

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND OWNERSHIP

All of the analyses, findings, data, and recommendations contained within this report are the exclusive property of the South Western Regional Planning Agency, with offices located in Stamford, Connecticut.

As required by the Code of Ethics of the National Council on Public Polls and the United States Privacy Act of 1974, The Center for Research & Public Policy maintains the anonymity of respondents to surveys the firm conducts. No information will be released that might, in any way, reveal the identity of the focus group participant.

Moreover, no information regarding these findings will be released without the express written consent of an authorized representative of the South Western Regional Planning Agency.

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INTRODUCTION

The Center for Research & Public Policy (CRPP) is pleased to present the results to a series of focus groups used to further develop the South Western Regional Planning Agency congestion mitigation study.

The study was comprised of eight focus groups as follows:

- Two groups among CEO's, Directors of Human Resources, and Owners of medium to large firms.
- Two groups among Logistics Managers.
- One group among Metro-North riders.
- One group among commuters to destinations in New York and New Jersey, other than New York City.
- One group among commuters who use routes 7, 25, 34, and 8.
- One group among I-95 commuters

Participants attended focus group sessions in Stamford and Trumbull, and were recruited throughout the study area.

This report summarizes information collected from the focus groups conducted January 29-30, 2002. All focus groups were conducted during this time.

The focus groups included the following for investigation:

- Discover participant's perceptions of highway congestion and safety;
- Determine impacts for congestion on quality of life and standards of living;
- Collect comments on commute and housing relationships;
- Find recall on awareness of regional planning efforts;
- Determine current customers satisfaction levels;
- Test for concern over the environment related to congestion;
- View Logistics Managers' roles, planning and perceptions of congestion;
- Determine, among business leaders, willingness to help reduce congestion;
- Collect perceptions of conceptual traffic congestion mitigation strategies;
- Determine preferred vehicles for receiving communication.

Following this Introduction, Section II - contains and explains the Methodologies employed in completing this Congestion Mitigation study.

Section III – contains Highlights made after an analysis of the findings.

Section IV – is the Appendix containing copies of the focus group guidebooks utilized, and transcripts.

METHODOLOGY

The Center for Research and Public Policy conducted a series of eight focus groups for the South West Regional Planning Agency. The focus groups were held in Stamford and Trumbull, Connecticut.

The Center for Research and Public Policy (CRPP) organized the series of focus group sessions on January 15, 16, 17 and 18, 2002 from our office headquarters in Trumbull, Connecticut.

CRPP staff had 15 – 17 participants recruited for each group to ensure 8 – 12 participants actually attended. A screener was used to ensure proper representation for each group.

Refreshments were served during each group and an incentive fee was provided to each participant “as a small token of appreciation” for their time and participation.

All session times were the same for both the Stamford and Trumbull facilities. Session times were 7:30 a.m., 12:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m., and 7:30 p.m., for the first, second, third and fourth sessions. Stamford sessions took place on January 29th, 2002 and Trumbull sessions took place on January 30th, 2002. All session lasted approximately 90 minutes.

HIGHLIGHTS

On Perceptions...

- There is unanimous consensus among all focus group participants, in all eight sessions, that traffic congestion is a very serious problem. One participant noted: “And it’s earlier”. Respondents deal with congestion by leaving earlier, and planning on arriving home later.
- The large majority of participants considered today’s traffic much worse than five years ago, but not worse than one year ago.
- Most participants suggested, as a result of traffic congestion, that quality of life and standards of living in the area have suffered greatly. And, stress was mentioned frequently, including: “I think stress levels are raised quite a bit, dealing with people on the roads”.

“The Parkway just shuts down at 5:00 pm. Once you hit High Ridge Road, you’re dead; you’re stopped”

“What I noticed is worse in the last year is not so much the main thoroughfares, but the back roads”

- Again, nearly unanimous concerns over safety were voiced. One participant summarized group feelings as: “If you have traffic, you’re going to have more accidents.”

On Locational Issues...

- Residents are “commuting the distance”. They are keeping or holding onto jobs that provide higher pay regardless of the commute, with few exceptions.
- CEO participants also suggested that most residents have long commutes, and ones that are only getting longer. One CEO noted: “A lot of them accept the job and then they find out what the prices are – but we only lose maybe 10% or less that would not take the job. They just commute”.

