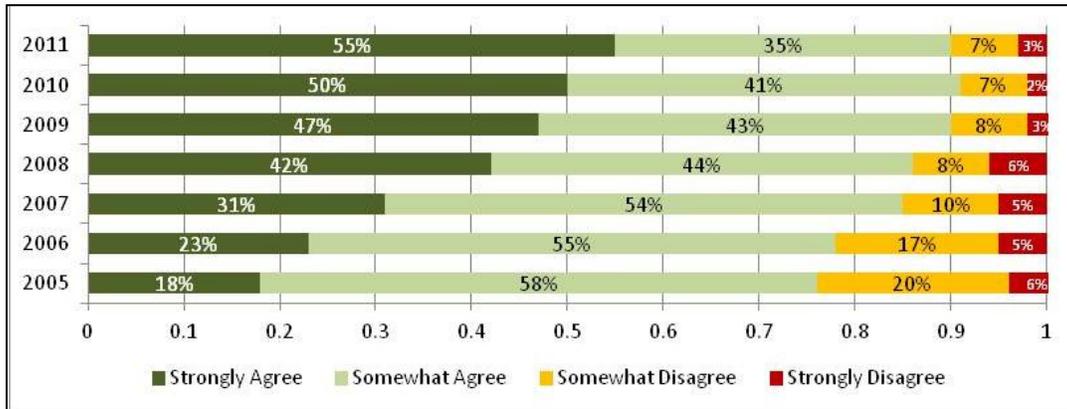


Figure 28. Percentage of Respondents Who Say MoDOT Provides Timely Information

The Missouri DOT received approval for increased bonding and for a long-term package of bridge improvements. It has not, however, received an across-the-board revenue increase. The department has for several years gauged the public's sentiment regarding increased revenue and the results illustrate substantial support for more revenue but not a clear majority for it.

In its survey, 48 percent believe that funding should increase greatly or slightly. That exactly equals the 48 percent who say it should stay the same. Four percent say it should be reduced either slightly or greatly. Despite the improvements in overall MoDOT performance, the number of supporters of increased revenue has decreased, probably because of the economic downturn, as seen in Figure 29.

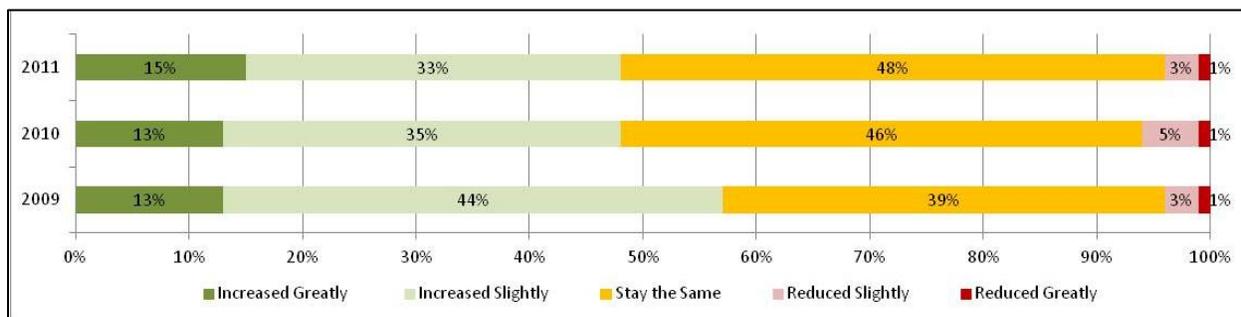


Figure 29. Opinions Regarding Whether MoDOT Revenue Should Increase or Decrease

MoDOT represents a significant benchmarking opportunity for ITD, particularly in regard to its public surveys and its public service efforts. The turnaround in pavement conditions, roadway appearance and the commensurate improvement in public satisfaction with MoDOT service efforts hold important lessons for ITD.

Conclusions

In addition to these four state surveys, the results of surveys by transportation agencies in Ohio, Arizona, Florida, Kentucky and Tennessee were reviewed. They included similar results as stated for the national, Oregon, Montana and Missouri surveys. Generally, between two-thirds and three-quarters of the survey respondents give high marks in response to general questions about their satisfaction with a given state's highway network. Those results are comparable to Idaho's.

More detailed comparisons of specific issues are problematic because of differences in the surveys, and the questions asked. The concerns expressed by respondents in the surveys vary somewhat in response to the questions asked. Surveys that focus upon the need for increased transit, or about the problems of congestion tend to elicit more responses regarding those issues. States that investigate in more detail respondents' concerns specifically about potholes or roadway surfaces tend to elicit stronger negative comments about those issues.

Nationally, the pothole and road surface responses are puzzling and do not correlate well to actual reported pavement conditions. Florida is known for smooth pavements being a state with a relatively "young" highway network and having favorable climate. Yet, significant concerns about pavement conditions were expressed. Similarly, Arizona has high reported pavement conditions yet had relatively strong negative responses regarding the condition of its interstate and two-lane highways. In Ohio, two-thirds of the public and 84 percent of public officials rated roadway quality as good or better. Yet, pavement ride quality was rated much lower.

The Idaho Transportation Department's customer service ratings compare favorably overall to both national survey results and to those of representative states reviewed. In most cases, large differences in public responses were not apparent in basic categories such as overall satisfaction, perceived roadway safety or value for money.

However, as was seen in the more detailed comments to open-ended questions from Idaho, the generalized close-ended questions may or may not actually capture all the public's sentiments regarding important highway performance. The comments to open-ended questions appear to indicate that further investigation is needed to determine whether the generalized answers mask important issues of ride quality, rutting, pavement markings and perhaps other considerations.

Also, some of the survey features of both Missouri and Montana appear to address some of the issues of interest to ITD, particularly how public perception changes over time, and what specific roadway attributes are most sensitive to shifting public satisfaction with the highway system. In addition, several states bifurcate results between stakeholder groups and the general public. Such is the case in Montana, Florida, Ohio, and Arizona. Such bifurcation in future Idaho surveys may provide the ITD additional insights into both how the public, and public officials, perceive important transportation issues.

