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Life in Hampton Roads Survey Press Release #4: The Changing Transportation Picture: Tolls and Traffic

Social Science Research Center, Old Dominion University

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Life in Hampton Roads Survey Press Release #4

The Changing Transportation Picture: Tolls and Traffic

This report examines regional and sub-regional measures of transportation perceptions from the 2014 Life In Hampton Roads survey (LIHR 2014) conducted by the Old Dominion University Social Science Research Center. For additional information on survey methodology, and analyses of other issues, please see the SSRC website at www.odu.edu/ssrc.

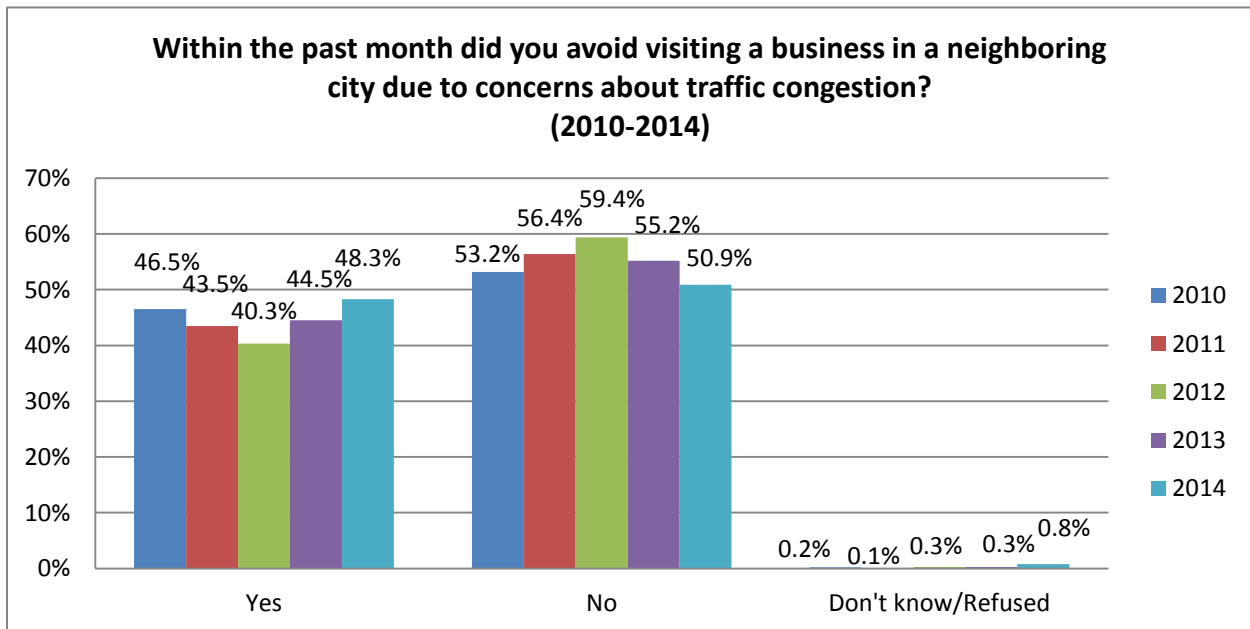
Every day people traverse the eleven bridges and five tunnels in the Hampton Roads area, commuting for work, family, and other activities. According to the Life in Hampton Roads survey conducted by Old Dominion University's Social Science Research Center, Hampton Roads residents are avoiding businesses in neighboring cities at the highest rates ever, surpassing the previous high set in 2010, the first year of the Life in Hampton Roads survey. Tolls are also causing substantial changes in driver behavior, with more than one third of survey respondents avoiding visiting a business in a neighboring city due to tolls, and twenty percent of respondents changing their commute routes to avoid tolls, often in spite of major increases in travel time. The survey also identified public priorities for highway and light rail expansion, with widening of I-64 to Williamsburg the highest highway priority, and extending light rail to the Virginia Beach oceanfront the highest light rail priority.

The 2014 Life in Hampton Roads survey asked 853 residents of the Hampton Roads area about their driving habits, opinions on bridge and tunnel tolls, preferences concerning major transportation projects, and views on alternative transportation. Data from prior years is also provided when available to show variations in responses over time. Responses were weighted by city population, race, age, gender, and phone usage (cell versus land-line) to be representative of the Hampton Roads region. Details of survey methodology are included in the 2014 LIHR demographics and methodology section (www.odu.edu/ssrc). The margin of error for the 2014 LIHR survey is 3.7 percent (95 percent confidence interval).

Survey questions dealing with general issues of transportation in the Hampton Roads area found that the average one-way commute to work or school of 24.4 minutes, which is slightly lower than the 2013 average of 24.8 minutes. The highest reported average was in 2011 (27 minutes) and the lowest was in 2012 (23.9 minutes).