“Well, they may want to locate here because they commute to New York, or they may be working in this particular area. But then they can’t afford the house prices. So they go to Trumbull or Stratford, or some place farther.”

- Another CEO supported this position, saying: “I find very few worry about where they’re going to live. They’re more concerned about getting a job if it’s a good job – they’re looking to get the job. Then they’ll worry about finding a house afterwards.”

“But it’s definitely a surprise because you warn them and you tell them how expensive it is to live in this area, then they start to look for houses, they have to move further out. We have people who commute to Darien from Hartford and Branford -- 1 ½ hours each way”

On Planning...

- There exists minimal awareness of any planning efforts to reduce traffic congestion on major highways.
- Planning efforts named by several participants were, for the most part, distant recollections, and included:

- ✚ Raising speed limits
- ✚ Lane expansion
- ✚ Closing exits
- ✚ Barriers from trailers
- ✚ Route 7
- ✚ High speed hydrofoils
- ✚ The Governor’s committee
- ✚ Toll booths
- ✚ Construction
- ✚ Transit incentives
- ✚ Double decker trains
- ✚ Carpool vans

“I’ve heard things, I don’t even know what they were. I would hear things on the news, in the newspaper...”

- Few participants could name successful improvements. However, many cited exits eight and nine in Stamford as successful.
- Participants heard about planning efforts from various sources, including: local papers, papers, representatives, The Chamber, The Post, The Advocate, Signs for Super 7, and a “visit by someone”.
- Participants were very cynical about the prospect for planning success.

“Yeah, it seems like the ideas are old and they’re incremental as opposed to doing something dramatic. It seems there needs to be a massive solution, not just incremental ones”

On Customer Service Satisfaction...

- Satisfaction with planning efforts and efforts to reduce traffic congestion is low. One group described their satisfaction simply as “none”.
- Satisfaction with the condition of Connecticut’s roads and highways, however, is moderate or good, according to most focus group participants.

“Well, it’s pretty low. It’s (planning) been going on for years and years. They want to widen, they’re not going to widen. They’re going to extend. They’re not going to extend. So it seems a plan is put in place and an environmentalist comes along and the plan shuts down”

On the Environment...

- Little concern was expressed by participants about the environment related to traffic congestion. One participant summarized group consensus as: “I don’t think people are really thinking about that, they should, but they’re not”.

“I mean, it’s (environment)an important subject, but you know, it’s more important to get home.”

- Approximately, half of all participants were willing to pay \$100.00 or more annually in taxes if credible sources suggested plans for reducing the impact of congestion on the environment would work.

On CEO Planning and Programming...

- By design, about half of CEO’s participating in the focus groups had formal or informal employee programs in place for commuters. Few had programs beyond flex time, telecommuting, car pool programs or vans.
- Telecommuting and flextime appears to work successfully for the sponsoring firms. However, car and van pooling seems to meet with mixed results.
- Executives representing firms without programs in place suggested the reasons were: “It’s against the nature of our business”, “It’s too difficult”, “We tried car pooling and matching employees, but it really didn’t work out”.
- All executives without current programs expressed a willingness to “do more”.
- Nearly all executives suggested a willingness to volunteer in a planning process that is “once and for all”. They are frustrated by historical planning efforts.

“A couple of years ago somebody from the state came around and there was one meeting, and that was it. Nothing ever came out of it”

- Executives will not expend funds in the effort to reduce congestion saying they've "given, given and responded to the State – now it's the State's turn".

"It's not a big deal any more. If people are late (because of traffic). It used to be a big deal, but not any more. It's accepted, and understood"

On Logistics Manager Planning...

- Logistics Managers do not think about their impact on traffic congestion.
- Further, time and money are foremost on the minds of Logistics professionals. One participant noted: "Basically, we just think of time and cost. How much extra time do we have in our daily schedules". Another added: "Nobody thinks of it that way. If it was illegal to ship at a certain time that is one thing, but it's legal to do business".