Section 2. Recommendations to Improve Customer Service

Summary

Section 2 presents recommendations to improve ITD customer service based on the research findings. These recommendations are provided in a hierarchy leading with those items with the highest perceived return for the lowest cost to those recommendations with the lowest returns and the highest costs. Some of the public's suggestions appear to be feasible with relatively low outlay of resources, while others may not be achievable even with substantial expenditures. The "biggest bang for the buck" prioritizes the recommendations in this section. Five formal recommendations are made for Low-Cost, High-Return items. Other possible actions are discussed but without specific recommendations.

Low Cost-High Return Recommendations

The following recommendations could be implemented with little cost but can produce high-return results.

Recommendation 1: Be Strategic

The first and overriding recommendation is to be strategic in the customer service areas to be addressed. ITD is in the early stages of developing a customer service process and the recommendation here is to closely adhere to the 80/20 rule by focusing upon the 20 percent of issues that affect 80 percent of the public. Also, with the severely constrained resources facing the department and a strong imperative to demonstrate concern for customer service, a strategic focus on a few, high-return items in this initial year is recommended.

Figure 30 illustrates the logic to be applied in making recommendations on how to improve ITD customer service based upon the highest likely return on investment.

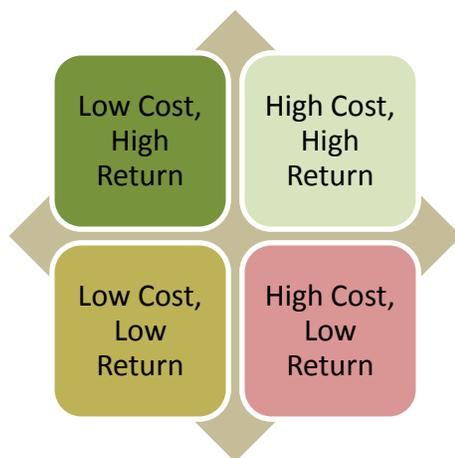


Figure 30. The Organization of Recommendations Based on Cost and Perceived Return

Those elements recommended most highly are those in the upper left quadrant, those with a perceived low cost but potential high return in customer satisfaction. In the upper right quadrant are items with a potentially high cost but also potentially high returns in customer satisfaction. At bottom left are items that are low cost but likely to not

produce substantial improvement in customer service. At bottom

right, are items that would be high cost and which are not likely to produce a substantial increase in customer service.

Customer Service Defined

Customer service is defined as an ITD process or action likely to result in a significantly higher public satisfaction rating on subsequent surveys.

Most textbooks or professional articles on customer service state to some degree or another that the customer is the definer of good service. Metrics that are not based upon customer preferences are less likely to directly improve perceived customer service.^(12, 13, 14, 15, 16)

The ITD customer survey appropriately focused upon a wide range of transportation issues, even ones that are not directly the responsibility of ITD. Transit services, the availability of other modes and even the direct operation of Division of Motor Vehicle offices are not the direct responsibility of ITD. ITD has some shared responsibility for these functions, and as a good public steward, it is interested in how it can improve the performance of these other functions that are important to the public.

Of the services directly under the responsibility of ITD, the highway network obviously is the most important.

When asked in 2009 what the ITD customers perceived as most important to them in terms of well maintained highways, 59 percent said road surfaces. Within this theme, over half of the respondents (55 percent) wanted roads free of potholes or cracks. Nearly a third (32 percent) of all responses to this question mentioned potholes and/or cracks in the road surface. The second most common primary theme was clear road markings, with 18 percent of all respondents mentioning markings. Within this theme, the two most common secondary themes dealt with lines (striping) or reflectors (70 percent within the theme) and visible signage (28 percent of responses within the theme). The third most common theme, drawing nine percent of the overall number of comments, mentioned road adequacy issues with the majority (81 percent) of those responses describing wide lanes and shoulders. The other primary themes, which comprised less than 15 percent of the overall responses, were winter maintenance, visibility, traffic flow, repairs and projects, pavement edge markings, safety, speed, and bridges. These results indicate that residents consider the surface of the road and the visibility of lane markings as the primary indicator of road quality.

Similarly, the Missouri DOT survey indicated that improved roadway surfaces had the strongest influence on improved satisfaction with MoDOT.

Recommendation 2: Understand the Ride Quality, Pothole Issue

ITD faces ambiguous results in regard to the important issue of customer satisfaction with the quality of its pavement surfaces. On the one hand, in response to the close-ended questions, 69.1 percent were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with overall highway maintenance and 74 percent were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with condition of the pavement. On the other hand, a reading of the responses to open-ended questions revealed more than 400 comments regarding needed improvement to roadway surface conditions. As noted, the words "pothole,"

"fix the potholes," "fill the potholes," "too many potholes" were common throughout the responses to open-ended questions.

ITD's submittals to the federal Highway Performance Monitoring System include data that indicates that ride quality as measured through the International Roughness Index is good, and above national averages, particularly on major routes. However, for rural routes in the Present Serviceability Rating category, Idaho's pavement surfaces appear to be lower than national averages. The Idaho 2010 pavement report indicates that ITD is making significant progress toward achieving its pavement targets. However, some targets such as those for rutting appear to be lower than are other states'.

Figure 31 illustrates that based on reported ITD targets, 63 percent of pavement lane miles are "good," 21 percent "fair", and 14 percent "poor" and 2 percent "very poor." However, the rutting threshold for "fair" allows up to a half inch of rutting on Interstates and up to 0.99 inches on collectors to be considered "fair." The author consulted with three national pavement experts, one in academia, one at the Federal Highway Administration and one from the private sector who has conducted pavement research among the states for the National Cooperative Highway Research Program. All three said the ITD rutting threshold of .99 inches to be considered "fair" on the collectors is more lenient than other states'. Similar comparisons to cracking and potholes are not possible because of differences between states in definitions. Likewise, comparison between the International Roughness Index ratings also are likely to be questionable because of national research that shows states collect the data differently. Some measure deficiencies in one wheel track, some in two tracks, some count bridge deck roughness in the calculations and others don't. When Ohio compared its IRI measurements to other states it found more than 20 percent variance in how the data were reported.

