

Organizational Results Research Report

November 2007
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Qualitative Assessment of Customer Satisfaction in the Kansas City Area

** Better*
no longer waiting
more services to use
Provides added benefit

Prepared by Heartland
Market Research and
Missouri Department
of Transportation

FINAL REPORT

RI07-009

**Qualitative Assessment of Factors Related to
Customer Satisfaction with MoDOT
in the Kansas City Area**

Prepared for the
Missouri Department of Transportation
Organizational Results

by
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The opinions, findings and conclusions expressed in this report are those of the principle investigators and the Missouri Department of Transportation. They are not necessarily those of the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration. This report does not constitute a standard, specification or regulation.

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16. Abstract <p>Five focus groups were selected to obtain a broad representation of views from District Four (Kansas City Area) residents. The qualitative results obtained from these focus groups will aid in the development of a quantitative research study that will provide statistical evidence for supporting or eliminating reasons for the satisfaction discrepancy between Kansas City Area residents and other Missouri residents. This research also identified other factors that potentially affected how satisfied District Four residents were with MoDOT. Additional findings are also discussed.</p>			
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Executive Summary

Five focus groups were selected to obtain a broad representation of views from District Four (Kansas City Area) residents. The qualitative results obtained from these focus groups will aid in the development of a quantitative research study that will provide statistical evidence for supporting or eliminating reasons for the satisfaction discrepancy between District Four residents and other Missouri residents.

While the personalities of the five groups were quite distinct from each other excepting a great similarity between the two rural groups, two points were almost universal among all five focus groups.

- Almost every person thought Kansas roads were better than Missouri roads. The few who did not hold this opinion did not disagree with it, they just were not familiar with Kansas roads.
- Very few people understood which roads were the responsibility of MoDOT and which roads were not. Many people thought MoDOT was responsible for all roads in Missouri. Each member of the "inner city" focus group believed MoDOT was responsible for every road in Kansas City.

This research also identified other factors that potentially affected how satisfied District Four residents were with MoDOT. These factors include a perception that MoDOT initiated too many simultaneous projects in close proximity, changes in area road quality, and how the media portrayed MoDOT. In addition, the inner city group had some unique factors that could be influencing how satisfied they were with MoDOT.

The inner city group felt that their community was largely ignored by MoDOT. They thought MoDOT should hire more people from within the inner city. However, their comments were not negative. The entire inner city group was very appreciative of MoDOT's efforts to reach out to them via the focus group and this study positively affected the group's perception of MoDOT. This was generally true of all the groups, but the affect was noticeably stronger with the inner city group.



Another consistent finding of this research is that Missourians have very high expectations of MoDOT. They feel MoDOT fails to meet their expectations when it takes too long, in their perspective, for needed road improvements to be made. In addition, Missourians believe they pay more in total state taxes than Kansans, yet believe Kansas roads are better. While much of this is outside of MoDOT's control, it appears to be a factor in forming Missourian opinion about MoDOT.

If some or all of these findings are supported by the quantitative research, they may explain much of the variance between District Four and the other Districts.

Another important finding that may impact future satisfaction with MoDOT came from the rural groups. Both the satisfied and dissatisfied rural focus group participants had the strong belief that MoDOT used Amendment 3 money to tackle the more populated areas first. As far as they are concerned, the clock is ticking for MoDOT to start substantial efforts to make the rural roads safer and better. If this is done, the dissatisfied folks said they would then be satisfied.

Likewise, if it is not done soon, the rural people who are currently satisfied with MoDOT will start becoming dissatisfied. According to these findings, the main difference between the rural dissatisfied and the rural satisfied is their level of patience for when MoDOT will start making the rural roads a priority.

Drawing upon the focus group research, discussions were then held with MoDOT stakeholders to determine what questions should be asked of citizens during the quantitative research phase. A copy of the proposed questionnaire appears at the end of this report.



Background

Historically, residents in District Four have rated MoDOT lower than residents in other Districts for reasons that remain uncertain. In discussions held between MoDOT personnel from District Four, MoDOT's Central Office, and Heartland Market Research, several research questions were raised as possible explanations. It was determined to conduct focus groups to gain input that would help support or dismiss these possibilities. These qualitative results will aid in the development of a quantitative research study that will provide statistical evidence for supporting or eliminating reasons for the satisfaction discrepancy between District Four residents and other Missouri residents. This quantitative study will utilize a survey which will be largely based upon the results of this focus group study project.

Five Focus Groups

In collaboration with the MoDOT stakeholders, it was decided to conduct focus groups from five distinct parts of the District. As shown in Figure 1, these parts were selected to help obtain a representative sample of opinions from District Four residents.