"Never thought of it. You bring your product in and your ultimate goal is to get it to the customer so you don't think: 'Well, gee, maybe we should go this way'"

- No plans, among two focus groups of participants, were reported to be in place to keep receiving and shipping trucks off the road during certain hours.
- Logistics managers do not talk internally with those organizing commuter programs – but they are all willing to do so.

"Personally, I don't consider congestion and it's not because I'm inconsiderate and don't care about the world. I just do my job and that's the way it is"

- Logistics managers do not talk externally to other Logistics managers -- but they are all willing to do so.
- No logistics manager reported any current plan in place to reduce traffic congestion. All, however, express a willingness to make some adjustments. They express some concern over associated costs of such adjustments.
- All Logistics professionals reported willingness to volunteer in a planning process and meet regionally with their peers

- Few alternatives to highway shipping were being used beyond air. However, the managers all reported a willingness to consider alternative modes.

“The only thing I would worry about (in using alternative shipping/receiving modes) is the more you move something from place to place, the more chance you take that something will go wrong with it”

On Conceptional Traffic Congestion Mitigation Efforts...

- All focus group participants were asked to listen to definitions, and then indicate how important twelve conceptional congestion mitigation efforts were to an overall plan.

Participants were told these twelve strategies were “early ideas”, and did not represent final strategies.

Participants were asked to indicate how important each was; using a scale of one to ten where one indicated “very important”, and ten meant the strategy was “not at all important”.

The following results present the cumulative totals for one through four, representing “very important”.

Strategies	Composite	Resident	CEO’s	Logistics Managers
Additional Lanes	92.8%	94.0%	84.2%	85.7%
Incident Management	85.5	84.0	84.2	85.7
Public transit improvements including express bus, rapid transit bus, and luxury / premium bus service	83.1	84.0	78.9	78.6
Goods / Truck movement Management	82.9	86.0	73.7	84.6
Improvements: park and ride lots, rail parking, bus by-pass ramps	72.6	66.0	84.2	71.4
Employee/Business Strategies – telecommuting, on-line shopping, carpooling, vanpooling, flexible hours	65.1	62.0	63.2	78.6
Rail/Light rail	63.9	62.0	78.9	50.0
HOV lanes	62.2	60.0	57.9	76.9
Land Use Changes (higher density development, creation of town or neighborhood centers, development of housing or businesses around rail and transit stations.)	56.1	54.0	61.1	57.1
Congestion pricing	50.6	50.0	47.4	57.1
Ferry transport	44.6	46.0	42.1	42.9
Bike/pedestrian facilities	25.6	26.0	21.1	30.8

APPENDIX

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January 2002 – Focus Group Guidebook

CEOs/Managers

INTRODUCTIONS
FOCUS GROUP INTRODUCTIONS
RULES
AUDIO/VIDEO TAPE
HOLD QUESTIONS

TOPIC INTRODUCTION – TRAFFIC MITIGATION

A. Perceptions - Highways

- A Serious problem? How serious?
- Congestion in relation to five years ago?
 - One year ago?
- Concern over safety?
- Affecting Quality of Life? How?
- Affecting Economies/Standard of Living?

B. Locational Issues

- Employer or Home first?
- Are people “commuting the distance”? (Define)
- Prioritize: Work, schools, home, recreation, quality of life, near cities, housing

C. Planning

- Recall any planning efforts – reduce traffic congestion on major highways?
- What have you heard?
- Where have you heard about planning efforts?
- Outlook? Success? Why/Why not?
- What should a plan look at?

D. Customer Service Satisfaction

- Satisfaction with planning efforts?
- Satisfaction with efforts to reduce traffic congestion?
- Satisfaction with condition of state roads/highways?
- Satisfaction with innovation of ideas to reduce congestion?
- Satisfaction with informing commuters?
- Satisfaction with having sufficient bicycle and pedestrian pathways?
- Satisfaction with making mass transit available?

E. Environment

- Concern over the environment related to traffic? Your concern? Others’ concern?
- Willingness (yours/others) to pay \$100.00? Why/Why not?
- Suggestions?

F. CEOs/Managers: Programming

- Do you have programs for employees such as flextime, telecommuting, car pool programs or vans?

