CROSS-COUNTY METROLINK EXTENSION
PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

The public opinion survey provides insight into the perceptions of individuals living close to the proposed alignment who might not otherwise be engaged in the planning and design process for Segment I of the Cross-County extension. The survey results will help the Engagement Consultants understand the nature of the community's concerns regarding the extension and various design ideas and alternatives.

Background

In May 1998, Attitude Research Company conducted a telephone survey to test attitudes toward possible MetroLink expansion. The purpose of the survey was to determine the level of support for the extension, to understand why people supported or did not support the extension, and to help planners understand public opinion about various design features.

Five hundred (500) people were selected from the vicinity of the proposed extension to participate in the survey, yielding an overall margin of error for the survey of 4.4%. Specifically, the sample included 100 respondents each from the City of St. Louis, University City, and Clayton, 101 from Maplewood, 49 from Richmond Heights, and 50 from Brentwood. In the larger municipalities the geographic area was further limited: For instance, in University City no one who lives north of Vernon was called. These geographic limits were chosen to ensure that the majority of respondents lived within one half mile of the proposed extension, and that no one was called who lived more than one mile from the extension.

Summary of Results

Survey participants were positive toward a MetroLink extension that would run along Forest Park Parkway from the Forest Park-DeBaliviere station to Clayton, and then south through Richmond Heights, Brentwood and Maplewood to I-44. A majority (87.8%) was in favor and only 10.6% opposed the extension.

If residents could walk to the MetroLink station, they would be even more likely to favor the extension. Three-fourths (76.8%) of respondents said they would be "much more" or "somewhat more" likely to support the proposal if MetroLink was in close proximity to their home.

Although a majority of residents never (47.4%) or rarely (21.0%) use MetroLink, 65.6% feel the proposed expansion would cause them to use MetroLink "much more" or "somewhat more often." Only one-third (32.0%) answered that the expansion would have little or no effect on their MetroLink usage.

Almost all respondents (94.0%) agreed that "MetroLink is an environmentally clean, safe, and efficient method of transportation" and "The St. Louis area should take pride in the success of the existing MetroLink system" (94.0%). The same percentage (94.0%) also agreed that MetroLink should link commuters to employment centers in Clayton, downtown St. Louis, and the airport.

Regarding the potential negative affects of an extension along the proposed alignment, most (80.2%) residents disagreed that MetroLink will increase crime in their neighborhood, and 70.0% said they did not worry that there would be too much noise from the trains if MetroLink came through their neighborhood.

Many design alternatives will be analyzed for the extension, including whether or not trains should run at street-level, in a tunnel, or in an open trench below street level. Respondents were read a list of features that would be involved in building a MetroLink extension in a tunnel under the street. The cost of tunneling and the fact that this may delay building the full extension to I-44 were seen as negatives by respondents. The length of time it would take to dig the tunnel, build the rail line, and then rebuild the street above as well as how it may disrupt the area, were also seen as negatives.

The most positive feature of an underground tunnel to respondents is that, once completed, it would be the quietest option. The fact that the tunnel will cause little or no disruption to the businesses or homes nearby once in place was also well liked.

The same process of questions was repeated for features of building the extension at street level. Survey participants were most responsive to the fact that building at street level may be the least disruptive and least expensive alternative. Residents also responded positively to the statement, "a street-level track would give riders a more pleasant view than either riding in a tunnel or in an open trench." Finally, the fact that the light-rail train may be quieter than bus traffic and similar to automobile traffic was also seen as a positive.

The only feature regarding a street level extension that was viewed as a negative was that the train, running on or along the street, might cause some disruption of automobile traffic.

When reading various features for building the light rail in an open trench, respondents were comparatively more negative about most of the features. The fact that adjacent properties might have to be purchased was a negative for over half of the survey participants. "The walls of the trench will block riders' views of surrounding neighborhoods" was also very negative in the minds of respondents.

In commercial areas, survey participants preferred the extension to be built at street-level (59.6%) rather than in a tunnel (26.4%) or in an open trench (9.4%). Of the respondents that preferred a tunnel, most would be willing to pay higher taxes in order to build the tunnels.

