



The South Carolina
Department of Transportation
955 Park Street
P.O. Box 191
Columbia SC 29202-0191

 MOORE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
Division of Research
1705 College Street
Columbia SC 29208



Survey the Public to Assess Perception of the Performance of the South Carolina Department of Transportation

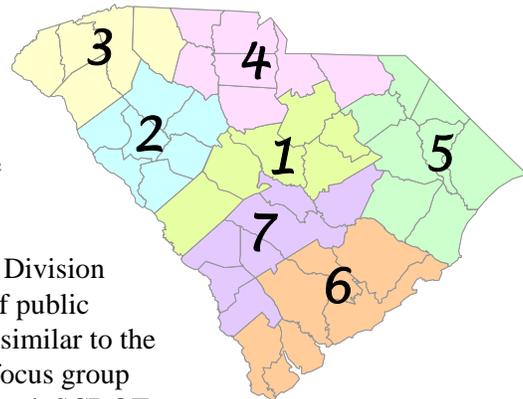
Executive Summary

A 2001 survey of South Carolina’s public (conducted by the University of South Carolina’s Moore School of Business) revealed that there was some confusion about the responsibilities of the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) and its mission, though there was general satisfaction with the agency and its services. The primary objective of the current project was to elicit public opinion about the effectiveness of and satisfaction with SCDOT and agency responsibilities in 2005. Two secondary objectives are (i) to determine how the public’s opinions and attitudes have changed since the 2001 survey and (ii) to elicit the public’s recommendations for improvements that SCDOT may execute.

The Division of Research of the Darla Moore School of Business (“Division”), University of South Carolina, conducted research to address these issues. This report summarizes the results of the research.

The research was conducted from Summer 2005 through mid-April 2006. Results for the state as a whole as well as for each of SCDOT’s seven service districts (see figure) were developed.

SCDOT Engineering Districts



To achieve objectives, the Division conducted a mail survey of public using a survey instrument similar to the 2001 survey. In addition, focus group discussions, were held in each SCDOT service district to elicit in-depth information, particularly recommended improvements. The mail survey instrument focused on the respondent’s understanding of SCDOT’s responsibilities and its funding sources, assessing the importance of SCDOT’s activities, assigning a grade to the activities, and demographic information about the respondent. Focus group interviews were held in each district in the first and second quarters of 2006.

SCDOT’s initial concerns about the public’s confusion over SCDOT’s responsibilities remain confirmed by these results. In particular, the 2005 study shows that the public is still confusing responsibilities of

SUMMARY REPORT

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SCDOT with responsibilities of the South Carolina Department of Public Safety and the South Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles. In addition, the general public erroneously believes that SCDOT receives its funding from many sources, most prominently vehicle registration and drivers' licenses fees. Nevertheless, SCDOT should be pleased that the confusion has declined somewhat since the baseline study in 2001. A particular area of improvement is that most respondents know that property taxes are not a source of tax revenue for SCDOT. Also, even though the percentage of people believing that drivers' licenses are SCDOT's responsibility has risen since 2001, the percentages have declined for the other activities that are not SCDOT's responsibility and were included in the survey.

For the public's assessments, SCDOT has realized slight improvements in both overall rating and comparative rating. In terms of the public's grade assignments, all but three grades were up from the 2003 grade assignments. The three grades exhibiting slight declines were for rest areas—satisfactory appearance, staffing, and cleanliness. Importance ratings are virtually identical to the 2003 ratings.

Combining grades and importance to yield an impact potential rating shows that "safe highway" activities have the highest impact potential. Specifically, SCDOT efforts to improve patching potholes, smoothing irregularities, repaving roadways, leveling drop-offs, widening roadways, and replacing bridges will be more satisfactory to the South Carolina public than the other kinds of activities that SCDOT could devote attention to.

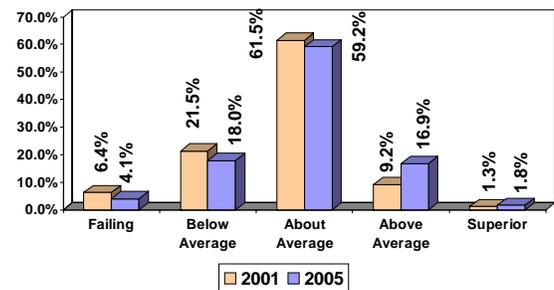
Focus group participants reinforce that "Safe roadways" are important. In all focus group discussions, the topic of potholes was a "hot" button that elicited many comments and heated discussion. Primarily, participants criticized the time it takes for potholes to be recognized as needing repair, the time it takes between recognizing the need and repairing the potholes, and the materials used in repairing potholes.

In terms of how to best spend its limited resources, the focus group discussions clearly state that making the highways safe is the first priority. This is reinforced by the potential impact assessment as many of the activities that could have high impact are activities that will make the highways safer.

There are statistical differences in responses among the seven service districts. However, these are fewer than were evident in the 2001 survey. Further, the concept that one district may receive more roadway attention than another is widespread (evidenced by the focus group discussions). If SCDOT attention is devoted to one district over another (to take advantage of the statistical differences among districts), this would likely fuel the feelings that there is not a "fair" distribution of resources throughout the state.

Overall, the results of the 2005 research provide many ways in which SCDOT can continue to serve the South Carolina public.

Overall Rating of S.C. Department of Transportation



Comparison Rating of SCDOT to Other States