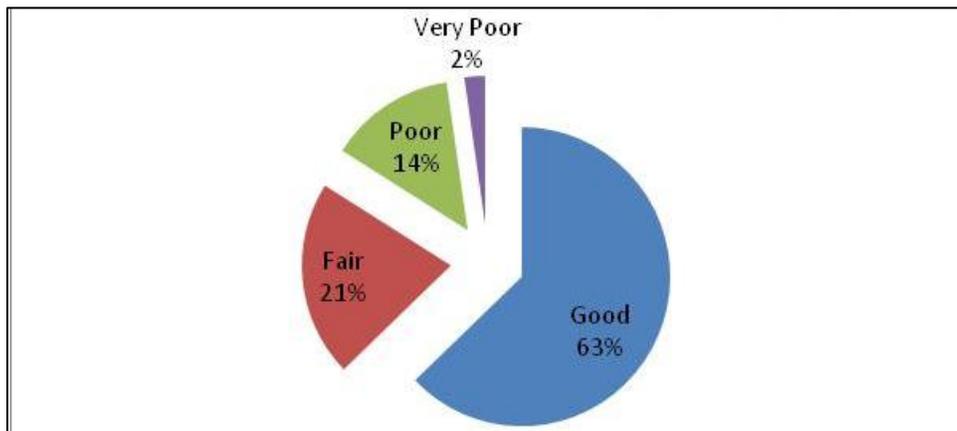


Figure 31. ITD Pavement Conditions

Use Customer Input and the New Pavement Management Tools

The second recommendation is to use ITD's pavement management module within its Transportation Asset Management System (TAMS) and other tools at its disposal to definitively answer the question of whether its pavement condition targets meet the level of service desired

by Idaho motorists. First, ITD must determine what level of service its customers expect without inordinate expenditures. Other states have accomplished this through both qualitative, subjective measures of customer preference combined with objective, engineering measurements. Minnesota and other states set their ride-quality targets through consultation with focus groups of citizens who are asked to ride over representative samples of highways and to state whether they provide an acceptable ride. These types of surveys appear to indicate that drivers are willing to accept a certain degree of roughness. Those sections deemed acceptable to the motorists are then measured through profiler vans and other technical means to measure the degree of smoothness acceptable to the focus group. The department's pavement targets are then set based upon clear customer preference. All routes are then measured and compared against the customer-based standards to determine the degree to which the department is providing an acceptable pavement surface. As a result, Minnesota, North Carolina and other states set their pavement level of service through a balanced combination of engineering standards and public preference.

The department also can answer an important question as to whether it is or is not providing an adequate pavement level of service against its peer states. The question of how one state compares to another currently is subject to debate because each state measures its own conditions, with variability of methodology between states. Idaho can use its profiler van to drive a representative sample of routes in states it considers to be comparable peer states and use the results to determine how its road surfaces compare to its peers. Rather than debating anecdote and the variability of data, ITD could measure objectively its performance against a representative sample of its peers. When Ohio did this, it found that it was substantially overstating its pavement ride quality in comparison to peer states. The discovery led to a recalibration of its pavement data, renewed discussion of the appropriate targets and greater urgency to address ride quality.

ITD could gain further insight into how to compare its pavement profiling data to other states by participating in the Road Profiler Users' Group (RPUG). It meets regularly with assistance from the Federal Highway Administration to improve the standardization of road profile measurement between states. With such information, ITD can conduct a more informed discussion with its Board, its Legislature, with its districts and with the public as to whether the important issue of ride quality on Idaho highways is being measured in a way that is comparable to other states' methods

The surface conditions are not only a matter of comfort. Rutted pavement holds water which increases stopping distance and contributes to hydroplaning. These factors are contributory to crashes and to overall highway safety.

This first step in this recommendation is for ITD to "dig into" its pavement condition survey results and to determine whether the comments about potholes and road surfaces are anecdote or fact. It is likely that both are the case. An in-depth review of pavement is likely to show that major routes such as Interstates are in good condition but that other rural routes are not. Such information will allow ITD to demonstrate that it is placing customer satisfaction as a high priority in regards to its most basic function of providing sound pavement surfaces.

This recommendation is placed in the Low Cost category because it is assumed the analysis of pavement conditions would be conducted in-house using the department's existing pavement measurement tools, and its staff expertise. This recommendation does not include actually increasing pavement expenditures. Instead, it recommends to measure first, understand the magnitude of the pavement-surface issue and then to base corrective actions - if any - upon sound engineering, economic and asset management considerations.

Recommendation 3: Investigate the Pavement Marking Comments

As noted in the 2009 survey, pavement markings were the second most important item by Idaho residents in terms of defining acceptable highway conditions. In the close-ended questions, 28 percent said they were "very" satisfied with pavement markings and approximately 50 percent said they were "satisfied." However, the open-ended questions revealed more than 149 comments about the need for improved pavement markings, out of 963 comments.

In keeping with a direct focus on customer satisfaction, the third recommendation is to investigate more fully whether pavement markings are visible and adequately reflective for conditions of poor lighting, rain or fog. Idaho allows studded snow tires and it uses sand and grit during winter maintenance operations. The studded tires and the abrasive materials degrade pavement markings. The ITD could take similar steps to those in the second recommendation to more fully understand how its public actually perceives the quality of its pavement markings. Peer reviews with other states likewise would be useful to separate fact from anecdote regarding pavement markings.

This recommendation also is included in the low-cost, high-return category. First, measuring the pavement markings and consulting with the public as to their adequacy should not be overly expensive, and will clearly demonstrate that ITD wants to serve important customer needs. If increased investment in pavement markings is found to be warranted, it is a much lower cost item than improving statewide paving efforts.

Recommendation 4: Increase Awareness of DMV Online Services

Every driver must interact with the Division of Motor Vehicles or its partners for drivers licensing and vehicle titling and registration services. In the modern era, the use of online and electronic services is viewed as a hallmark of customer convenience. Yet, in Idaho, as in other states, the public lacks widespread awareness or use of online registration and titling services. Greater use of them is not only more convenient to the public but also economical for the state. Likewise, it can allow 24 hour access to some services, as opposed to the availability of services only during working hours.

