National Poll: Americans Support Funding for Sidewalks and Bikeways

Bike lanes, bike paths, and sidewalks are resoundingly popular as bicycling continues to grow
Executive summary

As bicycling grows in popularity, gas prices soar, and Congress contemplates new transportation laws, a new survey finds that the overwhelming majority of Americans want to maintain or increase federal funding for biking and walking.

Princeton Survey Research Associates International asked a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults in the United States about their opinions on federal funding for sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths.

Participants were first asked to estimate what percentage of federal transportation funding is currently spent on sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths. Participants were then asked to say what percentage of transportation funds should be spent on biking and walking infrastructure.

Respondents then learned that less than 2 percent of transportation funding goes to sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths; 17 percent is used for public transportation; and 80 percent is used for roads and highways. Respondents were asked if the percentage that goes to biking and walking should increase, decrease, or stay about the same.

The results showed that 83 percent of respondents support maintaining or growing federal funding for sidewalks, bikeways, and bike paths.

More and more Americans are turning to biking for daily transportation. Americans took 4 billion bike trips in 2009, and the number of bicycle commuters has grown by 43 percent since 2000.

Currently, 1.5 percent of federal transportation spending funds sidewalks and bikeways. In contrast, biking and walking make up 12 percent of all trips, and bicyclists and pedestrians represent 14 percent of all traffic fatalities. Eliminating the tiny percentage of funding for bicycling and walking projects may worsen the existing discrepancy between funding, safety, and number of trips made by foot and bike.

The Princeton survey found:

- The vast majority of Americans — 83 percent — support maintaining or increasing federal funding for sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths.

- There is strong bipartisan support for sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths. Eighty percent of Republican respondents, 86 percent of Independent respondents, and 88 percent of Democrat respondents said Congress should maintain or increase federal funds for biking and walking.

- Support for maintaining or increasing funding for sidewalks and bikeways was consistently high among all surveyed demographics. Respondents reported support for biking and walking funding in all gender, age, income, and racial groups. Support was also high regardless of political identification, educational background, region, and community type.

1 Federal Highway Administration “National Bicycling and Walking Study: 15-Year Status Report”
2 2010 American Communities Survey, US Census Bureau
Do you think spending on sidewalks and bikeways should increase, stay about the same, or decrease?
About the survey

The PSRAI March 2012 Omnibus Week 4 obtained telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults living in the continental United States.

Telephone interviews were conducted by landline (602) and cell phone (401, including 181 without a landline phone).


Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies, and statistical testing was done at the 95 percent level of confidence. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 3.6 percentage points.

Respondents were asked the following three questions about federal funding for biking and walking infrastructure:

1. Out of every dollar the federal government invests in transportation, what percentage would you guess IS currently spent on sidewalks, bike lanes and paths?
   - Less than 1 percent
   - 1 – 2 percent,
   - 3 – 5 percent,
   - 6 – 10 percent,
   - Greater than 10 percent

1. Out of every dollar the federal government invests in transportation, what percentage would you say SHOULD BE spent on sidewalks, bike lanes and paths?
   - Less than 1 percent
   - 1 – 2 percent,
   - 3 – 5 percent,
   - 6 – 10 percent,
   - Greater than 10 percent

1. Actually today, less than two percent of transportation funding goes to sidewalks, bike lanes and bike paths. Seventeen percent is used for public transportation, 80 percent is used for roads and highways, and the rest to other uses. Knowing this, do you think spending on sidewalks and bikeways should increase a lot, increase somewhat, stay about the same, decrease somewhat, or decrease a lot?

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Federal biking and walking funds at work
Mount Prospect, IL — For 30 years, Frost Elementary School had been busing children who live in a large apartment complex just one-third of a mile from the school. Because the main street connecting the apartment complex to the school had high traffic volumes, limited sidewalks, few stop signs and no safe crossing locations, the school never encouraged students to walk to school due to safety concerns.