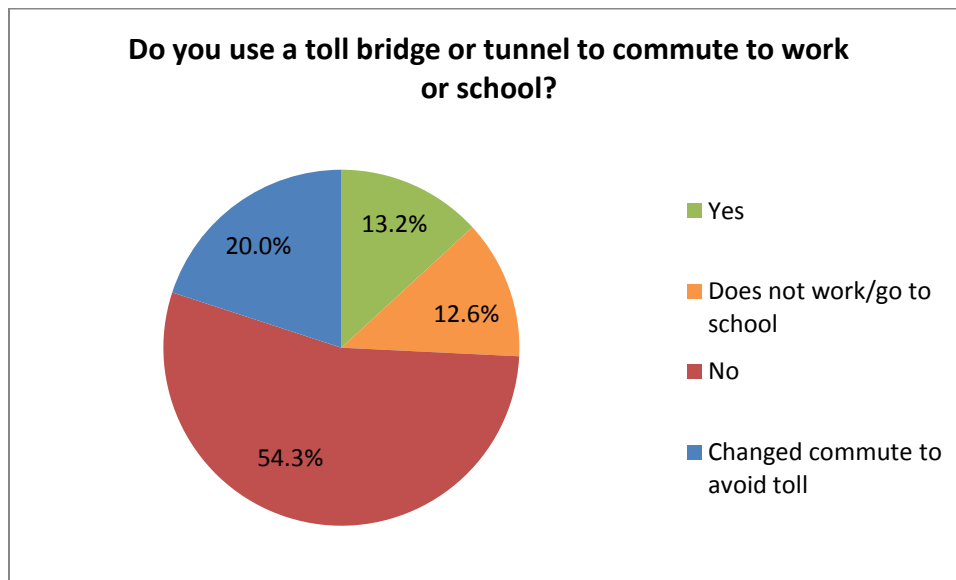
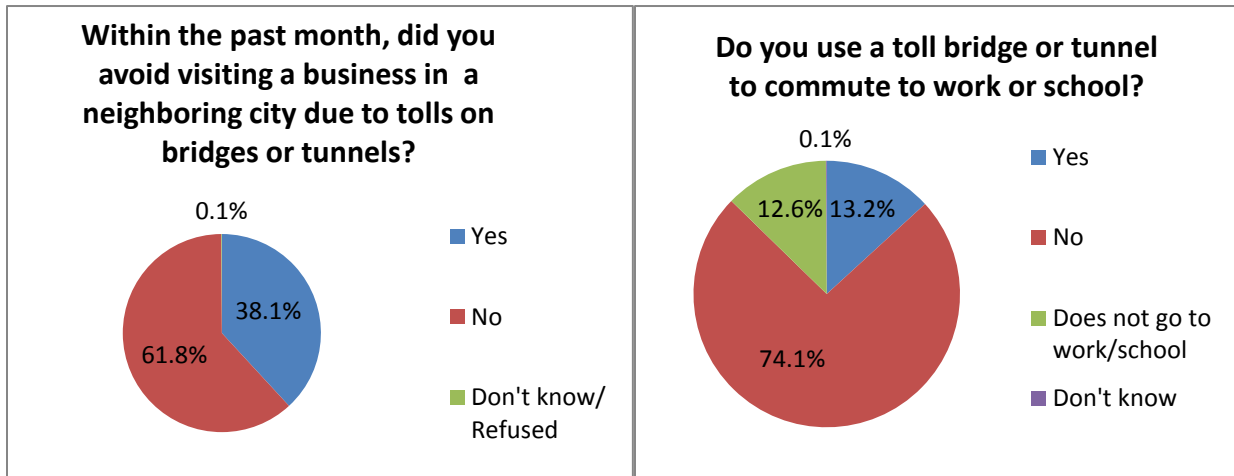
Commute	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Average one-way commute, in minutes, to work or school.	25.1	27.0	23.9	24.8	24.4

Additionally, in the past month 48.3 percent of residents avoided visiting a business in a neighboring city due to concerns about traffic congestion. This year had the highest percentage of respondents who have avoided visiting a business in a neighboring city due to concerns about traffic congestion compared to the data from previous years (48.3% in 2014 compared to 44.5% in 2013, 40.3% in 2012, 43.5% in 2011, and 46.5% in 2010). In other words, Hampton Roads residents are avoiding visiting businesses that require them to drive through traffic congestion now more than in any prior survey year.