As noted in the University of Idaho survey in 2011 only 14 percent of respondents to the survey had used online vehicle registration renewals, up one percent from the 2009 study. The University of Idaho and ITD recognize the increased use of online registration to be a potentially high-payoff customer service performance area.

Although advertising is not a low-cost item, the ITD can partner with the county assessors to further expand the awareness of the online registration. It can be promoted through earned coverage in the news media, through websites, through social media and through public

service announcements. Increases in the use of the online services represent a win for both the customers and the taxpayers.

Recommendation 5: Low-Cost Means for Public Involvement

The grades ITD received for public involvement efforts were somewhat lower than other categories. Fourteen percent of respondents rated ITD's efforts to involve the public as an "A," 35 percent awarded ITD a "B" and 28 percent awarded the grade of "C." Eleven percent of respondents awarded a grade of "D" or "F".

These are not dramatically low ratings and they are reflective of the often controversial nature of highway project development. Nonetheless, ITD is committed to improving its performance in key areas, including public involvement, or else it would not be surveying the public regarding the topic.

Low cost means to increase public involvement and demonstrate a sincere desire to receive public input during the project-development project can include strategies to "get to the people where they live." Some of these have been cited in national studies such as those published by the FHWA, AASHTO and the National Cooperative Highway Research Program. FHWA's Transportation Planning Capacity Building includes a new handbook on public involvement that addresses an array of strategies.

Among the most visible and low cost strategies that can be quickly adopted by ITD to make public involvement convenient for citizens include the following:

- Holding multi-day open houses in storefronts, shopping malls and other high-traffic areas in the vicinity of projects that are under consideration. Instead of a formal public meeting, these "drop in" centers allow residents to talk one-on-one with ITD representatives and consultants. The sessions also demonstrate a sincere intent by ITD to reach out to the citizens in their neighborhood and to solicit their opinions.
- Similar open-house forums can be held at county fairs, festivals and other highly visible gatherings. Staffing booths at these events places ITD in the community and allows for formal and information exchange of ideas. These events often also generate news coverage, or "earned media" that expands public awareness of ITD's outreach efforts;
- A high-profile ITD public involvement van or vehicle also can travel to public locations and quickly set up a public-involvement location. Posters, a portable table to receive comments, map displays, project brochures and the ability to fill out surveys on project alternatives can be accommodated.
- High-profile kick offs of these types of activities, particularly in smaller media markets, often attract media coverage. The coverage serves to draw attention to ITD's public involvement efforts and it tends to increase the degree of public involvement.
- Increased use of social media can be effective for the still-relatively small segment of the population that regularly uses Twitter or Facebook for current affairs. These media are relatively inexpensive, and increasingly will become popular as the tech-savvy younger generation matures. As with the other

strategies listed above, these tools can generate a disproportionate amount of media coverage which magnifies their benefits.

These recommendations are by no means exhaustive but they are inexpensive, produce a high return on investment and can be deployed relatively quickly with existing ITD resources. All have high value in terms of demonstrating a high degree of ITD commitment to increasing public involvement.

High Cost, High Return Options

The following two issues are in the High Cost, High Return category. It would be irresponsible to recommend substantially increased public expenditures without first conducting a thorough analysis of the costs and benefits. Such an analysis is not possible in this brief study and no formal recommendation to increase expenditures is made here. However, based on the survey results, it would appear that increased investment in pavements and increased investment in bicycle and pedestrian facilities would address key areas of customer satisfaction.

Increasing Pavement Investment

It already has been noted that customers rated pavement surfaces and pavement markings to be their number one and number two highway maintenance priorities. Likewise, the Legislative Audit of 2009 documented ITD's desire to improve its pavement management systems and to improve its pavement conditions. Therefore, increased investment in pavement correlates well with an area of high public concern and of documented deficiency by the ITD itself. To the extent possible, increased investments in pavement ride quality, smoothness and increased longevity would be an obvious source of customer satisfaction.

Expanding Bicycle and Pedestrian Opportunities

The desire for increased availability of non-highway modes was documented in the survey. At the same time, the most commonly used non-highway modes of travel were bicycling at 22.6 percent and walking at 34.9 percent. When respondents were asked about the importance of safe walking or bicycle routes, 87 percent felt they were either "very important" or "important," compared to seven percent who felt they were "unimportant" or "very unimportant."

Even though just half the population currently uses alternative transportation, far more think it is important to have transportation options. Sixty-one percent of respondents thought it is either "very important" or "important" to have access to public transportation, such as buses, Rideshare, or Van Pool in their community, and only 20 percent felt it was either "unimportant" or "very unimportant." However, only 7.9 percent reported using transit, although they said they would use it more if it was more frequent. In other words, 57.6 percent walk or bike while less than 8 percent use transit.

In examining the percentage of users and their intensity of preference, it would appear that increased emphasis on safe bicycling and pedestrian facilities would be well received by the

public. The public's strong endorsement of these facilities may be in based in part on the erroneous assumption that their expansion is relatively inexpensive. Often this is not the case. To expand bicycle or pedestrian facilities can require the widening of bridges, the relocation of utilities, acquisition of easements and often a degree of public controversy. Nonetheless, a serious examination of the possible expansion of pedestrian and bicycle facilities appears to be warranted based solely on the expressed customer sentiments.

Low Cost, Low Return Strategies

The following one strategy stands out as being low cost but also addresses a relatively narrow issue.

DMV Courteousness

Ratings for the courteousness of DMV personnel were quite high. Overall, 93.1 percent of respondents described the DMV staff as "very courteous" or "somewhat courteous." However, the high scores were not uniform and some counties were noticeably below average. Addressing the courteousness of those particular counties likely would be important to residents of these areas. However, raising the scores of those few counties will have only a slight effect upon the already high public satisfaction ratings with the courteousness of DMV personnel. Therefore, this issue is of relatively low cost but will have relatively low impact on statewide public satisfaction ratings.