- *Yes*
 - Please describe (Including company support, sponsorship, use, success, satisfaction, future plans).
 - Willingness to do more?
 - Why/Why not?
- *No*
 - Any other programs?
 - Have you tried any programs?
 - Why not? (How can state or region help you start programs?)
 - Willingness?
 - Why/Why not?

G. CEOs/Managers: Corporate Planning

- How much thought time, and planning time is given to employees commutes?
- How concerned is organization over long commutes due to congestion?
- Has congestion/travel time impeded employee recruitment/retention?
- Do employees have difficulty matching work and transit schedules?
- Does congestion result in employee tardiness or shifts in arrival/departure?
- Any innovative ideas implemented?
- Any innovative ideas not implemented?
- Current shipping and receiving?
 - Planning alternatives to trucking?
 - Perceptions?
- Any costs associated with implementing programs?
 - Concern over costs?
- Employee positions?
 - Do they approach you?
 - Express concerns?
- Willingness to create a corporate plan?
- Willingness to volunteer regionally for planning?

H. Closing

Survey on conceptual mitigation efforts.

- How should study recommendations be disseminated to the public?
- Finally, based on our discussion, your ideas on reducing traffic congestion?



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Shipping/Logistics Managers

INTRODUCTIONS
FOCUS GROUP INTRODUCTIONS
RULES
AUDIO/VIDEO TAPE
HOLD QUESTIONS

TOPIC INTRODUCTION – TRAFFIC MITIGATION

A. Perceptions - Highways

- A Serious problem? How serious?
- Congestion in relation to five years ago?
 - One year ago?
- Concern over safety?
- Affecting Quality of Life? How?
- Affecting Economies/Standard of Living?

B. Locational Issues

- Employer or Home first?
- Are people “commuting the distance”? (Define)
- Prioritize: Work, schools, home, recreation, quality of life, near cities, housing

C. Planning

- Recall any planning efforts – reduce traffic congestion on major highways?
- What have you heard?
- Where have you heard about planning efforts?
- Outlook? Success? Why/Why not?
- What should a plan look at?

D. Customer Service Satisfaction

- Satisfaction with planning efforts?
- Satisfaction with efforts to reduce traffic congestion?
- Satisfaction with condition of state roads/highways?
- Satisfaction with innovation of ideas to reduce congestion?
- Satisfaction with informing commuters?
- Satisfaction with having sufficient bicycle and pedestrian pathways?
- Satisfaction with making mass transit available?

E. Environment

- Concern over the environment related to traffic? Your concern? Others' concern?
- Willingness (yours/others) to pay \$100.00? Why/Why not?
- Suggestions?

F. Shipping/Logistics Managers: Planning

- How much thought is given to time allocated to reducing traffic congestion planning?

- Current shipping/receiving operation descriptions?
- Reliability of current goods movement.
- How concerned is company over shipping/receiving contributions to traffic congestion?
- Are logistics and employee commute programs linked?
- Does company have traffic / logistics plan in place?
- Current plans in place to reduce traffic?
 - Conceptual plans not in place?
 - Willing to shift hours of pick-up delivery?
- Costs associated with traffic/logistics plans?
 - Concern over costs?
- Non-highway modes used?
 - Available?
 - Willing to consider other modes available?
- Perceptions of non-highway modes?
 - Time, cost, convenience, suitability, public opinion?
 - Willingness to pay more to move goods (non-highway trucks)?
- Willingness to participate in further study efforts to improve mobility of goods through southwestern CT and adjacent regions?

G. Closing

Survey on conceptual mitigation efforts

- How should study recommendations be disseminated to the public?
- Finally, based on our discussion, your ideas on reducing traffic congestion?



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Commuters to NY/NJ

INTRODUCTIONS
FOCUS GROUP INTRODUCTIONS
RULES
AUDIO/VIDEO TAPE
HOLD QUESTIONS

TOPIC INTRODUCTION – TRAFFIC MITIGATION

A. Perceptions - Highways

- A Serious problem? How serious?
- Congestion in relation to five years ago?
 - One year ago?
- Concern over safety?
- Affecting Quality of Life? How?
- Affecting Economies/Standard of Living?