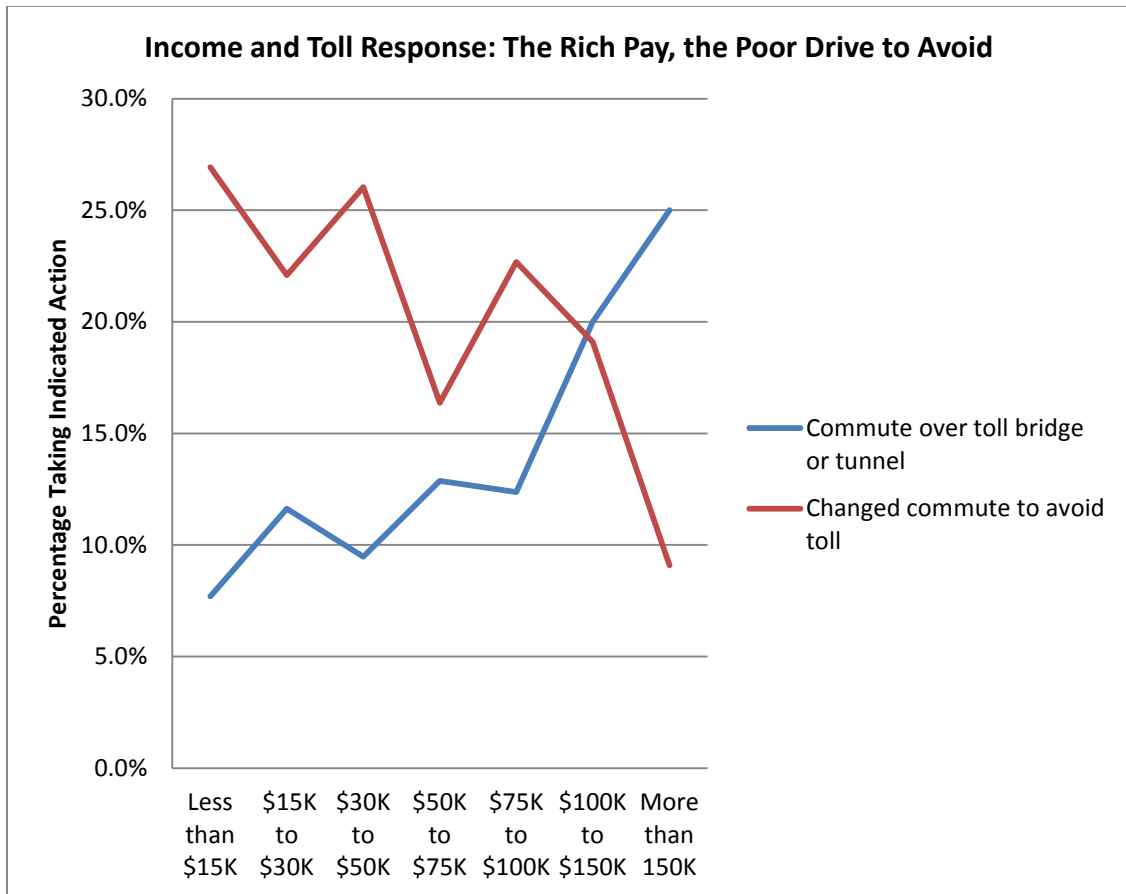
Bridge and Tunnel Tolls

The 2014 Life in Hampton Roads survey incorporated several new questions to help gauge opinions about the recently implemented tolls. When asked, 38.1 percent of respondents said they avoided visiting a business in a neighboring city due to tolls on bridges or tunnels in the past month. Only 13.2 percent said they use a toll bridge or tunnel to commute to work or school. Those respondents whose commute does not currently include a toll bridge or tunnel were asked if prior to the tolls on the bridges and tunnels in Hampton Roads they used a bridge or tunnel that now has a toll. Over a quarter (26.9%) indicated their commute did previously include a bridge or tunnel that now has a toll.