High Cost, Low Return Options

One obvious issue stands out as being both high cost and relative low return in terms of statewide public satisfaction.

Significant Expansion of Transit Services

As noted, the stated desire for public transit services was high with 61 percent stating increased transit services is important to them. However, in the low density state of Idaho only 7.9 percent reported using transit and a much smaller percentage relies on it for regular commutes. A substantial expansion of transit services to make a noticeable gain in statewide satisfaction of transit availability would be very expensive. The degree of frequency would probably need to increase substantially to result in a dramatic shift in transit usage, as a percent of all trips. Therefore, although the stated preference for transit is high, the cost to substantially expand it is also.

One notable exception is cited here, although it was not addressed in the survey. On-demand services for the elderly or disabled are a class unto themselves in terms of importance and widespread use among the targeted population. Clear distinction needs to be made that transit services for the elderly or disabled need to be considered separately from general transit services. They may be among the important trips on a per-person basis that ITD helps provide.

Section 3. ITD Customer Service Efforts

Summary

Section 3 reviews the ITD management efforts to assess customer service. This review is based upon an analysis of the Department's customer service documents, its customer-input efforts, interviews with key staff and a review of audits and other documents.

Implicit and Explicit Customer Service Efforts

A narrow interpretation of customer services efforts would consider only those efforts conducted in response to a direct and specific customer complaint. For instance, a member of the public calls to complain about a pothole and the department hurries to the location and fills the pothole. To some extent in a highway agency, such responsiveness would be considered positive. The agency responds directly to a complaint, which could be considered an explicit customer service activity.

However, if the highway agency takes steps to prevent potholes from ever occurring it also is responding to customer service issues. In fact, the prevention of potholes from ever occurring would be a higher form of customer service than merely responding reactively to those that occur. The wide range of ITD activities that keep the highway system in good condition can be considered in the category of implicit customer service activities. In fact, the behind-the-scenes engineering and maintenance activities that keep the highway network sound are the most pronounced and extensive forms of customer service. The key is to have the public recognize them as such.

This study involved a review of many relevant documents including the 2009 and 2011 legislative audit reports, ITD's strategic planning documents, Director Ness' many webcasts to the agency and public, a review of management system reports, accountability reports, a customer service plan, a draft customer service training document, annual reports and the department's accountability website.

In addition five interviews were conducted as was a meeting with the ITD's Customer Service Council.

In the following discussion, the major areas of customer service are briefly examined and reviewed. General recommendations are made in this section with more specific recommendations occurring in Section Four.

Asset Management as a Form of Customer Service

Among the largest changes at ITD in recent years has been the legislative approval to update the agency's major management systems including a pavement, maintenance, equipment and project-management system. It is a strong recommendation of this report that the asset management, equipment management and project-management systems not be viewed as separate from the customer service efforts. Instead, they should form the heart of it.

These systems can provide information and analysis tools staff can use to improve key areas of customer concern including pavement conditions, maintenance conditions, snow and ice performance, reliable project delivery and they can substantially improve the long-term effectiveness of dollars invested in infrastructure. For instance, to manage a pavement most economically over its lifecycle, the pavement requires different types of treatments that include preventive, reactive, rehabilitative and often replacement depending upon its condition. A pavement management system can produce sophisticated scenarios of when pavements should be treated and with what type of treatment to provide the smoothest ride and most economical performance. The pavement management systems also can "scale up" such analyses to the entire network of pavements. These types of scenarios can provide multiple benefits. They can improve pavement conditions, they can save ITD money and they can demonstrate to the public that ITD is using sophisticated, state-of-the-art management systems to best serve the public. Likewise, maintenance management systems, such as that acquired by ITD, can produce scenarios of how to maximize the condition of maintenance items, such as guardrail, while also maximizing the efficient use of staff, equipment and materials.

Interviews with the ITD leadership indicate strong support for the use of these systems and a clear desire to integrate them into the decision-making process. It is recommended that ITD publicize the results of its management system analysis and demonstrate that it is using these state-of-the-art systems to satisfy public demands for both sound highway conditions and economical ITD operations.

Legislative Outreach

ITD is well aware of the disproportionate importance of legislative relationships. In a representative democracy, legislators act like filters for receiving and distilling a large amount of public comment regarding highway services. Conversely, legislators can serve as magnifiers of ITD's message when that message is well received by them. Interviews with ITD staff indicate they are conducting the normal and recommended strategies of providing prompt responses to inquiries, being constantly available and meeting with the legislators annually in district settings. A recommendation of this report is to continue those activities and to use the district meetings in particular as forums for displaying the department's customer-service activities in their region. As mentioned in the asset management section, providing legislators with common messages about how their districts are affected by ITD's infrastructure-improvement efforts can be an effective form of customer outreach.

Performance Measurement

ITD has substantially expanded its publication of performance metrics in the past two years. This is good and should be viewed as another means of communicating to the public that the agency is focused and effective. As with asset management, it is a recommendation of this report that performance measurement be viewed as complementary and a part of the customer service package. Through the publication and widespread focus upon performance measures the department can demonstrate a focus upon the issues most important to the customer.

In Section Two it is recommended to investigate fully whether the department's pavement conditions and pavement markings are satisfying customer expectations. As those issues are reviewed, it is likely that diverse conditions will be found across Idaho. Pavements and pavement markings in some areas will be sound, and others will be consistently be subpar. To effectively complement customer service, the performance measurements should be tailored to serve as catalysts to drive increased performance in the key areas such as pavement conditions and pavement markings. By demonstrating that the performance measures are tied directly to expressed concerns of the public, the performance measurement process can be seen as a clear expression of the department's commitment to customer service. State routes with poor pavement conditions or pavement performance can be focused upon, the pace of improvement can be tracked and that improvement can be communicated to the public, the legislators and the media.

Customer Surveys and Customer Input

The 2009 and 2011 customer surveys represent valid and commendable efforts to understand public sentiment and to respond to it. A clear recommendation is to continue them.

An important observation is that the biennial surveys can be greatly augmented with more specific surveys and focus groups to "peel the onion" on key areas, such as the pavement smoothness. Additionally, more focused surveys and focus groups can provide substantial insight into ambiguous findings. They also can provide more granular understanding of how customers feel by district or by specific topics.

