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New Poll Finds 83 Percent of Bay Area Residents Think Traffic May Never Improve

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – Frustration over the Bay Area’s grinding traffic has reached a point where a staggering 83 percent of residents now believe it may never improve, according to results of the 2016 Bay Area Council Poll released today.

That frustration is reflected in the more than tripling of residents, from 6 percent in 2014 to 20 percent in 2016, who say the region’s badly congested highways and crowded mass transit systems are making it much harder to get around. The number that say Bay Area transportation has gotten much harder or somewhat harder has more than doubled since 2014 from 25 percent to 54 percent.

“We’re running out of adjectives to describe how bad Bay Area traffic is and the misery it’s causing,” said Jim Wunderman, President and CEO of the Bay Area Council. “We understand residents’ aggravation with traffic, but we’re not giving up on the problem and we don’t think that’s really what residents are saying. The business community is not going to accept this fate, nor should the public transportation agencies at the state, regional and local levels that control the funding and decisions for improving our transportation system.”

“There’s no smarter, more creative or innovative region on the planet. We may not completely solve traffic, but we can put a significant dent in it,” Wunderman said, “The answers are in front of us, from embracing new technologies like driverless cars, carpooling apps and intelligent transportation systems to expanding ferry service, modernizing aging transit systems like BART and Caltrain and getting smarter about how we finance and implement traffic relief projects.”

[Read the Bay Area Council Poll summary transportation results>>](#)

[See the Bay Area Council Poll charts and graphs>>](#)

Solo Drivers Dominate the Commute

The anger over traffic is perhaps not surprising considering that almost 70 percent of residents polled said driving alone in their car is their primary mode of transportation. Frustration among solo drivers with getting around the Bay Area was the highest for any group of commuters, and has grown the most. Sixty percent of solo drivers say getting around is more difficult than a year ago, an 18 percentage point jump from a year ago.

Frustration with gridlock has reached a particular boiling point for the critical stretch connecting Oakland and San Francisco, according to an online mapping tool that allowed respondents to click on areas where they think traffic is worst, although the congested Highway 101 and 880 corridors also attracted strong ire.

Meanwhile, 46 percent of residents that use some form of public transit, including buses, BART or light rail, say getting around is harder than a year ago. That represents a 16 percentage point increase from the year before, likely reflecting the impact of record ridership growth on systems including BART and Caltrain and also increasing maintenance and service issues. Overall, the percentage of residents who said they use public transit as their primary mode of transportation is about 12 percent.

Santa Clara County residents appear to be suffering the most from worsening traffic, with 62 percent saying it's harder than last year to get around. Residents in San Francisco, where public transit is a dominant mode, registered a relatively sanguine view of traffic, with 42 percent saying it's harder to get around.

Millennials Ditching Cars; Higher Earners Most Bothered

Millennials' rejection of cars appears to have brought down the Bay Area's overall average for driving solo. The poll found that a comparatively low 53 percent of Millennials (aged 18-33) opted for driving alone as their primary mode of transportation, far lower than the 72 percent of Gen Xers (aged 34-49 years), 78 percent of Baby Boomers (aged 50-64 years) and 84 percent of residents 65 years and older. Those disparities are even more pronounced when looking at smaller age subsets.

The poll found that Millennials are more likely to use transit, with 20 percent saying they rely on some form of mass transit, including BART, local buses and light rail, as their primary mode of transportation. Millennials are also more likely to carpool, walk or ride their bikes. The poll found that just 10 percent of Gen Xers and Baby Boomers use some form of transit as their primary commute method.

The Bay Area's crowded transportation system appeared to cause the region's highest earners the most grief, with 64 percent of residents with annual household incomes exceeding \$125,000 saying the commute has gotten harder in the past year, 59 percent of those making \$75,000 to \$125,000 saying it's more difficult and 42 percent of those making less than \$75,000 saying the problem has gotten worse. It's possible the differences are explained by the fact that fewer residents in lower income brackets rely on cars as their primary way of getting around.

Strong Support for Regional Transportation Planning

Bay Area residents appear to have a very good understanding of the just how connected and integrated the region's transportation system is. A strong majority of residents think that responsibility for addressing the Bay Area's significant transportation problems belongs at the regional level. The poll found 67 percent of residents think planning for roads and highways should occur at the regional level and 64 percent say the same thing for public transportation.

Some differences do emerge among counties, however, with 57 percent of San Francisco residents saying control over transit planning should stay local – the only county where more residents support local control over regional control of transit planning – and a slightly higher

percentage of residents in the North Bay counties of Marin, Sonoma and Napa than in other counties wanting more local control over planning for highways and roads.

“The Bay Area is a highly connected region that can’t afford a Balkanized approach to transportation planning and investment,” Wunderman said. “With limited and ever-shrinking state and federal transportation funding, we have to maximize every dollar we have by being efficient, integrated and strategic.”

The *2016 Bay Area Council Poll*, which was conducted by Oakland-based public opinion research firm EMC Research from Feb. 12-March 9, surveyed more than 1,000 residents online about a range of issues related to economic growth, housing and transportation, drought, education and workforce. It has a margin of error of 3.1 percentage points.

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About the Bay Area Council

The Bay Area Council is a business-sponsored, public-policy advocacy organization for the nine-county Bay Area. The Council proactively advocates for a strong economy, a vital business environment, and a better quality of life for everyone who lives here. Founded in 1945, the Bay Area Council is widely respected by elected officials, policy makers and other civic leaders as the voice of Bay Area business. Today, approximately 275 of the largest employers in the region support the Bay Area Council and offer their CEO or top executive as a member. Our members employ more than 4.43 million workers and have revenues of \$1.94 trillion, worldwide.