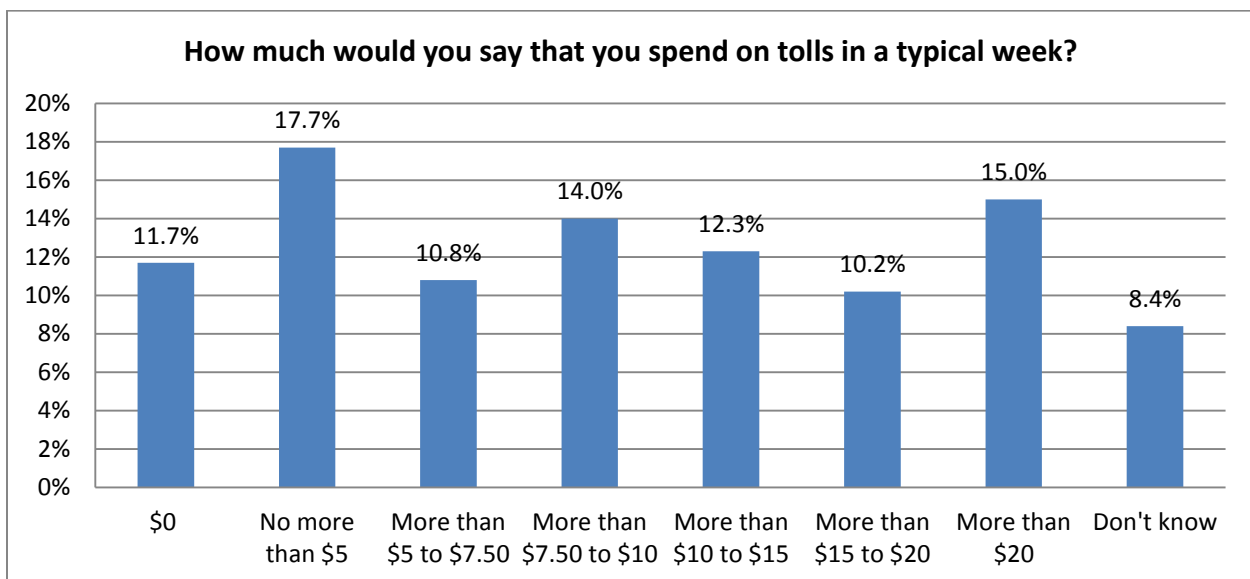
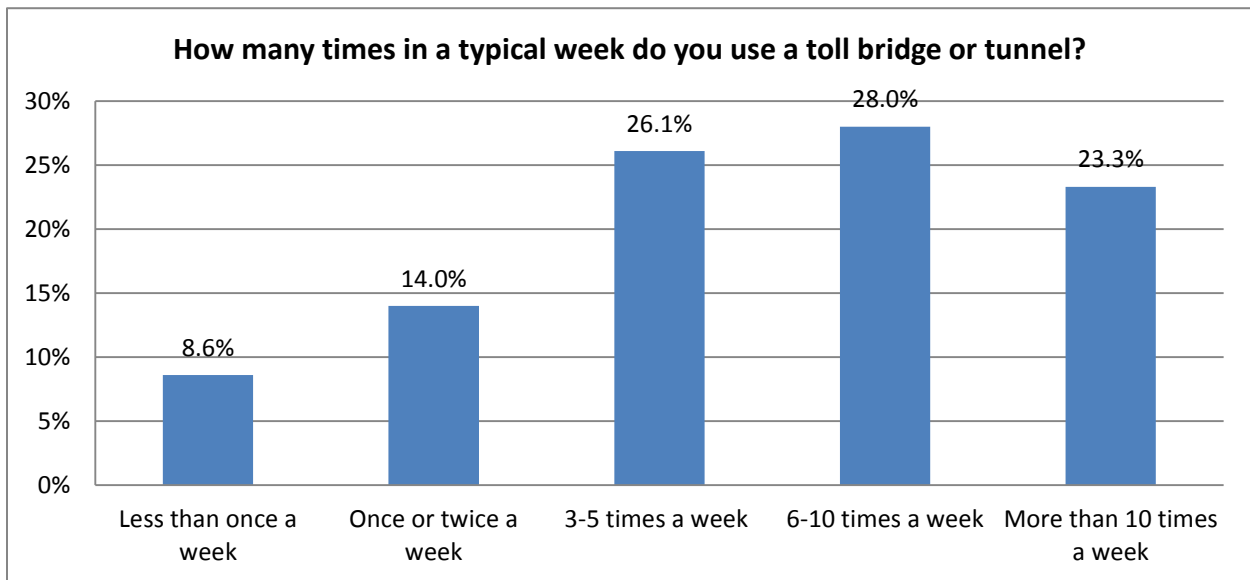


Twenty percent of survey respondents have changed their commute to avoid tolls, a portion that exceeds the percentage (13.2 %) currently commuting using a toll bridge or tunnel.

