



# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report documents the methods and results of the first wave of data collection for the I-394 MnPASS Evaluation Attitudinal Panel Survey (hereafter referred to as the Attitudinal Panel Survey). This baseline survey was conducted among a random sample of residents of the I-394 and I-35W travel sheds during the months of November and December 2004, prior to the opening of the I-394 MnPASS Express Lane project. A total of 1,000 interviews were conducted, with an average length of 19.5 minutes. NuStats conducted the survey under subcontract to the State and Local Policy Program at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota for the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

## 1.1 PURPOSE OF THE ATTITUDINAL PANEL SURVEY

The I-394 MnPASS Express Lane project creates Minnesota's first High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes. This project will allow solo drivers to pay a fee to use carpool lanes and avoid congestion on I-394, from Highway 101 to I-94. Because the project's goal is optimize capacity on the HOT lanes, it will be critical to maintain free flow conditions at all times. To do so, fees charged will change dynamically to reflect changing traffic volumes in the HOT lanes, and electronic toll collection (ETC) will be used. The I-394 MnPASS project is new and innovative. It requires a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan to inform political, technical, and market demand issues. The Attitudinal Panel Survey is one component in a comprehensive evaluation that includes a separate, but parallel, Technical Evaluation to monitor actual performance data.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the Technical Evaluation, the Attitudinal Panel Survey will measure the attitudes, perceptions, and reported travel behaviors of panel survey respondents. The following information, among others, will be tracked over time.

- Reported use of the I-394 corridor by mode, time of day, and purpose,
- Equity implications of changes in reported use of I-394,
- Attitudes and perceptions regarding:
  - The I-394 MnPASS project
  - Congestion in the corridor,
  - Method of toll collection,
  - Enforcement issues,
  - Toll rates, and
  - Travel time and travel time reliability.

## 1.2 ATTITUDINAL PANEL SURVEY METHODS

The Attitudinal Panel Survey will track a recruited panel of I-394 corridor users to assess changes in their travel behavior and attitudes associated with the I-394 MnPASS project over

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<sup>1</sup> Cambridge Systematics is conducting this Technical Evaluation under contract to the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

time. A small sample of I-35W corridor users will be used as a control group to measure “natural” changes in travel behavior. The Attitudinal Panel Survey will consist of three waves of data collection. Survey respondents were interviewed before implementation of the I-394 MnPASS project and will be interviewed two more times after implementation at approximately nine months apart. The projected sample sizes for each of the three waves are 1,000 for Wave 1, and consecutively larger samples in Wave 2 (1,400) and Wave 3 (1,600). A key objective of the first wave of data collection was to recruit survey respondents to continue as panel members for Waves 2 and 3. Thus, the sample sizes for Waves 2 and 3 assume that Wave 1 panel members will comprise the majority of respondents. Respondents will be added in subsequent waves, as necessary, to increase the numbers of transit and HOV users to enable richer analyses by mode, as well as to include MnPASS subscribers to answer questions specific to I-394 MnPASS Express Lane usage. This report presents the baseline survey results from Wave 1. Data from subsequent waves will be analyzed cross-sectionally (i.e., results at a single point in time), as well as longitudinally to measure attitude, perception, and behavior changes over time.

Data collection for Wave 1 was completed between November 19, 2004 and December 17, 2004, prior to the opening of the I-394 MnPASS Express Lanes. No interviews were conducted during the Thanksgiving holidays (November 24 -27). The baseline questionnaire was designed to collect information regarding household demographics, awareness and attitudes about the I-394 MnPASS project, summary travel behavior in the I-394 or I-35W corridors for the past five weekdays as well as for the most recent trip, and demand for use of the HOT lane.

