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Regional transportation survey highlights growing public support for diverse transportation options in Northwest Arkansas

SPRINGDALE, Ark. (Jan. 22, 2025) — The Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission has unveiled findings from its 2024 Regional Transportation Survey www.nwarpc.org/transportation/metropolitan-transportation-plan/, conducted by Ariel Strategic Communications. Conducted every five years, the survey is a vital tool for understanding public perspectives on the region's evolving transportation needs and priorities.

The results from surveys conducted in 2019 and 2024 reveal a growing public interest in diverse transportation options, with increased support for alternative modes like public transit, biking, and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. These insights come at a time when Northwest Arkansas faces both opportunities and challenges in managing rapid population growth and transportation demands.

Traffic growth and shifting sentiments

Northwest Arkansas residents remain acutely aware of traffic growth, with 88% of respondents reporting increased congestion between 2019 and 2024, down slightly from 94% in the previous survey. Despite this, satisfaction with car travel has improved, with more residents rating rush-hour congestion as manageable compared to similarly sized cities, according to the survey.

At the same time, satisfaction with non-auto travel, such as biking and walking, remains low, reflecting the need for targeted infrastructure investments to create safer, more connected options.

Increased support for transportation choices

The 2024 survey reveals a notable rise in public backing for alternatives to personal vehicle use.

Seventy-one percent of respondents consider funding for public transportation by local governments in Benton and Washington counties to be "very important," a 10% increase from 2019. Similarly, support for expanding public transit services in Benton and Washington counties has grown to 85%, up 7% from the previous survey.

These shifts are reflected in funding priorities, with respondents allocating slightly more to bus services and biking/walking infrastructure. Streets and highways remain a top priority but saw a decline in hypothetical funding allocations, from \$49 in 2019 to \$44 in 2024.

Persistent and emerging challenges

While satisfaction with certain aspects of the transportation system has improved, key challenges remain. Urban congestion in Bentonville, Rogers, Fayetteville, Springdale, and Lowell continues to be a major issue. Concerns about unsafe or disconnected pedestrian and biking infrastructure have grown significantly, with 58% of residents identifying gaps in sidewalks and trails as a pressing concern—a 17% increase since 2019.

Large truck traffic remained consistent as a top issue for respondents, while concerns about air quality increased compared to 2019. The survey underscores the need for solutions that address these long-standing and emerging challenges.

A vision for the future

As Northwest Arkansas enters an ambitious planning process leading to 2050, the findings of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Transportation Survey emphasize the importance of a balanced transportation strategy. Residents prioritize long-term goals such as relieving congestion, maintaining infrastructure, and reducing urban sprawl.

“The growing demand for improved public transit and safer biking and walking infrastructure sends a clear message: Our community is ready for change and expanded transportation choice,” said Tim Conklin, executive director of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission. “This sets the stage for our organization and regional partners as we chart a path toward 2050.”

Survey methodology

The 2024 survey, conducted in August, included responses from 420 randomly selected residents across Benton and Washington counties through a combination of mail surveys and online interviews. Combined with the 2019 survey, which included 834 respondents, the studies provide a dataset representing public sentiment on transportation priorities in the region.

For more details about the survey findings and their implications for regional planning, visit www.nwarpc.org/transportation/metropolitan-transportation-plan/.

About the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission

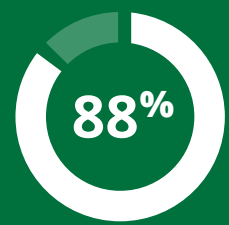
The Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission (NWARPC) is a governmental organization formed through a cooperative agreement in 1966. It has since grown to include 38 units of government and other public agency partners across Benton, Madison, and Washington counties in Arkansas, as well as a portion of McDonald County in Missouri. NWARPC serves as a forum for cooperative decision-making, develops federally mandated transportation plans, convenes stakeholders to address shared planning challenges, and provides information and staff resources to our member agencies and the public.

Designated the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in 1983, NWARPC oversees the 3C transportation planning process, ensuring comprehensive, cooperative, and continuous planning necessary for regions to qualify for federal transportation funding.



Traffic is Growing, and People Want More Transportation Choices

Traffic Congestion Still a Major Concern, but Less Than in Past

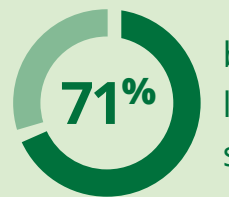


88% of respondents recognize increased traffic congestion between 2019 and 2024, compared to 94% in 2019 reporting an increase from the previous five years.

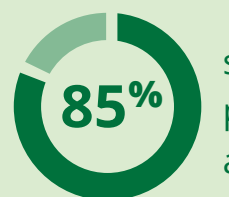


Public Transit Support on the Rise

Better routes, frequent service, and real-time updates are key to increasing usage.



71% believe it is "very important" for local governments* to fund and support public transportation



85% supported an expansion of public transportation in Benton and Washington counties



The Need for Transportation Choice

Public interest in alternatives like public transit, biking, and walking is growing. While maintaining and building new streets and highways remained the highest funding priority in 2024, bus services and bike/walking facilities received higher funding priority compared to previous years, reflecting stronger support for diverse transportation options.



Transportation Challenges

Residents want safer, more accessible infrastructure that addresses congestion issues and the lack of non-auto infrastructure.

Many of the issues identified in 2019 remain prevalent in 2024:

- Congestion in Rogers, Bentonville, Fayetteville, Springdale, and Lowell
- Lack of public transportation
- Large truck traffic



Concerns about unsafe pedestrian facilities and lacking connections among sidewalks and bike trails have risen by 17% since 2019, with 58% identifying gaps to safe and connected infrastructure as a current or emerging issue.



Key Takeaways

- 1 Community Support for Transportation Choice:** There is growing public support for ongoing investments in diverse transportation options to accommodate the needs of a rapidly expanding community.
- 2 Balanced Approach:** A balanced strategy that serves all types of roadway users—commuters, freight, visitors, and residents—is crucial for responsible growth and accessibility and maintaining the region's quality of life, emphasizing the need to align transportation decisions with other regional priorities.