

# The Star-Ledger/**Eagleton-Rutgers Poll**

June 23, 2002  
(Release 137-5)

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Sunday, June 23 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll.*"

## **NEW JERSEY E-ZPASS – THOSE WHO USE IT LOVE IT** *But Budget Problems are Taking Their Toll*

With E-ZPass in New Jersey, familiarity breeds satisfaction. Garden State drivers with E-ZPass view the system as a big success, both in general and in their own experiences. More than three-quarters of E-ZPass drivers classify the system as a success, and nearly as many say they are "very satisfied" with the way E-ZPass has worked for them personally. At the same time, however, drivers who do not use E-ZPass are more likely to dub the system a failure.

According to the *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll*, news accounts of E-ZPass' budget problems may be damaging the system's public image. Fifty-eight percent of New Jersey adults report having heard or read at least some news about the system's budget problems, and among them opinions of the system's performance are evenly divided – 45 percent call the system a success while another 45 percent call it a failure.

The poll also finds that residents are only willing to go so far to help solve the system's budget problems. They disapprove of ideas like raising state highway tolls or bailing the system out with state funds, and they are divided over whether to use surplus Turnpike funds. But they do support a proposal to remove E-ZPass discounts on the Garden State Parkway.

The *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* was conducted by telephone June 5 - 9, among a scientifically selected random sample of 801 New Jersey adults. The margin of sampling error for the survey is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

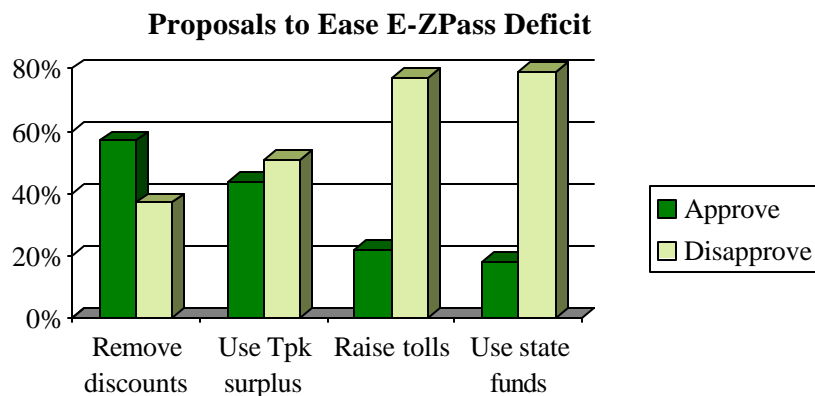
Overall, 51 percent of New Jersey adults say the E-ZPass system in New Jersey has generally been a success – 30 percent call it a "big success" and 21 percent a "small success." Just over one-third of New Jerseyans believe the system has been a failure, including 23 percent who call it a "big failure." Opinions of the system are strongly related to its usage. Among regular drivers who use E-ZPass, 54 percent call it a "big success" and another 23 percent call it

a “small success.” Only 19 percent of those who use E-ZPass think the system has generally been a failure. But among drivers who do not use E-ZPass, opinions of the system are negative. Roughly half – 48 percent – of non-E-ZPass drivers call the system a failure, while only 36 percent think it has been a success.

The system’s well-publicized budget deficit could be part of the problem. Fifty-eight percent of those who have heard little or nothing about the budget problems call the system a success, compared to only 45 percent of those who have heard or read “a lot” or “some” about the problem.

“E-ZPass has been in the news a lot recently, and none of it has been good” comments Monika McDermott, interim director of the Rutgers-based poll. “This is clearly affecting residents’ opinions of the system. But at the same time, it’s instructive to note that those who are the most familiar with the system – drivers who use E-ZPass – are extremely positive. Despite the budget problems, the system is a big success to those who use it.”

When it comes to solving the system’s budget deficit, residents support the proposal of removing E-ZPass discounts on the Garden State Parkway, but oppose some other possible remedies. Fifty-seven percent of Garden Staters approve of removing the Parkway discount while 37 percent disapprove. Even 53 percent E-ZPass users approve of removing the discount, as do 62 percent of drivers without E-ZPass. Residents disapprove, however, of either raising tolls on state highways or taking state funds from other programs to help ease the system’s budget crunch. Seventy-seven percent disapprove of raising highway tolls and 79 percent disapprove of using state government funds.



Residents divide over whether to use surplus Turnpike funds – earmarked for improving and maintaining that roadway – to help close the E-ZPass gap. Forty-four percent of residents

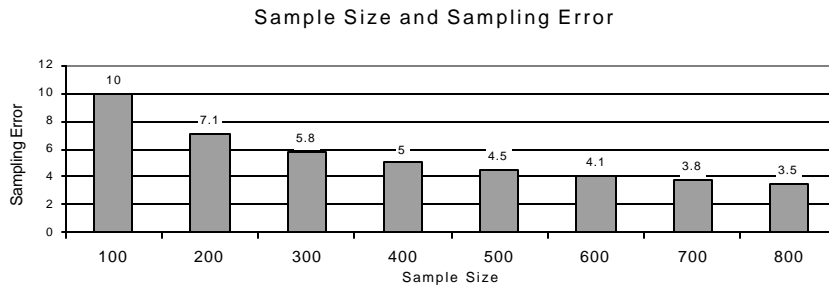
approve of using Turnpike funds, but 51 percent disapprove. E-ZPass drivers are open to the idea – 55 percent approve – but drivers without E-ZPass disapprove of it by 58 percent to 38 percent.