In 2007, the village of Mount Prospect received a $76,000 federal Safe Routes to School award to construct one quarter mile of sidewalk along a high traffic road connecting the elementary street with a large apartment complex. With their own funds, the village added school crossing signs, stop signs and crosswalks.

Once the project was completed, the traffic engineer met with the school district and officials agreed that the route to school no longer required hazard busing. This small project allowed the school system to eliminate a bus route in the morning, mid-day, and afternoon—a total annual cost savings of $66,657.

Americans think Congress should allocate more funds to biking and walking

Respondents were first asked to estimate what percentage of federal transportation funds is currently spent on sidewalks, bike lanes, and paths.

Respondents did not have a clear sense of how much we are currently spending on sidewalks and bikeways. Only about a quarter of those surveyed correctly guessed that between 1 and 2 percent of federal transportation dollars go towards sidewalks and bikeways.

28 percent of those reached estimated that less than 1 percent of transportation dollars go towards biking and walking. 41 percent guessed that more than 2 percent of the transportation budget goes towards building sidewalks and bikeways.

Currently, about 1.5 percent of federal surface transportation spending goes towards sidewalks and bikeways.

Second, participants were asked what percentage of federal transportation funds should be spent on sidewalks, bike lanes, and paths.

Overall, Americans supported funding for biking and walking at levels higher than the federal government is currently spending.

Without knowing the actual percentage of the federal transportation budget that goes towards sidewalks and bikeways, 21 percent of respondents said that 1 - 2 percent of the transportation bill should go to sidewalks and bikeways. Fifteen percent said that less than 1 percent of transportation dollars should fund sidewalks and bikeways, while 57 percent of respondents said that over 2 percent of transportation spending should fund pedestrian and bicycle projects.

The responses to these first two questions demonstrate a “need gap.” Most respondents felt that funding for biking and walking should be a higher percentage of transportation dollars than they estimated it to be.

Before knowing what current funding levels for biking and walking are, 78 percent believed that funding should remain at current levels or increase.

Federal biking and walking funds at work

Minneapolis, MN — Transportation enhancements were used to turn an obsolete industrial railroad trench through the center of the city into a thriving corridor for active transportation.

The resulting Midtown Greenway draws an average of 3000 bicyclists a day and is often the fastest way to get across town.

The Greenway gets more traffic than 77% of Minneapolis city roads and has revitalized surrounding neighborhoods by sparking housing and commercial development.

Source: Midtown Greenway Coalition, midtowngreenway.org.
Photo: Micah Taylor, Flickr
Americans support maintaining or increasing funding for sidewalks and bikeways

Respondents were then informed that less than 2 percent of transportation funding goes to sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths; 17 percent is used for public transportation; 80 percent is used for roads and highways; and the rest goes to other uses. Participants were asked if spending on sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths should increase, decrease, or stay about the same.

Once respondents knew current spending levels, support for investment in biking and walking grew. The majority of respondents — 83 percent — said they would like spending on sidewalks and bikeways to stay about the same or increase.

Nearly half of respondents — 47 percent — said that they would like funding for sidewalks and bikeways to increase a little or increase a lot. About a third of respondents — 36 percent — said they would like funding for sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths to remain at current levels.

A minority of respondents — 13 percent — said they think funding for sidewalks and bikeways should decrease.

Across all demographic groups, support for maintaining or increasing funding remained at 78 percent or higher.

The survey showed strong bipartisan support for biking and walking infrastructure. Eighty percent of Republican respondents, 88 percent of Democrat respondents, and 86 percent of Independent respondents said that Congress should maintain or increase federal funds for biking and walking.

Young voters — 18-29-year-olds — overwhelmingly reported support funding for sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths. Ninety-one percent of respondents in this age group said they support continuing or increasing biking and walking funds. 83 percent of respondents aged 30-49 said they support maintaining or increasing funding.

Most Americans over the age of 50 also said they support maintaining or increasing funding, although at a lower rate than their younger counterparts. Seventy-eight percent of respondents over 50 said they support continued or increased funding for sidewalks and bikeways.

