

Traffic survey shines light on commuting habits, public transit use

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If you've found yourself thinking that roads in Collier County are congested and that you spend a lot of your daily commute stuck in traffic, you're not alone.

An online survey on traffic congestion, commissioned by the Collier Metropolitan Planning Organization earlier this year, confirms what many residents already know to be true: Traffic can be a hassle on Collier's roads, especially during season.

The survey — which garnered 2,760 responses, mostly from Collier full-time residents, between Feb. 15 and March 15 — paints a picture of a county that still overwhelmingly relies on individuals driving themselves, many of them reporting that they spend more than an hour in their car on a typical weekday.



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A vast majority also said they don't feel they have options for commuting to work other than driving alone.

The survey is part of a larger study to assess the situation in Collier and to help prioritize projects, said Brandy Otero, principal planner for the Collier MPO. The study costs \$157,485 and began in late November. Its expected end date is Sept. 30, Otero said.

She said the survey results bore out largely what one would expect to see.

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"They attributed congestion to season, which is not surprising," Otero said. "They also attributed congestion to growth, which again is not very surprising."

Still, the survey, Otero said, is important because it is part of the public involvement process. It also helps officials pinpoint areas where residents see the most issues.

"It was important to us to have them tell us where they experience congestion to make sure that we're going out and looking at all the right spots," Otero said. "Obviously you can't collect data on every single road so you want to make sure that you're hitting all the right locations."

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The roads mentioned the most in survey responses were Interstate 75, Immokalee Road and Collier Boulevard, she said.

Among the survey's findings:

- Close to 65% of respondents rated Collier's roadways as "highly congested" while about 32% said roads were "moderately congested" and only about 3% categorized them as "slightly congested." Less than 1% said the roads were "not at all congested."
- More than 95% of respondents who work and do not work from home travel to work by driving alone.
- More than half of respondents who work and do not work from home leave for work between 7 and 8:30 a.m. and the most common commute time was "35 minutes or more," the highest option.
- Nearly half of respondents said they spend "70 minutes or more," again the highest option, driving on an average weekday, and nearly 20% reported spending that same amount of time driving in traffic congestion.
- Asked about the three most significant causes of traffic congestion in Collier, nearly 76% selected seasonal traffic from visitors as one of their three answers, 46% picked "inadequate roadway capacity" and about 33% chose "ineffective traffic signals/poor signal coordination."
- When asked to pick three preferred strategies for reducing traffic congestion, "improving signal coordination" and "improving intersections" — for instance, adding turn lanes or interchanges — were each selected by more than half of respondents, with about 53% and 58%, respectively. Nearly one quarter chose "connecting neighboring communities" as one of their answers.
- Almost 90% of respondents feel that they do not currently have options for commuting to work other than driving alone, but some 35% said they would be willing to use an alternative mode of transportation — other than driving by themselves — for getting to and from work if the options were available.
- Among those who said they would use an alternative commuting option if available, about 57% picked public transportation/transit, like buses and shuttles. About 44% selected telecommute/work from home, and close to 41% chose flexible work schedules outside of typical hours. Bicycle and carpool/vanpool were each selected by just over one quarter of survey respondents who answered that question. (Respondents were asked to select all the options they would consider.)
- Close to half — 47% — of respondents said they would be willing to use an alternative mode of transportation for commuting to and from work if their employer made them available or provided incentives to use them.
- Close to two-thirds of respondents were between the ages of 35 and 64.

For public transit officials with the county, the survey results indicate that more residents may take advantage of buses if they were to run more frequently.

Michelle Arnold, the county's director of public transit and neighborhood enhancement, said the survey seems to show that what is being provided is not

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