When asked about residential areas, a plurality preferred a street-level extension. Fewer than half (41.8%) favored a street level extension and 35.8% felt a tunnel would be the best option for residential areas. A smaller number (17.6%) preferred an open trench. Of those respondents who preferred a tunnel, three-fourths would pay higher taxes to help pay the added expense.

Respondents were then read a list of statements in favor of the MetroLink expansion. All of these statements struck a chord, and "The expansion of MetroLink should be encouraged because it is an environmentally friendly way to get around St. Louis" was considered "very" or "moderately" persuasive by nine out of ten (92.0%) respondents. The fact that the light rail service, going through downtown Clayton, near the U. City Loop, and through the Central West End, will enhance economic development and make these areas more attractive to shoppers and diners was considered positively by 86.6% of respondents.

The above procedure was repeated with statements in opposition to the expansion. Most were considered not very persuasive. The statement, "People will drive to the MetroLink stops even if they don't have any Park and Ride facilities, parking on residential streets and disrupting the neighborhoods," garnered the most support: 45.5% said this was a "very" or "moderately" persuasive argument against expanding MetroLink.

At the end of the survey, when asked to reconsider the possible expansion after learning more facts about the expansion, respondents continued to be supportive of the proposal. Almost nine of ten (86.6%) favored the expansion compared to only 11.4% who opposed it.

OVERVIEW OF DATA

Attitude Research Company developed and administered a survey designed to test attitudes toward a possible MetroLink expansion. This report presents the responses of 500 residents of the St. Louis metropolitan area, yielding a margin of error of plus or minus 4.4%.

I. Direction of County and Area

As warm-up questions, and to ascertain overall levels of optimism or pessimism in the population, respondents were asked if they thought things were headed in the right direction, or if they were off-track and headed in the wrong direction. We asked this question about both the St. Louis Metropolitan area, and the survey participant's local area. Some survey participants volunteered that they had mixed feelings.

Response	County	Local
Right direction	53.8%	80.8%
Mixed (VOL)*	18.2%	7.0%
Wrong	19.2%	9.2%
Other/Don't know	8.8%	3.0%

* (Volunteered opinion)

II. Public Issue Proposals

We then read respondents a list of proposals that have been made for the area. Respondents were asked whether they strongly favored, favored, lean favored, undecided, lean opposed, opposed or strongly opposed each proposal.

"First is a proposal for expanding Lambert-St. Louis International Airport by adding new runways, gates, and terminal space."

Response	Percent Responding
Strongly favor	19.2%
Favor	54.2%
Lean favor	3.6%
Undecided	3.4%
Lean oppose	1.2%
Oppose	10.6%
Strongly oppose	4.6%
Other/DK	3.2%
Total Favor	**77.0%**
Total Oppose	**16.4%**

"Second is a planned MetroLink extension that would run along Forest Park Parkway from the Forest Park/DeBaliviere station to Clayton, and then south through Richmond Heights, Brentwood and Maplewood to I-44. The extension would pass close to Washington University, the old Famous Barr Building in Clayton, and the County Government Center, the Galleria and the Promenade, and the Deer Creek Shopping Center on Big Bend."

Response	Percent Responding
Strongly favor	48.6%
Favor	37.6%
Lean favor	1.6%
Undecided	1.2%
Lean oppose	0.2%
Oppose	6.6%
Strongly oppose	3.8%
Other/DK	0.4%
Total Favor	**87.8%**
Total Oppose	**10.6%**

We then asked if respondents would be much more likely, somewhat more, somewhat less or much less likely to support the MetroLink proposal if they assumed that the rail line itself would run close to where they live.

Response	Percent Responding
Much more	36.0%
Somewhat more	34.8%
Some less	10.8%
Much less	8.2%
Other/don't know	10.2%

Respondents were next asked to assume the actual MetroLink station would be within walking distance of where they live. We questioned how this would effect their support?