Nickname	Location	Date	Participants
Rural Group 1	Ray County Library	August 23	4
Rural Group 2	Henry County Library	August 24	5
Suburban	Lee's Summit (D4 building)	September 13	6
Urban	Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary	September 14	4
Inner City	Bruce Watkins Cultural Center	September 15	4



Figure 1: Location of Five Focus Groups



Research Questions

In discussions held between MoDOT personnel from District Four, MoDOT's Central Office, and Heartland Market Research, multiple research questions were raised as possible explanations as to why residents in District Four have historically rated MoDOT lower than residents in other Districts. The primary purpose of the focus groups was to gain input that would help support or dismiss these possibilities for consideration in the mail survey.

Q1. Does Location Matter?

Location seemed to be a significant factor for almost every response. The two rural groups (Richmond and Clinton) had similar attitudes and expressed the concern that the rural roads were not receiving the attention they needed. The other three groups were more cynical, yet different from each other. For example, the inner city group thought MoDOT should hire more people, especially minorities, to complete the projects while the Suburban group (Lee's Summit) thought MoDOT should use more subcontractors. Since location was so closely tied to response variance, it is recommended that the survey ask for both the residential and work zip code of the respondents.

Q2. Does the Proximity of Kansas Matter?

Yes - This was one of two strongest findings from the five focus group discussions. Almost every person thought Kansas roads were better than Missouri roads. The few who did not hold this opinion did not disagree with it, they just were not familiar with Kansas roads. Based upon these results, it is highly recommended that this issue be asked in the survey.

Q3. Are People Confusing City, County, and State Roads?

Yes – This was the other very strong finding from the five focus groups. Very few people understood which roads were the responsibility of MoDOT and which roads were not. Many people thought MoDOT was responsible for all roads in Missouri. The "inner city" focus group believed MoDOT was responsible for the roads in Kansas City. Based upon these results, it is highly recommended that this issue be asked in the survey.



Q4. Have Respondents Been Influenced by Specific Projects?

This question was asked because of the hypothesis that residents still remembered a few MoDOT projects from years ago that ran into major problems. This did not appear to be the case. With two exceptions, the only negative feelings toward projects were projects that had not taken place. In other words, people were frustrated by the poor conditions of many roads that needed projects. However, there were two exceptions to this.

The first exception came from the two Kansas City groups. While they did not complain about a single project, they had vast complaints about the organization of a series of projects. From their perspective, the projects took place with no consideration of other projects. If project A caused a traffic detour, it seemed that Project B then appeared in the middle of the detour. The Kansas City residents were very concerned about having too many simultaneous projects in close proximity to each other.

The second exception came from the Suburban group (Lee's Summit) concerning the Triangle construction project. The group consensus was that the original design was very flawed and all were cynical about the effectiveness of the current project. Some thought there would be no change after project was finished and others thought that there would only be a minor improvement.

The results from the five focus groups did not find any support for the hypothesis that previous project history was impacting respondents' satisfaction with MoDOT. However, if there is space on the survey, it may be useful to ask about people's perceptions of too many projects in close proximity.



Q5. What is the Impact of Recent Construction?

Other than the previously described desire for better planning of multiple simultaneous projects, the impact of recent construction was almost completely positive. The two exceptions came from the same individual. He thought that MoDOT was skimping money by installing wire guards on the interstates instead of guard rails and that installing mile markers every tenth of a mile was a waste of time and money.

All the other participants were glad to see the improvements in their roads, including the rural groups who were glad Missouri was investing in their roads again even if the rural roads had not yet benefitted from Amendment 3.

Q6. Have People Noticed Differences in Road Quality in Their Area?

While Amendment 3 was not directly asked as part of this question, all of the groups brought this into their answer. All five groups thought the roads were in poor shape before the passage of Amendment 3. After the passage of Amendment 3, the results of this question varied with group location. While all groups could think of at least one recent project in their driving area, the responses of the two rural districts were much different than the response from the other three groups. The members of the two rural groups thought road quality in their area had continued to decline since Amendment 3 passed, but most of them were not upset by this. They believed that MoDOT was simply prioritizing and hitting the busiest roads first and these people confidently expected that MoDOT would start working on the rural roads soon now that they have had years to work on the urban roads and interstates. The other three groups had definitely noticed a big improvement in many roads since the passage of Amendment 3. Interestingly enough, a few well-traveled folks from these other three groups echoed the concern that the rural roads needed improvement.