A possible weakness seen in nearly all the surveys related to the generalized nature of some questions, such as general satisfaction with highways. From a public standpoint, the characteristics that comprise a "good" highway can be quite broad. The fact that nationally between 66 and 75 percent of all respondents say their highways are good or better contradicts other known facts such as the diminished remaining surface life of pavements, or the declining structural conditions of aging bridges or the comments regarding potholes. A possible improvement upon the survey process is to conduct additional, more specific surveys delving into key questions of basic customer issues such as desired ride quality, pavement marking reflectivity or night-time visibility of signage.

It is recommended that ITD delve more fully into the responses that indicate dissatisfaction. Additional questions to understand the cause of the dissatisfaction can provide the focus for continuous-improvement campaigns that are directly focused upon the public's greatest concerns.

Direct Customer Involvement

Although only 12 percent of the respondents reported having contacted ITD in the past 12 months, those who did generally had positive experiences. A combined 79.1 percent rated the customer service they received either an "A" or a "B." Such a positive experience should be celebrated but it does indicate that nearly 20 percent of those who contacted ITD rated their experience a "C" or worse.

The promptness, politeness and responsiveness of front-line staff clearly is important. The ITD is urged to implement its plans for department-wide customer-service training and to complete its customer service manual.

Celebrate the DMV Results

Most customer improvement efforts focus upon addressing weak performance. However, the DMV performance appears to be quite high in comparison to some other states. Arizona DOT reported only a 57 percent satisfaction rate with the courteousness of DMV staff contacted by phone. That is a slightly different question but compares somewhat to the 93.1 percent of Idaho respondents who said DMV staff was courteous. Keeping the DMV service high is important. It would be worthwhile to inform the DMV staff of their ratings and to thank them for their efforts. Similarly, the low ratings in a few counties would stand out in comparison.

Creating a Customer Service Council

The ITD has created a Customer Service Council with representatives from all divisions and several district offices. Council members appear enthusiastic and committed. At this point, however, discussions with them revealed more activities to be completed, than have been implemented. Obviously, the Council should continue and its efforts should advance.

Section 4. Recommendations to Improve Assessment of Customer Service

Summary

Section 2 includes five recommendations that flow directly from issues raised in the 2011 customer satisfaction survey. Section 3 describes many customer service activities under way at the Idaho Transportation Department. Section 4 closes this report with two major over-arching recommendations for assessing and improving customer service at the ITD. First, is to execute a comprehensive customer service strategy that serves as a unifying framework for the department's performance measurement system as is done at the Missouri DOT and by many leading private companies. Second, is for ITD to understand the components of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and to replicate them in-house. A CRM system captures customer complaints, tracks them to conclusion and tabulates the issues that underlie complaints in the first place. A CRM approach can feed directly into ITD's new maintenance management system, its customer service efforts and its performance measurement processes. Instead of capturing complaints informally, a CRM captures complaints in spreadsheets that allow for analysis of what types of complaints are received. From the spreadsheets, analysis can be conducted that allows for "continuous improvement" efforts that are fundamental to modern quality-improvement processes. Continuous improvement efforts are efforts that establish a baseline of performance and then seeks to steadily improvement upon it.

Develop an ITD Customer Service Strategy Flowing from the Strategic Plan

The ITD Strategic Plan is a brief document that articulates ITD's intention to improve performance and become more efficient by focusing on customers.

It is recommended that ITD expand on this by developing a formal Customer Service Policy that flows from the elements of the Strategic Plan. Although ITD is focusing on many aspects of customer service, it does not yet have an over-arching strategy for addressing customer service and integrating it as a primary consideration in all department activities. The department is concurrently pursuing many important initiatives that will improve customer service, but each appears to be occurring on near separate tracks. The department is deploying new management systems, developing corridor plans, conducting public surveys, adopting performance measures, reaching out to legislators and improving its communication with the public. It does not appear these activities are occurring under a recognized umbrella of improved customer service.

A customer service plan and framework could explain that these various activities all occur with a common goal - to improve customer service. A framework is a structure for supporting, defining or enclosing something. The word "framework" is commonly used in transportation circles, such as creating "asset management frameworks" or "performance management frameworks." By creating both a policy and an ITD customer service framework, ITD will be

articulating its policy objectives to better serve the public and also creating the mechanisms, or framework, for how it will achieve the customer-service policy. It is not enough to only adopt a customer service policy. To carry out the policy, the mechanisms, or framework, to do so must be in place. Presenting a comprehensive strategy and statement of principle can explain the comprehensive, inter-connected and customer-focused strategy that ties together the ITD's efforts.

As seen in Figure 32, the asset management systems are portrayed not as isolated technical systems but as important components that help the department manage the highway infrastructure to meet basic customer requirements of ride quality, safety, sign and marking legibility, bridge soundness and maintenance adequacy. The performance dashboard derives from the Asset Management Systems and other sources to inform the public and policy makers of whether the department is achieving performance targets. The customer surveys serve as periodic checkups of ITD's efforts to improve the customer experience. The Customer Relationship Management System provides continuous opportunity for the public to register complaints, receive answers to those complaints and to have their issues tracked for continuous improvement.