Response	Percent Responding
Much more	44.2%
Somewhat more	32.6%
Some less	7.4%
Much less	8.6%
Other/don't know	7.2%

"How often do you use the existing MetroLink line?" Respondents were probed as to how many round trips they take on an "average" month.

Response	Percent Responding
None	47.4%
One trip	21.0%
Two to five	16.6%
Six to fifteen	6.0%
Sixteen and over	4.6%
Other/don't know	4.4%

"If the extensions were built like I described earlier — from Forest Park to Clayton and then south I-44 — what effect would that have on your future usage of light rail? Would you use MetroLink much more often, somewhat more, or would it not have much effect on your usage of the light rail system?"

Response	Percent Responding
Much more often	34.8%
Somewhat more	30.8%
Not much effect	32.0%
Other/don't know	2.4%

III. Statements about Public Issues

Respondents were asked to evaluate a series of statements about public issues. Note: the percentages in each row do not add to 100% because we do not report the percentage of respondents on each questions who answered that they “did not know.”

Statement	%Strongly Agree	%Mostly Agree	%Mostly Disagree	%Strongly Disagree
Economic development to create new jobs should be the top priority of local government.	27.6%	50.2%	15.8%	3.2%
People should be able to walk from their homes and places of work to light rail station.	38.2%	44.8%	12.0%	2.2%
The St. Louis area should take pride in the success of the existing MetroLink system.	59.8%	34.2%	4.0%	1.0%
Light rail should be built only if it runs on existing railroad right-of-ways, but not on the streets.	16.6%	25.0%	33.2%	14.4%
Extending the light rail system throughout the metro area is essential for economic development and the creation of new jobs.	34.6%	44.2%	14.6%	3.8%
MetroLink should run near existing residential neighborhoods.	29.2%	45.6%	15.2%	5.6%
MetroLink is an environmentally clean, safe, and efficient method of transportation.	58.2%	35.8%	2.0%	0.4%
Light rail is an expensive boondoggle that simply won’t work.	2.0%	3.0%	31.4%	59.4%
MetroLink should be designed to link commuters to employment centers in Clayton, downtown St. Louis, and the Airport.	56.2%	37.8%	3.8%	1.0%
I trust the municipal officials in my city to make the right decisions about MetroLink issues.	16.2%	40.6%	23.0%	13.4%

Statement	%Strongly Agree	%Mostly Agree	%Mostly Disagree	%Strongly Disagree
If MetroLink comes through my neighborhood, I'm afraid that we will face serious parking problems.	7.2%	16.4%	47.0%	24.4%
If MetroLink comes through my city, it will help improve residential property values.	15.6%	37.2%	22.8%	6.8%
If MetroLink comes through my neighborhood, I would worry about the noise from the trains.	7.8%	20.0%	45.6%	24.4%
If MetroLink comes through my city, it will help improve economic development.	30.0%	49.6%	12.6%	3.0%
Increased MetroLink service will result in less traffic congestion.	45.2%	42.0%	8.8%	1.8%
Noise and safety issues will hurt nearby residential neighborhoods too much to justify the regional benefit of the expansion.	4.0%	10.2%	44.8%	34.4%
I believe a MetroLink line will increase crime in the neighborhoods in which it is located.	3.8%	8.8%	41.0%	39.2%

IV. Specific Options for MetroLink

Respondents then evaluated some options being considered for the MetroLink line to connect Maplewood and downtown Clayton.

"Washington University would donate land on its campus for the right-of way, on the south side of Millbrook between Skinker and Big Bend."

Response	Percent Responding
Much more	36.8%
Somewhat more	44.8%
Somewhat less	4.6%
Much less	4.6%
Other/don't know	9.2%

"No homes or businesses would be taken to complete this MetroLink route."

Response	Percent Responding
Much more	52.8%
Somewhat more	35.2%
Somewhat less	4.6%
Much less	3.0%
Other/don't know	4.4%

"Parking lots or parking garages would be built only at the stations near the two highways — I-44 and Highway 40 (I-64). Parking restrictions would be enforced on residential streets."

