

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

HOV (Highly Overrated Vaccine?) LANES: IS THE CURE WORSE THAN THE DISEASE?

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An editorial based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the March 8 *Star-Ledger*. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll."

New Jersey residents are caught in gridlock over HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) lanes. While most people think they are a good idea in principle, they have serious reservations about how effective HOV lanes are in promoting car pooling and reducing traffic congestion, according to the latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll.

HOV lanes, marked with a diamond, are special lanes on the state's busiest roads which are set aside for busses, cars and vans with a minimum number of passengers. Their purpose is to provide incentives for drivers to reduce the "one-person-to-a-car" behavior that characterizes New Jersey commuters.

While state residents overwhelmingly think these lanes are a good idea, they have yet to see a payoff from the HOV system. In fact, a slight majority actually think a better way to reduce congestion would be to open these reserved lanes to all drivers, regardless of how many people are traveling in any vehicle. Moreover, New Jersey drivers who should know best--motorists who regularly use roadways with HOV lanes--are the most skeptical of their value.

These are some of the main findings of a *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll conducted with a statewide sample of 802 New Jersey residents between February 12 and 17. The survey did not ask residents of southern New Jersey (those with a 609 area code) any HOV questions, as there are no HOV lanes in that region of the state. Additionally, 20 percent of New Jerseyans living in the northern and central parts of the state said they were unaware of HOV lanes and were not asked any subsequent questions about them. The sampling error for the remaining 495 residents is ± 5 percent.

Among those familiar with HOV lanes, far more people think they are a good idea (63 percent) than feel they are a bad one (29 percent), while the remainder express no opinion. However, by a margin of two-to-one (37 to 19 percent) more people think HOV lanes are *not* effective in reducing traffic congestion than think they are. A large number, 44 percent, voice no opinion on the matter. Among those using roads with HOV lanes on at least a weekly basis, 54 percent say these lanes are not effective in reducing traffic congestion while only 20 percent say they are. The remaining 26 percent venture no opinion.

These poll numbers are similar when New Jerseyans are asked if HOV lanes are effective in terms of getting people to car pool: One-fifth feel they are effective and two-fifths feel they are *not*, with the remaining two-fifths offering no opinion. The number of HOV supporters drops among those traveling roads with HOV lanes on a weekly basis: just 16 percent think the lanes are effective in promoting car pooling compared to 54 percent who feel they are not. The remainder offer no opinion.

While public opinion is somewhat split, HOV lanes come out on the short end when New Jerseyans are asked to make a choice about the best way to reduce traffic congestion. A bare majority (51 percent) report that the best way to reduce congestion would be to open up HOV lanes to all motorists, regardless of how many people are in any single vehicle. Forty percent feel that keeping these special lanes restricted to drivers with a certain number of passengers would be the more effective way to reduce congestion. However, the poll also shows far less support for HOV lanes among those more familiar with the daily New Jersey commute. Among those traveling HOV lanes on at least a weekly basis, 59 percent think opening all lanes of the roadway to all drivers would be the more effective way to reduce congestion. Far fewer (35 percent), feel that maintaining special HOV lanes for multiple-occupancy vehicles would be more effective in reducing overall congestion on the roadways.

Cliff Zukin, director of the Poll, commented, "The poll findings suggest a road NIMBY ('Not In My Back Yard') syndrome. The value of ride-sharing--and public transportation for that matter--are well acknowledged. But each is seen as something the 'other person' should do. People remain loathe to give up the convenience and comfort of the private automobile."

The poll also found that few New Jerseyans have direct experience with HOV lanes on an everyday basis. Filtering in those who live where there are no HOV lanes and those who are unaware of them, the poll estimates that 10 percent of state residents drive on roads that have HOV lanes every day, while another 8 percent do so a "few times" each week. This poll estimates that about 12 percent of New Jerseyans travel on roads that have HOV lanes during rush hour at least a few times every week.

BACKGROUND MEMO -- RELEASE SL/EP67-4 (EP117-4), SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 1998

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll was conducted between February 12 and 17, 1998, when a scientifically selected random sample of 800 New Jersey adult residents was interviewed by telephone.

All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for the total sample size of 800 is just over ± 3 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jerseyans were found to have a favorable opinion of the Governor, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 47 and 53 percent (50 ± 3) had all New Jerseyans been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported for men and women, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error.



Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. The verbatim wording of all questions asked are reproduced in this background memo. The sample has been stratified based on county and the data have been weighted on age and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. Two versions of the questionnaire were used in this study. Not all questions were on both versions.

Note: Residents of Southern New Jersey (those with a 609 area code) were not asked these questions as there are no HOV lanes in that region of the state.

"Now I'd like to ask you some questions specifically about HOV or high occupancy vehicle lanes. An HOV is a special lane marked with a diamond and reserved for busses, cars and vans with a minimum number of passengers. (Only the people not living in South Jersey were asked this question.) Have you ever heard of these HOV lanes? " [HV.1]

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
February 1998	80%	20%	100%	(583)

Note: Those not having heard about HOV lanes (QHV.1) were not asked subsequent questions.

"Do you ever drive on roads that have HOV lanes? IF YES, PROBE: How often--every day, a few times a week or less often? (This question was only asked to people not from South Jersey who have heard of HOV lanes.)" [HV.2]

	<u>Every Day</u>	<u>A Few Times A Week</u>	<u>Less Often</u>	<u>Don't Use Them</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
February 1998	17%	14%	49%	19%	1%	100%	(495)

Note: This questions was only asked to weekly users.

"Do you generally travel on these roads at rush hour, or not?" [HV.3]

	Yes	No	<u>Know</u>	Total	(n)
February 1998	69%	29%	2%	100%	(148)

" Do you think these HOV lanes are a good idea or a bad idea?" [HV.4]

	Good <u>Idea</u>	Bad <u>Idea</u>	Don't <u>Know</u>	Total	(n)
February 1998	63%	29%	9%	101%	(495)
Weekly Users	57	36	7	100	(148)

" Based on your own experience, do you think the HOV lanes have or have NOT been effective in reducing traffic

congestion, or aren't you sure?" [HV.5]

	Have Have	Have <u>Not</u>	Don't <u>Know</u>	Total	(n)
February 1998	19%	37%	44%	100%	(495)
Weekly Users	20	54	26	100	(148)

"And do you think the HOV lanes have or have NOT been effective in getting people to carpool, or aren't you sure?" [HV.6]

	Have	Have <u>Not</u>	Don't <u>Know</u>	Total	(n)
February 1998	18%	40%	41%	99%	(495)
Weekly Users	16	54	30	100	(148)

"Which do you think would be more effective at reducing congestion: keeping special lanes only for drivers with many passengers, or opening up these lanes to all drivers no matter how many passengers they have?" [HV.7]

	Keep <u>As Now</u>	Open Up <u>To All</u>	Don't <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
February 1998	40%	51%	8%	99%	(495)
Weekly Users	36	59	6	101	(148)