Despite a few exceptions (e.g. a rural respondent who said he was satisfied with MoDOT despite believing local rural roads were declining in quality while MoDOT concentrated on the urban areas), there appeared to be a correlation between noticing positive changes in area road quality and satisfaction with MoDOT. It is recommended that this be part of the survey.



Q7. How Has the Media Portrayed MoDOT?

Most respondents thought the media portrayal of MoDOT tended to neutral or positive, when the respondents were aware of media coverage other than traffic updates. However, this was the one case where the rural groups were more cynical than the other three groups. The rural groups tended to believe that the media usually portrayed MoDOT in a negative light. One explanation for this finding is that the average age of the rural groups appeared to be much older than the average age of the other groups and these were the people who tended to watch the evening television news on a regular basis. For example, in the Suburban group, only one person understood that MoDOT was ever in the news other than traffic reports.

Based upon the results of the focus group, it is recommended that this issue be addressed in the survey via another means. Instead of asking how MoDOT is portrayed in the media, we should ask people how often they watch the evening local news and how often they read the local paper. We can then analyze the results for positive or negative correlations.

Q8. Have They Had Personal Contact with MoDOT?

The reasoning behind this question was to understand how personal contact with MoDOT may have influenced a person's satisfaction with MoDOT.

Only two people in the focus groups had had personal contact with MoDOT. One of these was direct – a woman had been aided by MoDOT's Motorist Assist program. She thought the program was great but wished there was a way to call the operators. The second contact was indirect. One of the men had previous done some road construction work for a firm that had a MoDOT contract. Both had positive things to say about MoDOT, but thought there was room for improvement. In this, they reflected the general consensus of the five groups.

Given that the two people who had contact with MoDOT had similar impressions of MoDOT as the other respondents and given that asking about the type of contact would consume much of the survey space, it is recommended that this question not be on the survey.



Q9. What Do People Like about MoDOT and the Road System?

Questions 9 and 10 were asked via two open ended questions on a paper survey completed by respondents before the focus group started. This was done to ensure their answers were not affected by the focus group discussion. Some people were uncomfortable with writing and did not elect to participate in this part of the research. Others elected only to answer either the “Like” or “Dislike” question and skipped the other one. The results of those that participated have been segmented by focus group.

Rural Group 1 (Ray County)

I know there are many roads and probably never enough money or people to take care of them properly. Therein lies the problem. Our highways other than large cities need much improvement and this seems to never get done. All our rural state roads are very much in need of resurfacing. I do think MoDOT does a super job in inclement weather clearing the highways in a timely manner. Also mowing crews seem to keep up with keeping highways mowed and cleaned of trash. All in all I think they do a good job but much more attention is needed to make our rural roads safer by having new surfaces.

I appreciate the control of the traffic. I have never been stopped except for license checks. My husband drives a truck all over the roads and he has always been treated well. We have our own truck and try to keep up with the regulations and abide by the rules.

I like the way they kept 210 up so far. They need to remember 10, it needs work and upkeep. I travel both. During the winter months, 10 could be better. There should be more road sign especially for deer. The white strip for fog.

Road workers tend to be very courteous, even friendly. Most arterial roads are in outstanding shape. There doesn't seem to be much traffic congestion. I am a big fan of our metro highway system. Speed limits are always very fair. Not an overabundant number of traffic lights. Well marked hazards/obstructions (e.g., mowers, men at work, etc.). Well marked signage - I rarely need to use directions. For all the hills down here, rarely do you need to over incline.



Rural Group 2 (Henry County)

I think MoDOT is starting to do a very good job on the roads. I think the cable system is good. Equipment looks nice.

Driving the winter months - they seem to clear the roads pretty early after a snow/ice storm. The safety of the workers seems to be a top priority. That's very important to me. The new trucks with the "bumper" system is good. The roads seem to be maintained - mowing - signs visible - turn lanes marked well.

They are always striving to improve our roadways.

Four-laning of roads that traveled more - such as 7 Highway and 13 South of Clinton.

Suburban Group (Lee's Summit)

Don't know a whole lot about MoDOT except for what I see on the roads.

Depending on condition of roads, repairs are done in a reasonable amount of time.

Urban Group (Kansas City)

The interstates and interstate highways seem to carry the most importance and I feel are well maintained. If there is roadway work being performed, signs indicating the roadwork are put out well in advance and precautionary warnings about workers are posted.

Since I am fairly new to the State of Missouri, I cannot judge too highly on the road system. The road system around my apartment in Northern Kansas City is satisfying. I rarely have to worry about traffic conditions or road construction. I do have a concern for some roads that run through main streets. Most of them branch off from one lane to two lanes frequently, but I have noticed they are working on adding more lanes to these roads.