African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic Americans all support sustained or increased funding for biking and walking. African American and Hispanic respondents reported support at a higher rate than white respondents. Eighty-three percent of white respondents, 88 percent of Black respondents, and 85 percent of Hispanics reported support for sidewalk and bikeway funding.

Urban, rural, and suburban residents all support federal funding for biking and walking. Eighty-two percent of suburban and rural respondents and 87 percent of urban respondents support federal funding for sidewalks and bikeways.

Both men and women support funds for biking and walking. Eighty-three percent of women and 82 percent of men reported support.

Americans of all income and education levels say that federal transportation funds should benefit biking and walking. Eighty-one percent of respondents who earn under $30,000 per year, 85 percent of respondents who earn $30,000 to $49,999, 84 percent of those who earn $50,000 to $79,999, and 87 percent of those who earn over $75,000 said they support continuing or increasing funding.
Who thinks funding for sidewalks and bikeways should increase?

Both Democrat and Independent respondents were likely to report support for increasing funding for biking and walking. Fifty-seven percent of Democrat respondents and 50 percent of Independent respondents said they support increasing funds for bikeways and sidewalks. Republican respondents were more likely to support maintaining funds than increasing them.

The survey found that a majority of Americans under the age of 50 said they support increasing funding for biking and walking. Sixty percent of respondents aged 18 to 29 and 53 percent of respondents aged 30 to 49 reported supporting increasing funds for sidewalks and bikeways. While younger respondents were more likely to support increasing funding, older respondents were more likely to support keeping funding at current levels.

Regionally, Americans from the Northeast were more likely than those from the Midwest to report supporting increased funding. While only 41 percent of respondents from the Midwest signaled support for increased funding for sidewalks and bikeways, 52 percent of respondents from the Northeast said they support increased funding.

Investing in biking makes a difference

Biking and walking are growing in popularity as investments increase. The U.S. Census reports that bike commuting increased by 43% percent between 2001 and 2008.

Communities with greater investment saw greater increases in bike commuting. In areas recognized for their pro-bicycling investments by the League of American Bicyclists, bike commuting went up by 69%.

This is a significant rise in the number of Americans who have found bicycling to be a healthy and efficient way of getting to work.

Changes in bicycle commuting, 2001 - 2008

![Map showing changes in bicycle commuting](image)
Respondents who identified as nonwhite reported higher support for increasing federal funding for sidewalks and bikeways. While 44 percent of white respondents said they support higher funding for biking and walking, 58 percent of Black respondents and 56 percent of Hispanic and other nonwhite respondents said they support increasing funding.

Middle-income and low-income respondents were slightly more likely to support increased funding than higher-income earners. Fifty-two percent of respondents who earn under $30,000 per year and 54 percent of respondents who earn between $30,000 and $49,999 said they support increasing funding for sidewalks in bikeways. In contrast, 39 percent of respondents who earn between $50,000 and $74,999 per year and 48 percent of respondents who earn over $75,000 per year reported support for increased funding.

Who thinks funding for sidewalks and bikeways should stay the same?

Groups of respondents who were less likely to support increases in funding for sidewalks and bikeways were likely to support keeping funding at current levels.

The elasticity in support for federal funding for biking and walking infrastructure seems to be between wanting an increase and believing it should stay the same.

For example, while Americans over 50 were less likely than younger respondents to report that funding should increase, older respondents were more likely to report that funding for sidewalks and bikeways should stay about the same.

Thirty-seven percent of respondents aged 50 – 64 and 51 percent of respondents over the age of 65 said funding for sidewalks and bikeways should remain at current levels.
While Democrat and Independent respondents were more likely than Republican respondents to support increased funding, Republicans were more likely than Democrats and Independents to say that funding should stay about the same. Forty-six percent of Republicans said funding should remain at current levels. In comparison, 31 percent of Democrats and 36 percent of Independents said they support keeping funding for sidewalks and bikeways at current levels.