For Wave 1, 750 users of the I-394 corridor and 250 users of the control corridor (I-35W) were interviewed. Survey respondents included individuals 18 years of age or older who had traveled along one of the target road segments between 6am and 9pm at least once in the five weekdays prior to being interviewed. Sampled respondents tended to be vehicle owners (99%), homeowners (85%), employed (81%), and college educated (51%). There were more persons older than 45 years of age than younger, and more households with an annual income greater than \$75,000 than less. The average household in our sample had 2.6 persons, 2.1 vehicles, 1.99 licensed drivers, and 1.5 workers. About one in ten had lived at their current residence for one year or less. As many respondents had resided at their current residence 2-10 years as had 11 or more years.

### **1.3 KEY FINDINGS AMONG I-394 TRAVEL SHED RESIDENTS**

- 64 percent of persons living near I-394 thought allowing single drivers to use carpool lanes by paying a toll was a “good idea”; 28 percent thought it was a “bad idea”, and 8 percent had no opinion.

- ✓ Support for the project did not vary across income levels. Supporters comprised 65 percent of those with household incomes \$50,000 or less as well as 65 percent of those with household incomes of \$150,000 or more.

Positive aspects of the I-394 MnPASS project cited by respondents, without prompting, were that it is a better use of carpool lanes (24%), it adds capacity to the roadway (19%), and that only users pay, not everyone (12%).

Negative aspects were less frequently cited and these included, again without prompting, that it only benefits the rich (8%), it discourages carpooling (5%), and carpool lanes should be free for all (5%).

- 58 percent were supportive of the 24/7 operation of a toll lane program on I-394; 31 percent thought it was a “bad idea”, and 11 percent had no opinion.
- 69 percent of I-394 travel shed residents had heard of the I-394 MnPASS project as of November / December 2004.
  - ✓ Persons who were aware of the project knew basic information -- that it allows SOVs to use the carpool lanes for a fee (52%) and/or that it charges tolls (33%).
  - ✓ Newspaper (45%) and TV/radio (43%) were their main sources of information.
- 75 percent usually drive<sup>2</sup> I-394 or nearby Hwy 55 in a single occupant vehicle (SOV); 22 percent drive in a multiple occupant vehicle (HOV), and 2 percent usually travel by transit.
  - ✓ Carpool and transit were used by travelers of the I-394 corridor to a greater extent than was evidenced by reports of their “usual” travel modes. 30 percent said that they sometimes traveled by carpool, and 20 percent reported that they sometimes traveled via transit.<sup>3</sup>
- 96 percent of persons living near I-394 reported that traffic congestion in the Twin Cities was a problem, with 58 percent reporting that it was a major problem.
  - ✓ 38 percent reported that they were delayed by congestion on their most recent weekday trip in the I-394 corridor, while 24 percent reported that they began their most recent weekday trip at a specific time to avoid congestion.

#### 1.4 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The I-394 MnPASS Express Lane project had strong support among persons living near I-394. Slightly more than two-thirds of them believed that allowing single drivers to use carpool lanes by paying a toll was a good idea, and 58 percent believed that operating the toll lane program on I-394 24 hours per day was a good idea. Support was as strong among lower income households as it was among higher income households. People supported the idea of allowing single drivers to use carpool lanes by paying a toll because they believed it was a better use of carpool lanes (24%) and it added capacity to the roadway (19%).

Levels of support and opposition to the I-394 MnPASS project (and related attitudes and perceptions) will be tracked in the subsequent waves of data collection, as well as changes in travel mode associated with the implementation of the HOT lane. Virtually all respondents in Wave 1 (98%) agreed to be interviewed in the two subsequent waves of data collection. These respondents will receive a postcard thanking them for their participation. Planning will soon begin for the second wave of data collection. The total sample size will be increased for the second wave, from the current 994 recruited panel members to 1,400 respondents. This increased sample size will include more transit and HOV users, as well as I-394 MnPASS subscribers. Finally, the survey team will identify survey questions to be dropped and added to ensure that Attitudinal Panel Survey objectives are fully achieved.

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<sup>2</sup> “Usual” mode is defined as the travel mode used most often for trips in the I-394 corridor for the past five weekdays.

<sup>3</sup> Most respondents reported that they used transit or HOV less often than once per month.