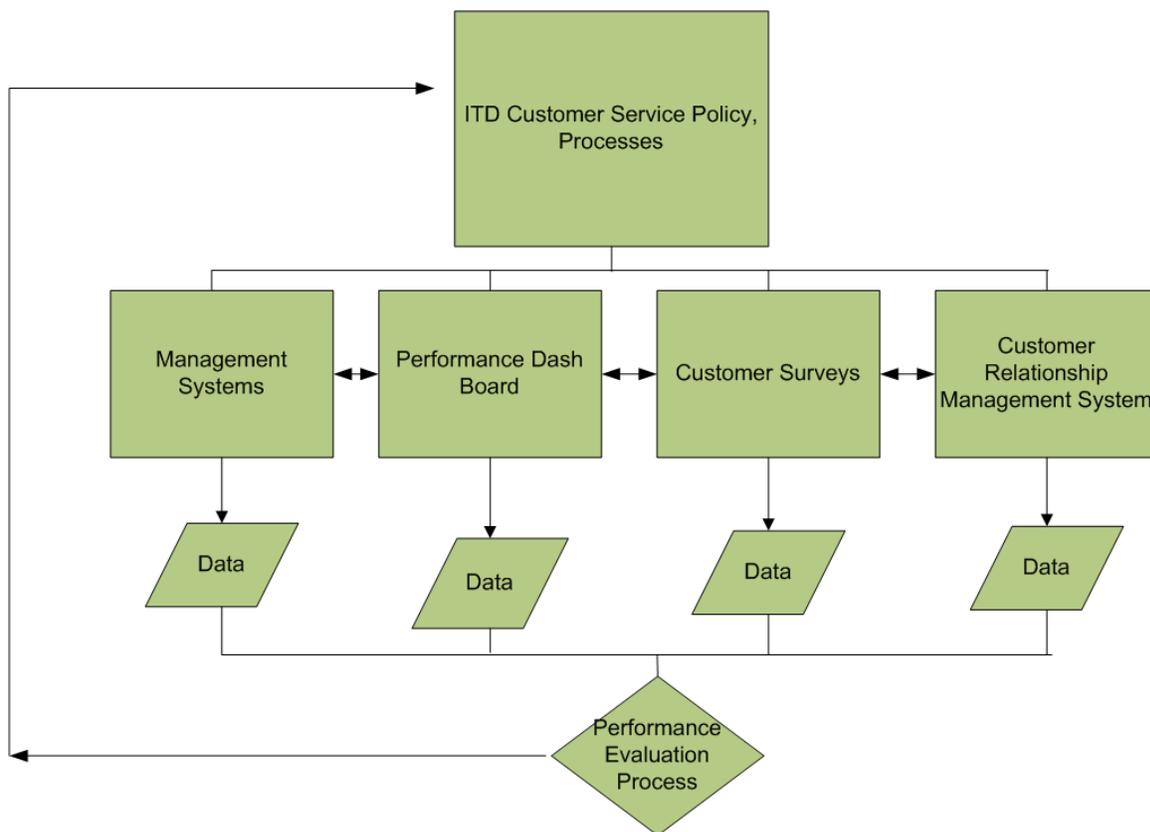


Figure 32. Asset Management Systems Can Directly Assist with Meeting Customer Needs

In an integrated approach, these systems would not work in isolation. If the customer surveys or CRM indicate problems with maintenance, roadway conditions or other infrastructure issues, the information would flow to the asset management managers for input into their decision making. Likewise, the performance dashboard would produce information that can be provided to the public or to customers who contact the department through the Customer Relationship Management System.

It appears from reading the ITD documents and interviewing the staff that this sort of overarching linkage and systematic approach is envisioned. However, the "connectedness" of the different aspects were not articulated in a fashion that directly links to improved customer service. It is recommended that ITD articulate this linkage.

Restating two graphics from Missouri illustrates an important point. Figure 33 addresses whether Missouri customers are satisfied and how has the satisfaction changed. Second, what makes them dissatisfied and how can the management processes be focused on reducing the root causes of the dissatisfaction is shown in Figure 34.