While white non-Hispanic respondents expressed lower support for increasing funding, these same respondents reported higher support for maintaining funding for sidewalks and bikeways at current levels. Thirty-eight percent of white respondents reported support for maintaining current funding levels, while 29 percent of Black and Hispanic or other nonwhite respondents reported support for maintaining funding.

The same phenomenon held true for income. Respondents who earn over $50,000 per year were less likely than their peers in other income brackets to support increasing funds for biking and walking, yet they were more likely to support maintaining funding. Forty-five percent of respondents who earn $50,000 to $74,999 per year supported maintaining current funding levels, while only 29 percent of respondents who earn under $30,000 and 32 percent of respondent who earn $30,000 to $49,999 supported keeping funding levels about the same.
Who thinks funding for sidewalks and bikeways should decrease?

A minority of respondents — only 13 percent — said that funding for sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths should decrease. In all measured demographic groups, no more than 18 percent of respondents reported support for decreasing funding. Even where support for decreasing was the highest, for every respondent who said funding should decrease, two respondents said funding should increase.

The survey found that Americans with area codes corresponding to suburban or rural areas are slightly more likely than their urban counterparts to believe that funding for sidewalks and bikeways should decrease. While 9 percent of respondents with urban area codes said funding should decrease, 15 percent of respondents with suburban area codes and 14 percent of respondents with rural area codes reported that funding should decrease.

Due to limitations of the survey, however, data about community type require a note of caution. Princeton Survey International deduced respondents’ community type by analyzing phone number area codes, and 401 of the 1003 respondents were reached on cell phones. There is no guarantee that the respondents reached on cell phones currently reside in the communities corresponding with their area codes.

Republican respondents were more likely than Democrat and Independent respondents to say that funding for sidewalks and bikeways should decrease. While 9 percent of Democrats and 11 percent of Independents support decreased funding, 18 percent of Republicans said that they support lower levels of funding. In comparison, 34 percent of Republicans report support for increasing funding. Even in demographic groups in which support for decreasing funding was highest, twice as many respondents said funding should increase as those who said it should decrease.

In addition, respondents with an education level of high school or less were more likely than respondents who had attended college to say that funding should decrease. Seventeen percent of those with a high school degree or less reported support for decreasing funding, compared to 12 percent of respondents who had attended some college and 9 percent of college graduates.
Conclusion

The Princeton survey revealed that:

- Americans support federal funding for biking and walking infrastructure.

- There is a “need gap” between Americans’ perceptions of what is spent on sidewalks and bikeways and what they think should be spent on sidewalks and bikeways.

- Before knowing current funding levels, 78 percent of Americans believed that funding for biking and walking should be at or above current levels.

- Once informed that less than 2 percent of federal transportation dollars are spent on sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths, the number of respondents who believe that funding for biking and walking should be at or above current levels jumped to 83 percent. This represents a significant uptick in support.

- While support for increased funding varied among demographics, support for maintaining or increasing funding remained consistent.

- Only 13 percent of Americans want to cut spending on biking and walking. Even in demographic groups in which support for decreasing funding was highest, twice as many respondents said funding should increase as those who said it should decrease.

- Americans overwhelming support maintaining or increasing funding for biking and walking.

At a time when gas prices are skyrocketing and biking is rising in popularity, Americans want Congress to maintain or increase — not cut — the programs that fund sidewalks and bikeways. Congress has not yet agreed on a new transportation bill, although current law expired in 2009.

As Congress continues to consider reauthorization of federal surface transportation investments, legislators should avoid eliminating key funding for sidewalks and bikeways at a time when public opinion shows broad support for maintaining — or broadening — those programs.

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Mayors of rural towns on the benefits of biking

Oxford, Mississippi (population 19,000) developed a comprehensive bicycle plan in 2003, and implemented it by constructing 7 miles of bike paths connecting key locations in town. Half of Oxford schools have Safe Routes to School bicycle education programs. Former mayor Richard Howorth says that biking infrastructure “is a real quality of life improvement. Families, retirees, and businesses realize this is a great tool for community and economic development.”

