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**Gas costs top healthcare, taxes in regional concern
Commuter Services poll shows impact on budgets and job choice**

York, Pa. – When asked to name the single most important problem facing them daily, regional commuters cite rising gasoline prices over healthcare or taxes. Gas costs are a factor not only in household budgets, but in job choices, although few regional employers help workers with the problem.

A poll just conducted by Commuter Services of South Central Pennsylvania reveals rarely seen nearly unanimous or overwhelming agreement on several issues related to gasoline costs and traffic congestion.

When it comes to battling traffic congestion, commuter alternatives (such as carpools and transit) get very strong public support over options like highway construction.

Many who drive alone would switch if they had more options, could overcome barriers or knew of resources, such as the region's Commuter Services programs. There is a hard core minority, however, who would not switch no matter what.

The poll reveals widespread support for more alternatives, as well as for investment of public dollars to promote them.

This is the first such public opinion poll on these issues in the region, which includes Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry and York counties, where Commuter Services provides its free congestion reduction programs.

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Gasoline Prices:

Gas prices are of almost universal concern.

Asked about their most important household problem, 17 percent say it is gas and energy prices, which is mentioned twice as much as either healthcare or economic issues and three times as often as taxes. When asked to rate their level of concern, 97 percent say they are very or somewhat concerned about the increase in gasoline costs.

Four families out of 10 make sacrifices in other household necessities to meet the rising cost of their commute. Nearly 30 percent said that the rising gas cost has a significant impact, with 45 percent reporting a moderate impact.

More than 7 out of 10 responders (71 percent) say it is good public policy for government to invest in programs that promote commuter options.

Relieving traffic congestion:

The survey reveals little regional support for new highways as an alternative to address traffic congestion.

Nearly 90 percent are very or somewhat concerned about the increase in traffic congestion, but they don't prefer more roads to solve the problem. A whopping 92 percent think it is somewhat or very important to provide buses, light rail or train service to alleviate congestion, cut gas consumption and help the environment.

Increasing mass transit (favored by 54 percent) and promoting more use of commute options (favored by 47 percent) as solutions rank well above building new roads (14 percent) and expanding existing ones (34 percent). Only one in 10 favors a solution such as dedicated carpool lanes.

Job choice impacts:

Polling results may be a wake up call to regional employers as they compete for qualified workers in a region with relatively low unemployment.

Three in every 10 people report they considered changing jobs to reduce their commuting costs. Nearly seven in 10 consider these costs somewhat or very important in influencing their decision to accept a job.

Almost nine in 10 (89 percent) of those polled indicate there is no commuter "benefit" program at their work place, although a benefit program could be defined as something as simple as preferred carpool parking .

About one in four people telecommutes. Most who don't telecommute believe their employer does not permit telecommuting, although a recent national survey suggested employers may be offering this option, but failing to communicate the policy.

Commuting preferences:

There is a hard core of commuters (up to 40 percent) who would not consider alternatives, but the rest are open to options with some help.

In the poll, 85 percent said they drive alone. The majority interested in other options report major barriers: not having someone with whom to carpool (mentioned by 36 percent), no transit/train service (27 percent), along with shift work and unpredictable work schedules (20 percent).

Half of those polled would be more likely to use an alternative if they had a free, guaranteed ride home in emergencies, which Commuter Services already offers along with a confidential ridematching database.

If they were to switch, nearly half of the people are interested in carpooling with 19 percent preferring transit and 24 percent wanting to use a train. The later two preferences may be relatively equal given the survey's 4 percent margin of error.

Six in 10 people see the need for express bus service from their area to another town.

Four in 10 of those polled prefer the freedom and convenience of driving alone no matter how long the commute, its cost or consequences on the environment.

Current services:

Those who are aware of Capital Area Transit, rabbitransit, County of Lebanon Transit and Red Rose Transit (which are Commuter Services partners), Amtrak or Commuter Services itself have an overwhelmingly favorable opinion of these organizations.

About the poll:

The poll was conducted exclusively among residents in Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry and York counties who work full or part time. The poll was conducted by Susquehanna Polling & Research at the end of October/early November: 600 interviews were conducted with a margin of error of + or - 4 percent.

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About Commuter Services of South Central Pennsylvania:

Call 1-866-579-RIDE or visit www.PaCommuterServices.com

Commuter Services is a program of the non-profit Susquehanna Regional Transportation Partnership, whose board includes the Harrisburg Regional Chamber; the Gettysburg Adams, Lebanon Valley and York County Chambers of Commerce; Lancaster Chamber of Commerce & Industry; Adams County Transit Authority (ACTA); County of Lebanon Transit Authority (COLT); Red Rose Transit Authority (Lancaster); York County Transportation Authority (rabbitransit); Capital Area Transit (CAT, Cumberland-Dauphin-Harrisburg); the Lancaster, Lebanon and York metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs); Harrisburg MPO (Cumberland, Dauphin and Perry counties) and Adams Rural Planning Organization (RPO). Funding is provided by the Federal Highway Administration, PennDOT and the PA Department of Environmental Protection.