

CARRD Executive Summary: “High-Speed Rail Messaging Survey” commissioned by Ogilvy on behalf of the California High Speed Rail Authority

Background

In May 2010 a telephone survey was conducted with 1,206 Californians about their views of the state’s high-speed rail project. The survey was commissioned for the California High-Speed Rail Authority’s (CHSRA) by their communications and outreach firm, Ogilvy + Mather, at a cost of \$60,000. According to CHSRA, the survey was carried out as part of the project’s outreach efforts by two California research firms, Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates and Public Opinion Strategies.

The CHSRA’s press release¹ and interviews with the media shared a few statistics from the survey. CARRD received the raw data of the survey through a Public Records Request and has produced this report to fully understand the scope of the survey and the types of questions answered. CARRD’s calls and emails to the firm that performed the survey were not returned.

Executive Summary

The California High Speed Rail Authority’s survey not only determined support for the project, but also evaluated how various messages succeeded in swaying a person’s opinion on the project (hence the title of the study itself: “High Speed Rail Messaging Survey”).

It is important to know that the survey employed a split-message format, and thus some of the percentages reported are NOT based on the full sample size. For more information see section called “Sample Size”. *Results for the full sample have a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.5%, however margins of sampling error for subgroups within the sample is higher.*

Here are some interesting statistics garnered from the survey that were NOT reported to the public:

- 21% of the total survey respondents rated the project as high priority.
- 38% of respondents who supported the project at the end of the survey rated it as a high priority.
- Only 8% who “support with concerns” rated it as a high priority.
- 15% of “consistent supporters” don’t know about plans to build HSR.
- 28% have not seen or heard anything about a plan to build HSR.
- The Bay Area is most informed; the Los Angeles Area is least informed.

People who live *outside* of counties in which the project will pass through are somewhat *better* informed than those who live within the HST counties. However, those surveyed who live within outnumber those who live further away by nearly 3 to 1.

¹ CHSRA Press Release. “SURVEY FINDS STRONG SUPPORT FOR HIGH-SPEED RAIL. Findings Bolster Effort to Attract Federal and Private Investment”. <http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/news/Survey-Finds-Strong-Support-for-High-Speed-Rail.pdf>

Support for the project was measured by three choices:

- 1) I support the project and would like it to move forward as quickly as possible.
- 2) I would like to see the train built, but have some concerns about the timing and cost of the project.
- 3) I oppose the project, and would prefer that the train not be built.

Note: People who were generally supportive of the concept of HSR, but opposed to the project in its current form (build it right or not at all) were difficult to track from the choices offered.

Building HSR in order to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and reduce reliance on freeways and cars resonated with 69%. The costs cited in the survey compared travel by HST to air travel and to single occupancy automobile travel. Fuel efficiencies were based on current car and airplane measures.

The survey also measured which groups or organizations were considered to be most believable: HSR engineers, CA small businesses and CA university transportation economists* were considered very believable while Labor Unions, the California High Speed Rail Authority and the Authority board members were rated as least believable.

**Note: CA University transportation economists were likely included in the survey given that experts from UC Berkeley and UC Irvine, under orders from legislators, recently peer reviewed the ridership model for the project.*

Conclusion

The “Messaging Survey” measured which messages are most effective in building people’s support of the project and which messengers are most believable. In their press release, the CHSRA shared limited information about the level of support Californians have for the project. By reviewing the rest of the data, it’s clear there is more to be learned from this survey.

CARRD encourages public engagement on this project in order to build the best project possible. Unfortunately, the limited release of the survey results (paid for by CA tax payers for a public project) could actually exacerbate the Authority’s believability problem. Cherry picking survey results does not engender trust and misses the opportunity to learn what the concerns are and what can be improved.

For more detailed information, please read our “CARRD Survey Analysis” at:

<http://www.calhsr.com/carrd-analysis-messaging-survey/>. This report was compiled by Rita Wespi, Co-founder of CARRD. Rita can be reached at: rwespi@carrdnet.org or 650-269-1781.

About Us:

Californians Advocating Responsible Rail Design (CARRD) is a grassroots, volunteer group that has been following the California High Speed Rail project. We value transparency, accountability and oversight and believe local communities should be partners in designing transportation projects. We encourage civic engagement on this project, provide in-depth and relevant information to the public, and demand an open process that allows for meaningful and constructive input. For more information, please visit: <http://www.calhsr.com>.