Response	Percent Responding
Much more	51.0%
Somewhat more	35.0%
Somewhat less	8.4%
Much less	3.4%
Other/don't know	2.2%

"Stops would be positioned at I-44 in Shrewsbury, the Deer Creek Shopping Center, Manchester near Hanley, Hanley and Highway 40 (I-64), the County Government Center, the old Famous-Barr store, at Big Bend and Millbrook, and at Skinker and Forest Park Parkway."

Response	Percent Responding
Much more	47.0%
Somewhat more	40.0%
Somewhat less	6.2%
Much less	3.6%
Other/don't know	3.2%

After hearing the description of the planned extension, respondents were asked how far they live from the MetroLink line.

Response	Percent Responding
Couple of blocks	23.8%
Less than 1/2 mile	21.8%
1/2 to one mile	27.4%
One to two miles	17.2%
Two to three miles	5.2%
Three to five miles	3.2%
Other/don't know	1.4%

V. Features of Tunnels

Respondents were informed that an important design feature being considered is whether or not to build the MetroLink extension at street level, in a tunnel under the street, or in an open trench below the street if possible. Respondents were read a list of advantages and disadvantages of putting the MetroLink extensions in tunnels and were asked to indicate how positive or negative each feature is on a seven point scale with seven being very positive, four being neutral, and 1 being very negative.

Service	Very Positive 7	7-5	Neutral 4	3-1	Very Negative 1
Digging a tunnel, building the rail line, and then rebuilding the street above will take a long time and be very disruptive to the area while work is in progress.	8.6%	18.6%	26.2%	54.8%	32.4%
Once in place, a tunnel will cause virtually no disruption to the businesses or homes nearby the line.	45.0%	70.4%	17.2%	12.2%	7.6%
Given current funding levels, only half of the line could be built if we were to build it all underground.	7.0%	15.8%	25.8%	56.2%	29.2%
Safety features for a tunnel include adequate ventilation and escape hatches.	41.6%	66.0%	16.4%	17.0%	10.4%
A tunnel will be the quietest option.	46.0%	69.4%	18.0%	12.0%	8.0%

VI. Pros and Cons of Street-Level Light Rail

Using the same scale, respondents were asked to rate each advantage or disadvantage for building the extension at street level.

Service	Very Positive 7	7-5	Neutral 4	3-1	Very Negative 1
A street-level line will be the easiest, least expensive, and quickest option to build.	49.8%	76.8%	12.6%	10.2%	5.0%
A light-rail train running on or along a street will cause some disruption of automobile traffic.	14.0%	31.0%	27.4%	41.6%	13.4%
A light-rail train at street level will not be any louder than regular car traffic, and actually quieter than the existing bus traffic.	38.0%	70.8%	15.8%	12.6%	5.4%
A street-level line requires people to cross the tracks much like they have to cross the street.	21.2%	40.6%	29.2%	29.4%	12.0%
This option has been used successfully in other cities, such as Dallas, Boston, or Portland.	32.8%	56.2%	31.2%	7.6%	3.6%
A street-level track would give riders a more pleasant view than either riding in a tunnel or in an open trench.	48.6%	73.2%	18.6%	7.8%	4.0%
There is no fence or barrier, so the MetroLink is easily visible.	31.2%	54.4%	26.8%	18.2%	7.4%
Light rails running in or along streets travel more slowly than do those running underground or along separate right-of-ways.	18.2%	36.4%	31.8%	29.6%	7.6%

VII. Features of an Open Trench

Next, we read advantages and disadvantages of building the light rail in an open trench.

Service	Very Positive 7	7-5	Neutral 4	3-1	Very Negative 1
The trench option may require the purchase of adjacent properties.	5.4%	16.4%	27.4%	55.8%	27.0%
An open trench is less expensive to build than a tunnel, although considerably more expensive than building the extension at street level.	11.6%	33.4%	30.4%	35.6%	15.2%
An open trench will not run in the street like the street-level option.	15.4%	44.0%	33.6%	20.8%	11.2%
Safety concerns would require fences and barriers to keep people from falling into the trench.	26.4%	46.0%	18.2%	35.2%	16.6%
The walls of the trench will block riders' views of surrounding neighborhoods.	12.0%	23.4%	35.4%	40.4%	18.4%

VIII. Commercial Area

We then asked respondents which of the above three options they preferred for a commercial district — a tunnel, street-level tracks, or an open trench.