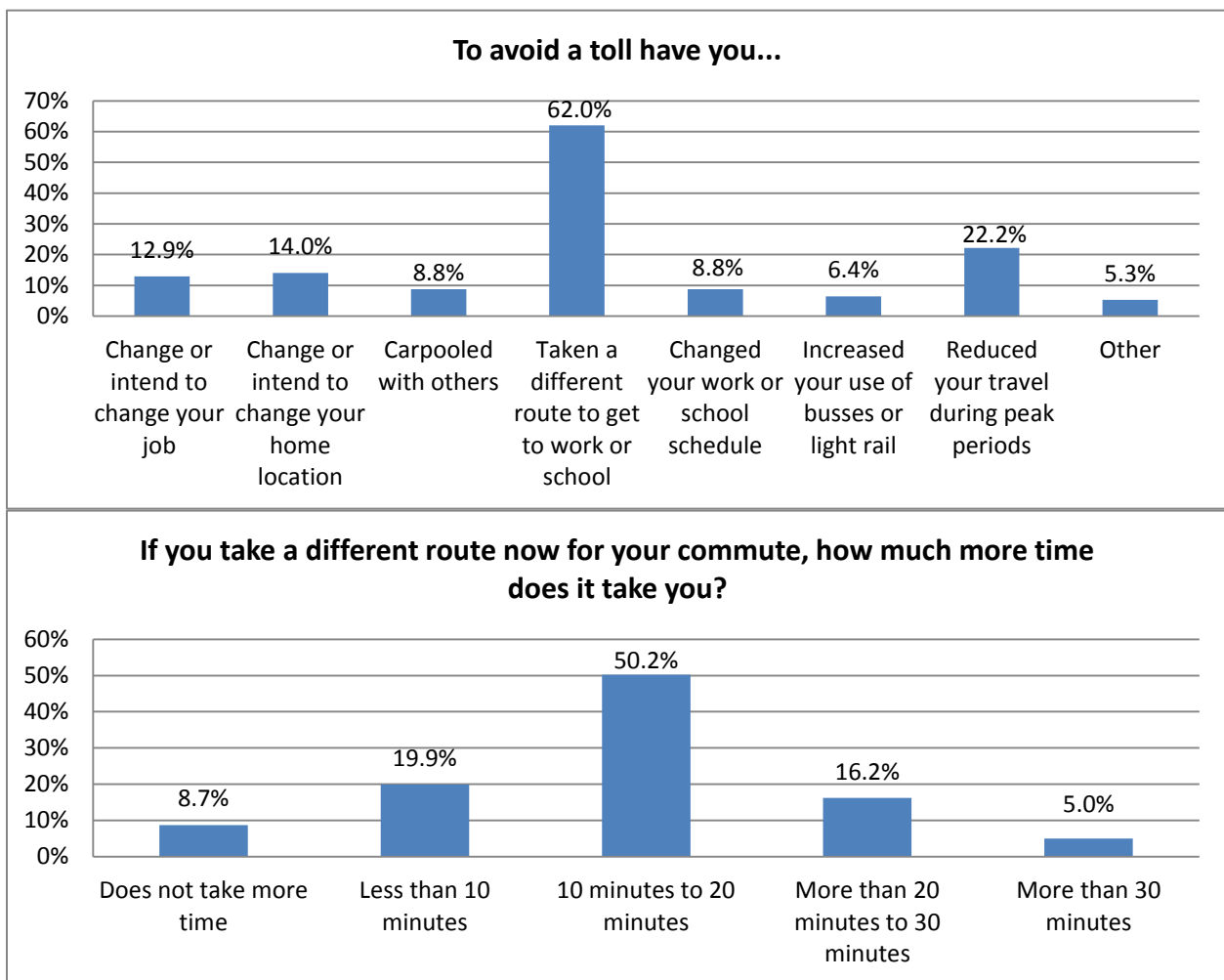
Response to the imposition of tolls has varied substantially by income level. Low income individuals have been much more likely to change commute patterns than high income individuals. Among respondents with a reported family income of less than 30 thousand dollars, 10.1 percent are commuting by toll bridge or tunnel, while 23.9 percent report changing their route to avoid tolls. Conversely, among respondents with family incomes above 150 thousand dollars, 25 percent report commuting over a toll bridge or tunnel, while 9.1 percent changed their commute to avoid the toll. For higher income commuters, imposition of tolls may have actually been a boon by diminishing traffic congestion.



Those who indicated they used a toll bridge or tunnel to commute to work or school were also asked how many times in a typical week they used a toll bridge or tunnel; 23.3 percent claimed more than 10 times a week, 28 percent said 6-10 times a week, 26.1 percent indicated 3-5 times a week, 14 percent said once or twice a week, and 8.6 percent said less than once a week. When asked about the amount spent on tolls in a typical week; 11.7 percent paid \$0, 17.7 percent paid no more than \$5, 10.8 percent paid more than \$5 to \$7.50, 14 percent paid more than \$7.50 to \$10, 12.3 percent paid more than \$10 to \$15, 10.2 percent paid more than \$15 to \$20, and 15 percent paid more than \$20.



Respondents were also asked about the different methods used to avoid toll bridges and tunnels. Almost 40% said that they did not intentionally avoid the tolls (39.5%). For those respondents who did indicate ways that they avoided the toll, three of the most commonly cited alternatives include taking a different route to work or school (62%), reducing travel during peak hours (22.2%), and changing or intending to change their home location (14%). Those who indicated that they took a different route to get to work or school were asked how much more time their commute took; 8.7 percent indicated their alternate route did not take more time. Almost one in five (19.9%) indicated that their alternate route took less than 10 minutes more, 50.2 percent indicated their alternate route took 10 minutes to 20 minutes more, 16.2 percent took more than 20 to 30 minutes more, and 5 percent reported that their alternate route took more than 30 minutes.