The League of American Bicyclists recognized Oxford’s efforts in 2008, naming it the first Bicycle Friendly Community in Mississippi.
Appendix

Contact

For more information, contact Mary Lauran Hall at mlhall@americabikes.org or (202) 223 – 3726.

Region Definitions

The Princeton survey used the following designations to assign geographic region:

Northeast
Connecticut
Massachusetts
Maine
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New York
Pennsylvania
Rhode Island
Vermont

Midwest
Iowa
Illinois
Indiana
Kansas
Michigan
Minnesota
Missouri
North Dakota
Nebraska
Ohio
South Dakota
Wisconsin

South
Alabama
Arkansas
District of Columbia
Delaware
Florida
Georgia
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maryland
Mississippi
North Carolina
Oklahoma
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Virginia
West Virginia

West
Alaska
Arizona
California
Colorado
Hawaii
Idaho
Montana
New Mexico
Nevada
Oregon
Utah
Washington
Wyoming

Poll Data

See the following pages for the original survey data.
AB1. Out of every dollar the federal government invests in transportation, what percentage would you guess IS currently spent on sidewalks, bike lanes and paths? (READ 1-5)

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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>3868</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>2587</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>1141</td>
<td>786</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNWEIGHTED BASE</td>
<td>1003</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>225</td>
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<td>1073</td>
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<td>733</td>
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<td>958</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>548</td>
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<td>805</td>
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<td>523</td>
<td>73</td>
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<td>6 to 10 percent</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>64</td>
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<td>More than 10 percent</td>
<td>374</td>
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<td>220</td>
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Comparison Groups: BC/DE/DF/GHIJ/KLM/NOPQ/RST/UVWX
Independent Z-Test for Percentages (unpooled proportions)
Uppercase letters indicate significance at the 95% level.

PRINCETON SURVEY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INTL.
MARCH 22-25, 2012
Table AB2 Page 2

AB2. Out of every dollar the federal government invests in transportation, what percentage would you say SHOULD BE spent on sidewalks, bike lanes and paths? (READ 1-5)

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<td>WHITE BLACK NON-HISP NON-WHITE TOTAL MALE FEMALE BLACK HISP HISP INCL HISP TOTAL 18-29 30-49 50-64 65+ COLLEGE GRAD SOME COLLEGE HS OR LESS $75K+ $74.9K $49.9K UNDER $30K REP DEM IND NORTH EAST MIDWEST SOUTH WEST</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>6 to 10 percent</td>
<td>641 316 325 447 53 180 183 266 137 46 147 214 278 171 59 179 196 101 138 215 239 108 155 228 151</td>
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AB3. Actually today, less than two percent of transportation funding goes to sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths. Seventeen percent is used for public transportation, and 80 percent is used for roads and highways, and the rest to other uses. Knowing this, do you think spending on sidewalks and bikeways should increase a lot, increase somewhat, stay about the same, decrease somewhat, or decrease a lot?

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<td>Increase a lot</td>
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<td>Increase somewhat</td>
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<td>614</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>882</td>
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<td>Stay about the same</td>
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<td>709</td>
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<td>952</td>
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<td>641</td>
<td>468</td>
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Comparison Groups: BC/DF/GHIJ/KLM/NOPQ/RST/UWX
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</table>

Decrease a lot/somewhat

| G        | 13\%  | 14\%  | 12\%  | 14\%  | 9\%   | 7\%   | 12\%  | 17\%  | 16\%  | 9\%   | 12\%  | 16\%  | 11\%  | 14\%  | 12\%  | 14\%  | 18\%  | 11\%  | 13\%  | 13\%  | 13\%  | 12\%  |
|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|

Comparison Groups: BC/DE/DF/GHIJ/KLM/NOPQ/RST/UVWX
Independent Z-Test for Percentages (unpooled proportions)
Uppercase letters indicate significance at the 95% level.

PRINCETON SURVEY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INTL.
MARCH 22-25, 2012