E-ZPass users' personal experiences with the system are rated very highly. Seventy-one percent of E-ZPass users say they have been "very satisfied" with the way the system has worked for them. Another 17 percent say they are "somewhat satisfied" with the system. Only 11 percent of E-ZPass drivers in New Jersey are unsatisfied with the way the system has worked for them.

Despite these high ratings, E-ZPass users lend some credence to the systems' reputation for issuing false violations. Thirty-nine percent of E-ZPass users report having received at least one penalty letter from E-ZPass at some time, and over half of these drivers say they have received more than one penalty letter in the past year. Among those who have ever received a penalty letter, 71 percent blame their most recent penalty on a malfunction of the E-ZPass system. Only one-quarter of those receiving penalty letters feel that their most recent letter was a result of something they had done.

**BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP137-5) June 23, 2002**

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers* Poll was conducted by telephone from June 5 to June 9 with a scientifically selected random sample of 801 New Jersey adults. 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 is  $\pm 3.5$  percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey residents said E-ZPass was a big success, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.5 and 53.5 percent ( $50 \pm 3.5$ ) had all New Jersey residents 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 E-ZPass users, 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 is 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. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

Would you say the E-ZPass [EEE – ZEE - Pass] system on New Jersey’s toll highways has generally been a success or a failure? IF SUCCESS OR FAILURE: Is that a big [success/failure] or a small [success/failure]? [EZ1]

	<u>Big Success</u>	<u>Small Success</u>	<u>Small Failure</u>	<u>Big Failure</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>June 2002</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<u>Drivers</u>							
-- with E-ZPass	54	23	6	13	4	100	(309)
-- without E-ZPass	16	20	15	33	15	99	(411)
<u>Heard/read about problems [QE22]</u>							
-- a lot/some	24	21	13	32	10	100	(501)
-- not much/none	37	21	10	12	19	99	(291)

How much have you heard or read about current budget problems with the New Jersey E-ZPass system – a lot, some, not much, or nothing at all? [EZ2]

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Nothing at All</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>June 2002</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<u>Drivers</u>							
-- with E-ZPass	29	37	19	13	1	99	(309)
-- without E-ZPass	20	40	22	17	1	100	(411)

As you may have heard, the E-ZPass system, which was designed to be self-financing, is facing a budget deficit of up to four hundred and sixty-nine MILLION dollars over the next 5 years. I am going to read you some possible ways for the system to make up the budget deficit. For each one, please tell me whether you would approve or disapprove of it as a way to help close the E-ZPass deficit. Would you approve or disapprove of [RANDOMIZE: A. Raising state highway tolls for all drivers, B. Removing the E-ZPass discounts drivers currently receive on the Garden State Parkway, C. Taking state government funds from other programs, D. Using surplus money originally targeted for improving and maintaining the Turnpike] to help close the E-ZPass budget deficit? [EZ3]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>June 2002</b>					
<b><u>Raise Tolls</u></b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<i><u>Drivers</u></i>					
-- with E-ZPass	29	71	--	100	(309)
-- without E-ZPass	16	83	1	100	(411)
<b><u>Remove Pkwy Discounts</u></b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<i><u>Drivers</u></i>					
-- with E-ZPass	53	45	2	100	(309)
-- without E-ZPass	62	31	6	99	(411)
<b><u>Take Other State Funds</u></b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<i><u>Drivers</u></i>					
-- with E-ZPass	23	74	2	99	(309)
-- without E-ZPass	15	82	3	100	(411)
<b><u>Use Turnpike Surplus</u></b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<i><u>Drivers</u></i>					
-- with E-ZPass	55	44	1	100	(309)
-- without E-ZPass	38	58	4	100	(411)

Do you regularly drive a car? [EZ4]

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>June 2002</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(801)</b>

**ASKED OF THOSE WHO REGULARLY DRIVE:**

Do you have E-Z Pass on any of the cars you drive? [EZ5]

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>June 2002</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(720)</b>

**ASKED OF THOSE WHO HAVE E-ZPASS:**

How often would you say you use E-Z Pass – daily, a few times a week, about once a week, about once or twice a month, or less than that? [EZ6]

	<u>Daily</u>	<u>Few X week</u>	<u>Once a week</u>	<u>1-2 X month</u>	<u>&lt; Once a month</u>	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	33%	31%	18%	15%	2%	1%	--	100%	(309)

**ASKED OF THOSE WHO USE E-ZPASS:**

Have you been satisfied or unsatisfied with the way the E-Z Pass system has worked for you – [IF SATISFIED OR UNSATISFIED]: Is that very, or somewhat? [EZ7]

	<u>Very satisfied</u>	<u>Somewhat satisfied</u>	<u>Somewhat unsatisfied</u>	<u>Very unsatisfied</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	71%	17%	5%	6%	--	99%	(307)

Have you ever received a penalty letter from E-Z Pass? [EZ8]

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	39%	61%	--	100%	(307)

**QEZ9 – QEZ10 ASKED OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED AT LEAST ONE PENALTY LETTER**

About how many penalty letters would you say you have received in the past year? [EZ9]

	<u>One</u>	<u>2 to 10</u>	<u>11 to 20</u>	<u>21 or more</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	43%	40%	9%	7%	1%	100%	(127)

And was your [most recent] penalty letter a result of something you had done, or was it a malfunction in the system? [EZ10]

	<u>Something I did</u>	<u>Malfunction of system</u>	<u>Both (vol.)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	25%	71%	2%	2%	100%	(127)