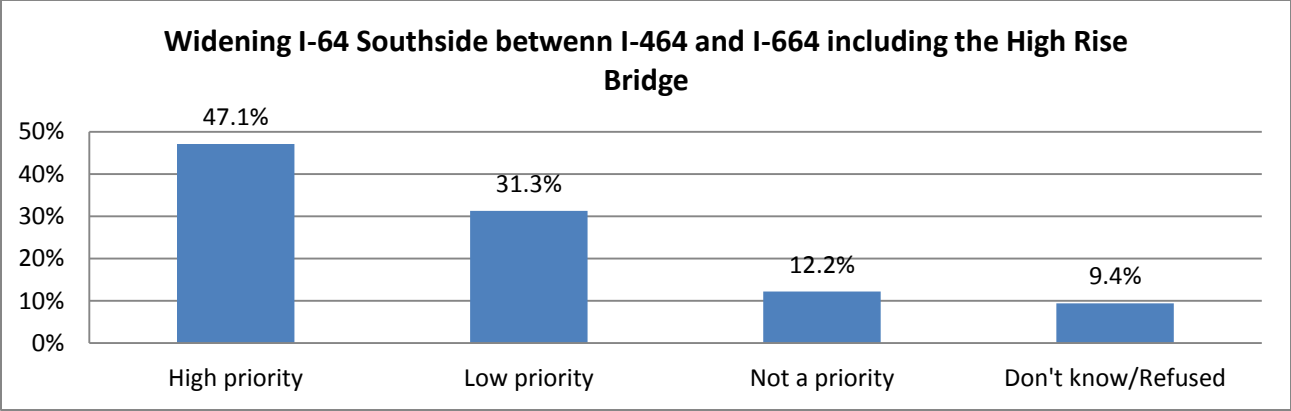
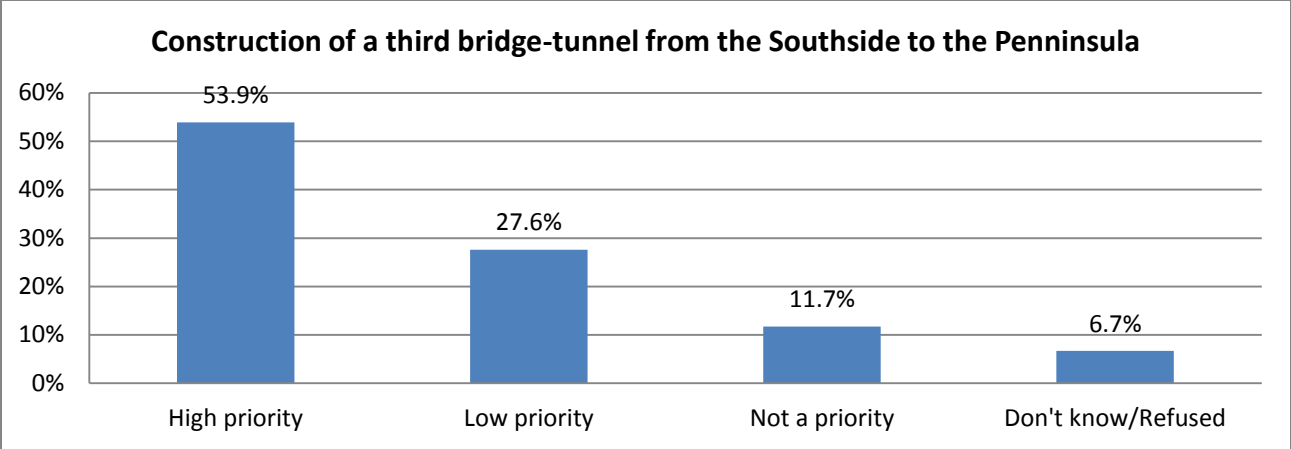
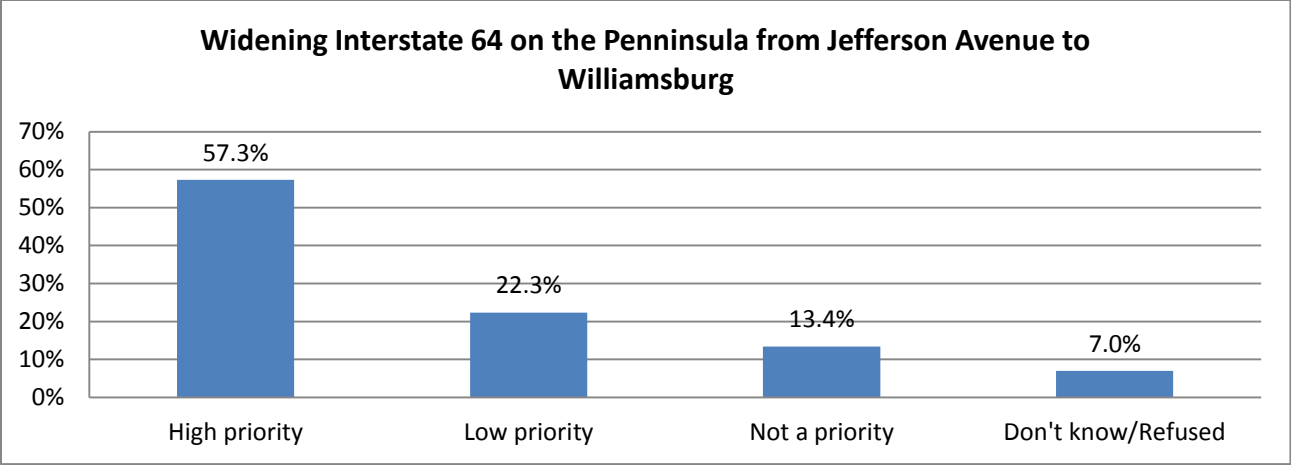


Overall, these results point toward the major effect tolls have had on regional commute and travel patterns. These major changes in traffic patterns, if they endure, will create significant transportation challenges within the region.