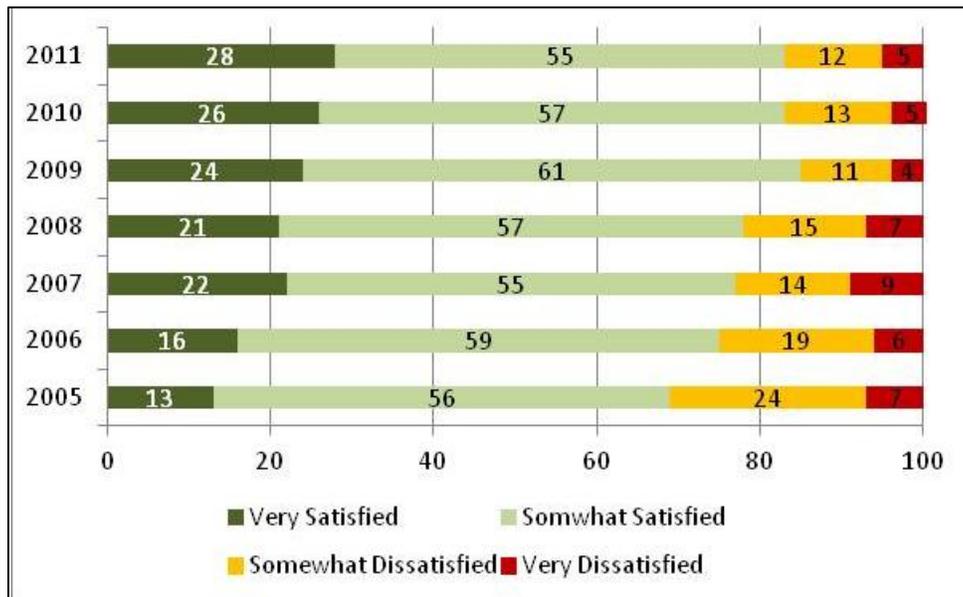


Figure 33. Degree of Satisfaction with MoDOT

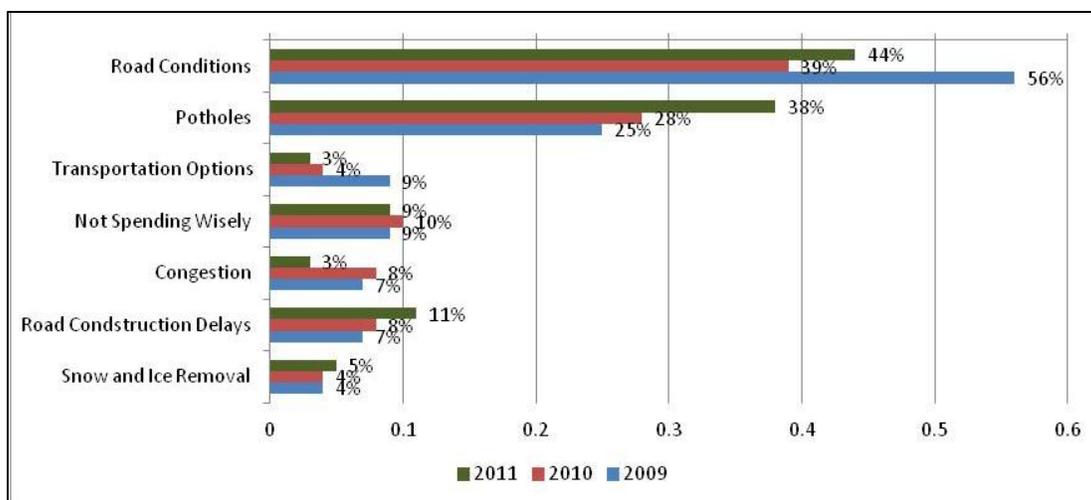


Figure 34. The Factors that Lead to Dissatisfaction with MoDOT

The two figures illustrate that poor surface conditions causes the greatest dissatisfaction among those surveyed by MoDOT. As its pavement conditions improved over the years, its satisfaction ratings rose commensurately. These illustrate that MoDOT measured what mattered to the public, improved it and received steady improvement in customer-satisfaction ratings. Such customer-focused, continuous improvement lies at the heart of customer-service efforts.

Inherent in this framework is an ethos of continuous improvement and root cause analysis. What are ITD's performance targets? What makes the public satisfied? What prevents ITD from reaching its targets? What prevents the public from being increasingly satisfied with ITD performance? Those would be the fundamental questions addressed through the Customer Service Framework.

Develop a Customer Relationship Management Process

Fifty years ago, a management author named Charles E. Lindblom wrote a famous article that said governments have two ways to approach major problems. They can make minor, incremental changes over time and "muddle through" or they can take a rational, comprehensive approach to develop systematic solutions to fundamental problems. Lindblom concluded 50 years ago that the cost of comprehensive decision making was so great that government was compelled to generally "muddle through" its decision making.

Modern technology provides tools unknown to Lindblom that greatly increase government's ability to rationally, comprehensively and systematically approach problems. Modern pavement and bridge management systems are two examples. Customer Relationship Management systems (CRMs) are another.

CRMs capture customer complaints and customer preferences and quantify them so that an organization can continuously improve its service. In the private sector, a CRM may include not only a customer-complaint function but also an extensive customer-preference database. With that information, companies can "push" information to customers letting them know of new products, product enhancements, sales and other important information.

In the public sector, the CRM would be primarily a comprehensive way to capture public complaints and public comments, categorize them, respond to them and summarize them for "institutional learning." By tracking where pothole complaints come from, ITD could strategize on the underlying conditions that create them. Complaints about unreadable signs or non-reflective pavement markings can be located, summarized and fed into the Maintenance Management System to generate work orders. When completed, the customer can be contacted and informed that his or her complaint has been addressed.

Such customer-feedback systems are at the heart of "quality systems" such as the International Organization of Standards (ISO), the Six Sigma process or the Baldrige continuous improvement framework. Such systems have tracked the typical types of car breakdowns. With that information, automakers can continuously improve the performance of automotive components. In the software field, Microsoft tabulates its online questions and complaints to improve future versions of software. These systems can help identify clusters of similar complaints so that they can be analyzed for root causes to be corrected.

At ITD, a CRM system would be an enhanced customer-complaint tracking process. As described currently, complaints come in to a central location and then are distributed for response. Resolution of complaints are tracked but are not categorized or analyzed for continuous improvement.

CRMs can be purchased for many fields and can be customized for many purposes, even for a highway agency. However, they can be expensive and difficult to integrate into legacy information technology systems. It is beyond the scope of this limited report to recommend a specific CRM vendor or solution. Instead, this report recommends that ITD view its customer-complaint and customer-comments process through the lens of a CRM process. At a minimum, ITD should consider how to tabulate its comments from its website, complaints that come into districts and central office and the issues raised by legislators. By counting, categorizing and tracking comments and complaints, the department can apply a rational, systematic approach to interacting with its customers.

Admittedly, CRMs are not common in highway agencies. However, ITD has articulated a goal of being the best DOT in the country and of providing extraordinary customer service. By systematically tracking its complaints, its comments, categorizing them and addressing them it can replicate in the public sector some of the leading practices from the private sector.

Processes to track customer complaints and analyze customer comments appear to be a "missing link" in the suite of strategies that ITD is adopting for improved customer service. It is enhancing its asset management systems, it is conducting periodic surveys of the public, it emphasizes customer service but it is not systematically categorizing the feedback it receives from the public.

Final Comments

President Obama's approval rating stood at 43.6 percent on Sept. 8, 2011, according to the RealClearPolitics composite of national polls.⁽¹⁷⁾ Congressional approval stood at 11.7 percent, according to the same composite of polls in October of 2011.⁽¹⁸⁾ Only 29 percent of the public said the media gets its facts straight and only 26 percent said news organizations are careful in

their reporting, according to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.⁽¹⁹⁾ Only 19 percent of the public said it has a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in big business and confidence in organized religion stood at 48 percent, according to a Gallup poll in 2009.⁽²⁰⁾

In Idaho, 74 percent of respondents were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the condition of the pavement. Eighty-one percent were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with ITD's winter maintenance efforts. Seventy-seven percent said they were satisfied with the overall flow of traffic and 82 percent said they were either "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the overall safety of the state highway system. Eighty-nine percent of customers were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with DMV wait times and over 90 percent awarded grades of "A" or "B" to DMV services.

These contrasts are not intended to indicate ITD can be complacent. To the contrary, this report examines several areas where the public appears to express strong desire for better performance. However, the overall results of the survey conducted by the University of Idaho Social Sciences Research Unit indicate satisfaction with the Idaho Transportation Department and illustrate opportunities for even further improvement. If ITD conducts "benchmark" analysis of best customer-service practices from other highway agencies and if it adopts those that are pertinent to it, ITD can achieve even higher levels of service for Idaho citizens.

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