B. Locational Issues

- Employer or Home first?
- Are people “commuting the distance”? (Define)
- Prioritize: Work, schools, home, recreation, quality of life, near cities, housing

C. Planning

- Recall any planning efforts – reduce traffic congestion on major highways?
- What have you heard?
- Where have you heard about planning efforts?
- Outlook? Success? Why/Why not?
- What should a plan look at?

D. Customer Service Satisfaction

- Satisfaction with planning efforts?
- Satisfaction with efforts to reduce traffic congestion?
- Satisfaction with condition of state roads/highways?
- Satisfaction with innovation of ideas to reduce congestion?
- Satisfaction with informing commuters?
- Satisfaction with having sufficient bicycled and pedestrian pathways?
- Satisfaction with making mass transit available?

E. Environment

- Concern over the environment related to traffic? Your concern? Others’ concern?
- Willingness (yours/others) to pay \$100.00? Why/Why not?
- Suggestions?

F. Commuters to NY/NJ: Your Commute

- Your commute distance? One Way?

- Your commute time/one way?
- Why do you travel by car?
- Are you permitted to telecommute?
- Does employer sponsor commuter programs?
 - Which?
 - Why/Why not?

- Have you encouraged employee sponsored programs, such as vans, mass transit stops, flextime, telecommuting, and/or ridesharing?
- Have you tried ridesharing, vans, mass transit, flextime, and/or telecommuting?
 - Willingness to try?
 - Why/Why not?

- Do you have an alternative to driving yourself to work?
- Any traffic congestion issues related specifically to your use of roads into NY/NJ?

G. Closing

Survey on conceptual mitigation efforts.

- How should study recommendations be disseminated to the public?
- Finally, based on our discussion, your ideas on reducing traffic congestion?



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Riders Metro-North

INTRODUCTIONS
FOCUS GROUP INTRODUCTIONS
RULES
AUDIO/VIDEO TAPE
HOLD QUESTIONS

TOPIC INTRODUCTION – TRAFFIC MITIGATION

A. Perceptions - Highways

- A Serious problem? How serious?
- Congestion in relation to five years ago?
 - One year ago?
- Concern over safety?
- Affecting Quality of Life? How?
- Affecting Economies/Standard of Living?

B. Locational Issues

- Employer or Home first?
- Are people “commuting the distance”? (Define)
- Prioritize: Work, schools, home, recreation, quality of life, near cities, housing

C. Planning

- Recall any planning efforts – reduce traffic congestion on major highways?
- What have you heard?
- Where have you heard about planning efforts?
- Outlook? Success? Why/Why not?
- What should a plan look at?

D. Customer Service Satisfaction

- Satisfaction with planning efforts?
- Satisfaction with efforts to reduce traffic congestion?
- Satisfaction with condition of state roads/highways?
- Satisfaction with innovation of ideas to reduce congestion?
- Satisfaction with informing commuters?
- Satisfaction with having sufficient bicycled and pedestrian pathways?
- Satisfaction with making mass transit available?

E. Environment

- Concern over the environment related to traffic? Your concern? Others’ concern?
- Willingness (yours/others) to pay \$100.00? Why/Why not?
- Suggestions?

F. Metro-North

- Frequency of Use?
- Only for commute?

- Other uses?
- Discuss routine/daily trip?
- Report satisfaction?
 - Convenience
 - Cost
 - Parking
 - Logistics
 - Facilities
- Your alternative to Metro-North?
- Reasons for using Metro-North?
- Your initiative or employer?
- Employer sponsor commute programs?
 - Which
- Have you tried other employer programs?
 - Why not?

G. Closing

Survey on conceptual mitigation efforts.

- How should study recommendations be disseminated to the public?
- Finally, based on our discussion, your ideas on reducing traffic congestion?



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Commuters I-95

INTRODUCTIONS
FOCUS GROUP INTRODUCTIONS
RULES
AUDIO/VIDEO TAPE
HOLD QUESTIONS

TOPIC INTRODUCTION – TRAFFIC MITIGATION

A. Perceptions - Highways

- A Serious problem? How serious?
- Congestion in relation to five years ago?
 - One year ago?
- Concern over safety?
- Affecting Quality of Life? How?
- Affecting Economies/Standard of Living?