Projected Road Projects

In order to better understand public views of major transportation planning efforts underway in the region, the survey also included three questions specifically focused on major highway upgrades being discussed by the Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization: widening of Interstate 64 on the Peninsula, constructing a third crossing bridge tunnel from Southside to the Peninsula, and widening I-64 Southside.

The highest portion of respondents supported widening I-64 on the peninsula. In regards to the widening of Interstate 64 on the Peninsula from Jefferson Avenue to Williamsburg, 57.3 percent of respondents thought the project was of high priority, 22.3 percent said that it was low priority, and 13.4 percent reported the project was not a priority. Constructing a third bridge-tunnel from the Southside to the Peninsula was viewed as a high priority by 53.9 percent of residents, 27.6 percent thought it was a low priority, and 11.7 percent said it was not a priority. When asked about widening I-64 Southside between I-464 and I-664 including the High Rise Bridge 47.1 percent indicated the project to be a high priority, 31.3 percent considered it to be a low priority, and 12.2 percent thought it was not a priority.



Looking at how the individual cities of Hampton Roads rated the priority of upcoming road projects the results show that respondents were more likely to rate a project as a high priority if the projects is in closer proximity to the city in which they reside. The three cities that rated the widening of Interstate 64 on the Peninsula from Jefferson Avenue to Williamsburg as their highest priority include Newport News (77.6%), Hampton (71.9%), and Suffolk (67.3%). When it comes to constructing a third

bridge-tunnel from the Southside to the Peninsula, respondents from Norfolk (59.5%), Hampton (59.3%), Virginia Beach (56.3%), and Portsmouth (56.1%) consistently reported a high priority. Respondents from Portsmouth (68.4%), Chesapeake (54.4), and Virginia Beach (45.9%) were most likely to rate the widening of I-64 Southside between I-464 and I-664 including the High Rise Bridge as a high priority.

Alternative Transportation

Hampton Roads’ residents were also polled on their opinions of alternative forms of transportation in the area. In 2014, the top three destinations for light rail expansion include the Virginia Beach Oceanfront (54.7%), Virginia Beach Town Center (34.8%), and the Naval Base (33%) as seen in the table below. These were also the top three destinations specified in the 2012 and 2013 survey. When asked where respondents would like to see the light rail extended, 14.2 percent stated they did not want the light rail extended at all. Additionally, the percentage of respondents indicating they do not want the light rail extended was higher in 2014 (14.2%) compared to all previous years (10.5% in 2013, 11% in 2012, 11% in 2011, and 6.3% in 2010). Overall, preferences for light rail expansion appear to be coalescing around extension to the Virginia Beach Oceanfront, as this is the only option that attains majority support, and its support has held up relatively well compared to other alternatives.