Response	Percent Responding
Tunnel	26.4%
Street-level	59.6%
Open trench	9.4%
Depends which commercial area (VOL)	1.8%
Other/don't know	2.8%

For those respondents who choose a tunnel, we asked if they would be willing to pay higher taxes in order to have MetroLink run underground through commercial areas in their city.

Response	Percent Responding
Yes	17.4%
No	7.4%
Not asked	73.2%
Other/don't know	2.0%

For those respondents who preferred an open trench, we asked if the open trench were not possible, would they prefer that the extension through commercial area be built in a tunnel or a street-level.

Response	Percent Responding
Tunnel	2.8%
Street-level	5.8%
Not asked	90.6%
Other/DK	0.8%

IX. Residential Area

"What about in a residential area? Of the three options discussed above — a tunnel, street-level tracks, or an open trench, which would you prefer for a residential neighborhood?"

Response	Percent Responding
Tunnel	35.8%
Street-level	41.8%
Open trench	17.6%
Depends which residential area (VOL)	0.6%
Other/DK	4.2%

For those who choose a tunnel we asked, *"Would you be willing to pay higher taxes in order to have the light rail running underground through residential areas in your city?"*

Response	Percent

	Responding
Yes	24.6%
No	8.4%
Not asked	64.2%
Other/DK	2.8%

For those who preferred an open-trench, we asked if that option were not available, would they prefer that the extension near the residential neighborhood be built in a tunnel or at street-level.

Response	Percent Responding
Tunnel	8.8%
Street level	8.4%
Not asked	81.8%
Other/DK	1.0%

X. Statements in Favor of Expansion

Respondents were then a list of statements made by people who are in favor of the plan for the MetroLink extension and were asked the persuasiveness of each statement.

Argument	Very persuasive	Moderately	Not very	Not at all persuasive
Light rail service will make areas like downtown Clayton, the U. City Loop, and the Central West End more attractive to shoppers and diners, and thus will enhance economic development in our area.	50.2%	36.4%	4.8%	7.0%
The expansion of MetroLink should be encouraged because it is an environmentally friendly way to get around St. Louis.	66.0%	26.0%	3.6%	3.8%
Increased MetroLink service would simply make life more convenient in our part of the metro area, and improve our quality of life.	54.8%	31.0%	8.6%	4.6%
Proximity to light rail stations has actually increased residential property values in other cities with systems similar to MetroLink. * Note: 10.8% “did not know”	37.4%	33.8%	9.0%	9.0%
This line is very important to my city, regardless of whether it is below ground or on the surface.	52.4%	30.4%	8.6%	5.8%

XI. Statements Against Expansion

We then repeated the procedure for statements opposing the proposal.

Argument	Very persuasive	Moderately	Not very	Not at all persuasive
Light rail will make it easier for outsiders to come to my area.	16.0%	25.0%	34.6%	22.8%
This proposed route runs too close to quiet, historic, residential areas, and it will drive down property values in those neighborhoods.	12.2%	21.2%	33.0%	30.4%
Trains running on the streets will create safety hazards and traffic gridlock.	12.4%	27.8%	32.4%	25.2%
People will drive to the MetroLink stops even if they don't have any Park and Ride facilities, parking on residential streets and disrupting the neighborhoods.	15.8%	29.6%	33.2%	19.6%
I want less development and activity near my neighborhood, not more of it.	13.4%	20.6%	31.2%	31.2%

XII. Reconsideration

Finally, after hearing many details of the proposed expansion of MetroLink we asked respondents their position on the light rail expansion.

Response	Percent Responding
Strong favor	52.2%
Favor	32.6%
Lean favor	1.8%
Undecided	1.4%
Lean oppose	1.2%
Oppose	6.0%
Strong oppose	4.2%
Other/don't know	0.6%
Total Favor	**86.6%**
Total Oppose	**11.4%**