B. Locational Issues

- Employer or Home first?
- Are people “commuting the distance”? (Define)
- Prioritize: Work, schools, home, recreation, quality of life, near cities, housing

C. Planning

- Recall any planning efforts – reduce traffic congestion on major highways?
- What have you heard?
- Where have you heard about planning?
- Outlook? Success? Why/Why not?
- What should a plan look at?

D. Customer Service Satisfaction

- Satisfaction with planning efforts?
- Satisfaction with efforts to reduce traffic congestion?
- Satisfaction with condition of state roads/highways?
- Satisfaction with innovation of ideas to reduce congestion?
- Satisfaction with informing commuters?
- Satisfaction with having sufficient bicycled and pedestrian pathways?
- Satisfaction with making mass transit available?

E. Environment

- Concern over the environment related to traffic? Your concern? Others’ concern?
- Willingness (yours/others) to pay \$100.00? Why/Why not?
- Suggestions?

F. Commuters I-95: Your Commute

- Your commute distance? One Way?

- Your commute time/one way?
- Why do you travel by car?
- Are you permitted to telecommute?
- Does employer sponsor commuter programs?
 - Which?
 - Why/Why not?

- Have you encouraged employee sponsored programs such as vans, mass transit stops, flextime, telecommuting, and/or ridesharing?
- Have you tried ridesharing, vans, mass transit, flextime, and/or telecommuting?
 - Willingness to try?
 - Why/Why not?

- Do you have an alternative to driving yourself to work?
- Any traffic congestion issues related specifically to your use of I-95?

G. Closing

Survey on conceptional mitigation efforts.

- How should study recommendations be disseminated to the public?
- Finally, based on our discussion, your ideas on reducing traffic congestion?



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Commuters Routes 7, 8, 25, & 34

INTRODUCTIONS
FOCUS GROUP INTRODUCTIONS
RULES
AUDIO/VIDEO TAPE
HOLD QUESTIONS

TOPIC INTRODUCTION – TRAFFIC MITIGATION

A. Perceptions - Highways

- A Serious problem? How serious?
- Congestion in relation to five years ago?
 - One year ago?
- Concern over safety?
- Affecting Quality of Life? How?
- Affecting Economies/Standard of Living?

B. Locational Issues

- Employer or Home first?
- Are people “commuting the distance”? (Define)
- Prioritize: Work, schools, home, recreation, quality of life, near cities, housing

C. Planning

- Recall any planning efforts – reduce traffic congestion on major highways?
- What have you heard?
- Where have you heard about planning efforts?
- Outlook? Success? Why/Why not?
- What should a plan look at?

D. Customer Service Satisfaction

- Satisfaction with planning efforts?
- Satisfaction with efforts to reduce traffic congestion?
- Satisfaction with condition of state roads/highways?
- Satisfaction with innovation of ideas to reduce congestion?
- Satisfaction with informing commuters?
- Satisfaction with having sufficient bicycled and pedestrian pathways?
- Satisfaction with making mass transit available?

E. Environment

- Concern over the environment related to traffic? Your concern? Others’ concern?
- Willingness (yours/others) to pay \$100.00? Why/Why not?
- Suggestions?

F. Commuters Routes 7, 8, 25, & 34: Your Commute

- Your commute distance? One Way?
- Your commute time/one way?

- Why do you travel by car?
- Are you permitted to telecommute?
- Does employer sponsor commuter programs?
 - Which?
 - Why/Why not?
- Have you encouraged employee sponsored programs such as vans, mass transit stops, flextime, telecommuting, and/or ridesharing?
- Have you tried ridesharing, vans, mass transit, flextime, and/or telecommuting?
 - Willingness to try?
 - Why/Why not?
- Do you have an alternative to driving yourself to work?
- Any traffic congestion issues related specifically to your use of Routes 7, 8, 25, & 34?

G. Closing

Survey on conceptual mitigation efforts.

- How should study recommendations be disseminated to the public?
- Finally, based on our discussion, your ideas on reducing traffic congestion?