

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

HOV LANES: PUBLIC SUPPORT GRINDING TO A HALT

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo is in the Sunday, October 4th Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to the "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll."

There has been a marked decline in public support for HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) lanes between February and September of this year. While most people continue to think they are a good idea in principle, a growing number voice serious reservations about how effective they have proven to be in reducing traffic congestion.

HOV lanes, marked with a diamond, are special lanes on the state's busiest roads set aside for busses, cars and vans with a minimum number of passengers. The idea behind them is to create incentives for drivers to carpool or take public transportation between home and work.

A greater number of New Jerseyans think that opening up these restricted lanes to all drivers would be a more effective way to fight road congestion than by restricting them to multiple-occupancy vehicles. Moreover, those who should know best--motorists regularly using 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 804 New Jersey residents between September 12 and 20. The findings from this poll are compared to an earlier statewide survey conducted with 802 state residents between February 12 and 17. The surveys 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, about one-fifth of those living in the Northern and Central parts of the state who said they were unaware of HOV lanes were not asked any subsequent questions about them. The sampling error for the remaining 495 residents is ± 4 percent for both surveys.

Here is how public opinion has changed between February and September of 1998:

In February, more of those familiar with HOV lanes thought they were a good idea rather than a bad one by a margin of 63 to 20 percent. By September, the margin in support had dropped to 54 to 38 percent. And opinion among those who travel at least weekly on

roads having HOV lanes is deeply divided: the September survey finds 51 percent describing HOV lanes as a good idea and 48 percent as a bad idea.

More citizens now express opinions about the effectiveness of HOV lanes than was the case in February. And more now express the view that HOV lanes have *not* been effective in reducing traffic congestion. The September survey finds the perception that HOV lanes have not been effective in reducing traffic congestion outnumbering views that it has by a margin of three-to-one (48 to 15 percent). In February it was a narrower ratio of two-to-one (37 to 19 percent). Two-thirds of those who drive weekly on roads with HOV lanes say these lanes have not been effective in reducing congestion; only 16 percent feel they have been.

In February of this year the public was fairly evenly divided about whether traffic congestion would be better reduced by opening HOV lanes up to everyone (51 percent), or by restricting them to drivers with many passengers (40 percent). This sentiment has changed considerably over the last seven months. The September survey finds far more wanting HOV lanes opened up to all than continuing to be restricted by a wide margin of 65 percent to 27, with the remainder expressing no opinion.

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BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP70-5 (EP120-5), SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1998

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll was conducted between September 14 and 20, 1998, when a scientifically selected random sample of 804 New Jersey adult residents was interviewed by telephone. This release is based on questions asked of 569 Northern and Central New Jersey residents, excluding those in the 609 area code. 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 569 is just over ± 4 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 46 and 54 percent (50 ± 4) 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 separate figures reported for men and women, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. Click here for a [chart](#) that 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 buses, cars and vans with a minimum number of passengers."

"Have you ever heard of these HOV lanes?" [DR8]

	Yes	No/Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	83%	17%	100%	(569)
PAST SURVEYS				
February, 1998	80%	20%	100%	(583)

Note: Those not having heard about HOV lanes in September, 1998 (DR8) and February, 1998 (HV1) 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?" [DR9]

	Every day	A few times a week	Less often	Don't use them	Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	11%	12%	48%	26%	2%	99%	(494)
PAST SURVEYS							
February, 1998	17%	14%	49%	19%	1%	100%	(495)

"Do you think these HOV lanes are a good idea or a bad idea?" [DR10]

	Good Idea	Bad Idea	No opinion	Total	(n)
September, 1998	54%	38%	8%	100%	(494)
Weekly Users	51%	48%	1%	100%	(122)
PAST SURVEYS					
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?" [DR11]

	Have	Have not	Don't know/Not sure	Total	(n)
September, 1998	15%	48%	37%	100%	(494)
Weekly Users	16%	67%	18%	101%	(122)
PAST SURVEYS					
February, 1998	19%	37%	44%	100%	(495)
Weekly Users	20%	54%	26%	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?" [DR12]

	Keep as now	Open up to all	Don't know/no opinion	Total	(n)
September, 1998	27%	65%	8%	100%	(680)
Weekly Users	29%	64%	7%	100%	(122)
PAST SURVEYS					
February, 1998	40%	51%	8%	99%	(495)
Weekly Users	36%	59%	6%	101%	(148)