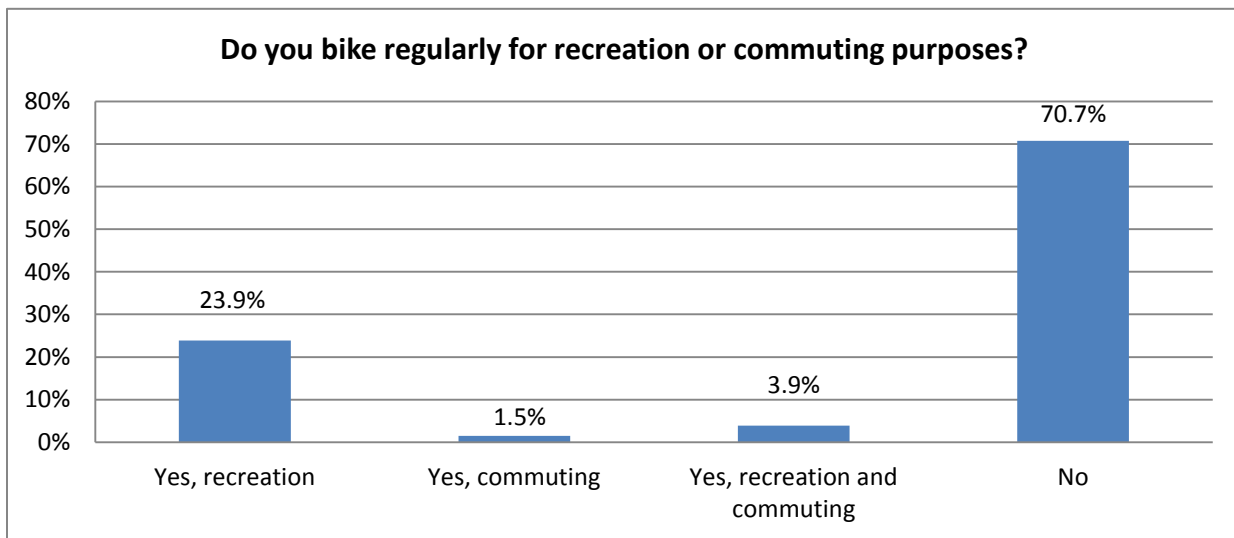
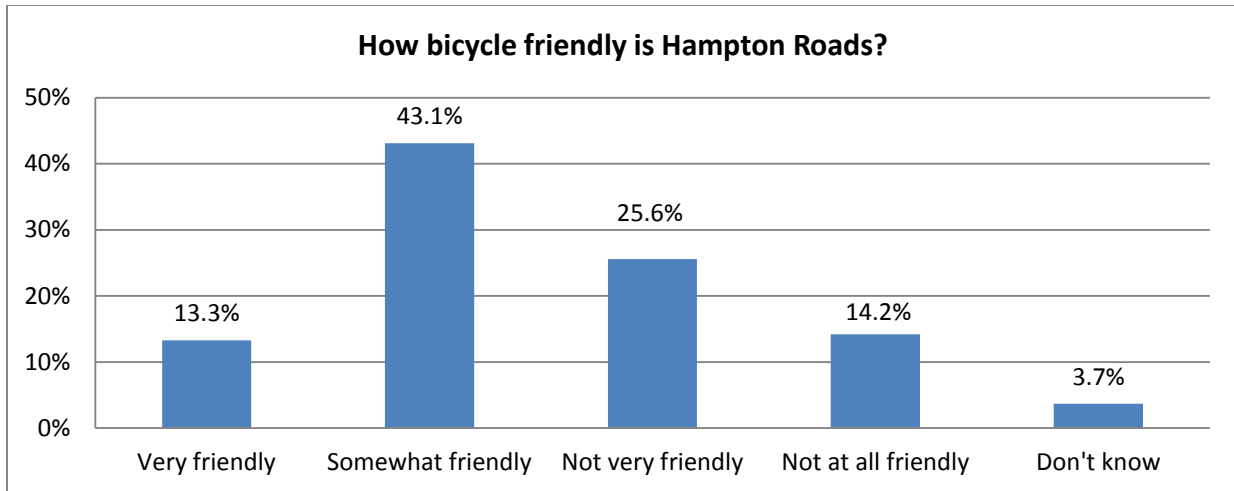
Where would you like to see the light rail extended? ¹²	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Virginia Beach	57.5%	54.3%	"	"	"
Virginia Beach Town Center	"	"	48.8%	35.9%	34.7%
Virginia Beach Oceanfront	"	"	63.9%	54.5%	54.7%
Chesapeake	37.0%	32.3%	41.5%	27.0%	26.8%
Portsmouth	28.9%	28.9%	37.3%	21.5%	21.6%
Hampton	34.0%	33.6%	40.1%	27.9%	23.5%
Newport News	34.4%	33.7%	39.0%	24.3%	24.5%
Suffolk	25.4%	25.2%	30.1%	19.4%	18.7%
Naval base	32.8%	34.5%	47.3%	37.5%	33.0%
Norfolk International Airport	42.9%	37.6%	46.8%	34.0%	28.3%

Other	11.0%	10.0%	7.4%	10.2%	9.0%
Don't want light rail extended	6.3%	11.0%	11.0%	10.5%	14.2%
Don't know/Refused	2.2%	2.5%	4.0%	4.2%	6.5%

¹ In 2012, the Virginia Beach option was separated into "Virginia Beach Town Center" and "Virginia Beach Oceanfront."

² Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents were allowed to choose more than one response.

For the first time, the LIHR survey also included two questions on bicycling. This provides baseline measures of bicycle use in the region. In regards to bicycling, a majority of respondents (56.4%) thought that Hampton Roads is either very or somewhat bicycle friendly. When asked if they biked regularly for recreation or commuting purposes, 23.9 percent of respondents indicated that they biked for recreation, 1.5 percent biked for commuting reasons, and 3.9 percent biked for recreational and commuting purposes. When comparing the results by city, Norfolk (64.1%), Suffolk (59.2%), and Virginia Beach (58.6%) residents were most likely to report that Hampton Roads was somewhat to very bicycle-friendly. Efforts to expand bicycle routes may be paying off.



The 2014 LIHR survey reveals a region with ongoing and substantial transportation challenges. The imposition of tolls on regional bridges and tunnels has led to substantial changes in traffic and commute patterns. The most common method for avoiding a toll is to take a different route to work or school (62.0%) and of those who take a different route more than two-thirds (71.4%) reported that their new route takes more than 10 minutes longer. Many respondents supported multiple proposed highway upgrades, but the widening of Interstate 64 on the Peninsula from Jefferson Avenue to Williamsburg was rated the highest priority by the most Hampton Roads' residents (57.3%). Additionally, there has been a 3.7 percent increase in respondents who do not want to extend the light rail since 2013, but a majority continues to support extending light rail to the Virginia Beach oceanfront.