

BLUE STAR HIGHWAY

COMMUNITY OPINION SURVEY REPORT



MAY 2011

BLUE STAR HIGHWAY: DOUGLAS COMMUNITY OPINION SURVEY

On March 1st, 2011 the Douglas Advisory Committee and the City of Douglas issued opinion surveys to the community, available to all adults interested in participating. Surveys were largely distributed via the online site Survey Monkey, however paper copies were also made available upon request and tabulated by Patrick Pawluk our winter intern from Central Michigan University. Specific questions were included within the survey to determine residency and or ownership of property or business interests within the City of Douglas.

The Douglas Advisory Committee sought input regarding community views related to traffic, pedestrian/bicycle accommodation and views/access to the waterfront within the community. The Advisory Committee sought this input to inform decisions regarding recommendations to the Douglas Planning Commission and Douglas City Council and pertaining to potential updates or modifications to the existing Master Plan for the community. This report presents the findings of that survey. It includes a summary of the information garnered from the survey, both in terms of the quantified data received, and an analysis of the significant conclusions that may be drawn from that data.

Generally, data is presented as the percent of total responses and raw (“n” value) scores. In a few instances, data is reported as a percentage of responses with substantive content, ignoring no answer responses. These are clarified in the context of the report. In addition, the survey methodology that was used in the process is also described. Provided in the appendices are a series of exhibits which document and support this report.

The following summarizes the primary findings of the survey.

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. A total of 206 survey responses were received by mail and online entry. Of those who responded, 107 (53%) respondents were self-identified as being either a full-time or part-time resident of Douglas. This may be compared with 1,059 reported adult residents of Douglas as identified within the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010 survey data. This results in a rate of representation of 10.1% of the Douglas resident community.
2. An additional 95 respondents indicated that they resided in Saugatuck City (13.4%, n=27), Saugatuck Township (15.8%, n=32) or another

community (17.8%, n=36). Although these individuals may or may not be paying taxes within the City of Douglas (we did not ask whether survey respondents owned property within Douglas), it is likely that they have dined in local restaurants, used local professional services and shopped in local stores and galleries. While the opinions of non-residents should not hold equal significance to those of residents or property owners when making decisions which may affect those residing in Douglas, they can be indicative of local and regional perspectives just the same and must be considered during the decision making process.

The population of survey respondents between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five years represented only 4% (n=8) of the responses; and 7.9% (n=16) of the respondents were between twenty-six and thirty-five years. The other age ranges were better represented and more evenly distributed: 36-45 years (20.3%; n=41); 46-55 years (28.2%; n=57); 56-65 years (31%; n=63); and 65+ years (7.4%; n=15). Surprisingly, the survey is highly representative of general age demographics within the City of Douglas. Census data from 2010 indicates that just over two thirds of the local population is over the age of 45. This trend is almost perfectly mirrored in the age range of those survey respondents who provided a response to this question.

**Over 70% respondents
have children living
with them at some
point during the year.**

3. Of the entire set of respondents, just over half of those responding to question 13 (50.5%, n=102) indicated that they own a business and/or work in the Saugatuck/Douglas area. Nearly 22% (n=44) indicated that they own a business in Douglas.
4. Nearly sixty percent (59.7%, n=123) of respondents indicated that they were male. While it is difficult to determine whether this population cohort has a statistically significant impact upon the data received, it should be noted that this gender breakdown is not entirely indicative of the overall population characteristics in the City of Douglas. The 2010, gender statistics illustrated a nearly 50/50 split between men and women in the community.
5. Finally, more than 71% (n=147) of respondents indicated that they had children and/or teenagers living with them either regularly or on an occasional basis. As this segment of the population is typically far more reliant upon traveling by bicycle and by foot, the demographic should be taken seriously when planning for the future, keeping in mind that Douglas has a relatively low populations of children and teenagers as compared to Allegan County as a whole.

Sample Validity

The validity of a sample depends on two considerations: its accuracy and its precision. An accurate sample must first be unbiased. In other words, the

Systematic variance is essentially the inclusion of known or unknown influences that may cause scores to lean in one direction.

sample must either be a random selection of the larger population or it must be carefully designed to properly balance all key parameters of interest to faithfully represent the larger population. The survey was made available to all members of the community and was promoted through the email newsletter, the City website, local newspapers, social networking sites and by word of mouth. Another element of the accuracy criteria is the absence of systematic variance in the sample. Systematic variance is essentially the inclusion of known or unknown influences that may cause scores to lean in one direction.¹

One method of measuring systematic variance is to examine the degree to which the profile of the sample corresponds to that of the larger population. Based on the above summary description, it will be important to bear in mind the following probable systematic variations found in the Douglas Opinion survey:

- ◆ Respondents tend to be older than the general population, with 39% (n=79) reporting their age at 56 years or older, as compared with 22.5% in this range in the 2000 Census.
- ◆ The population of the survey respondents who are male represented approximately 60% (n=123) of the responses, while the 2000 Census indicates that there were 324 persons (about 8.2% of the population) in that age bracket in 2000.

These variances need not undermine the validity of the survey process; however, it will be important to keep them in mind as the City makes use of the survey results for policy decisions.

¹ Emory, C. William and Cooper, Donald R., *Business Research Methods, 4th Edition*, Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1991

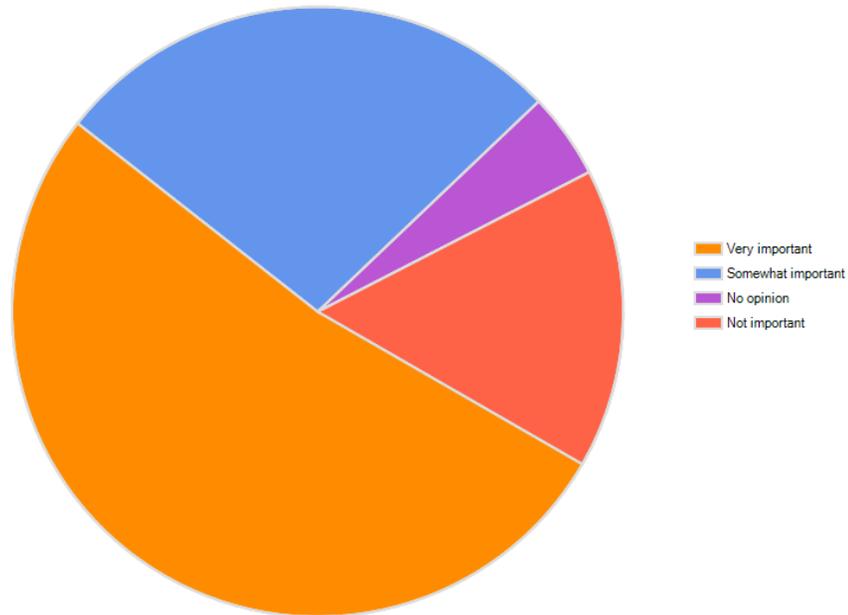
PREFERENCES

A full list of the frequency distribution (data results of all survey responses) is found at the end of this document. The following provides a graphic illustration of some of the preferences expressed within particular response groups.

Douglas Business Owners

The following is brief analysis of a select group of responses taken from the surveys submitted by only those respondents who indicated that they own a business in Douglas.

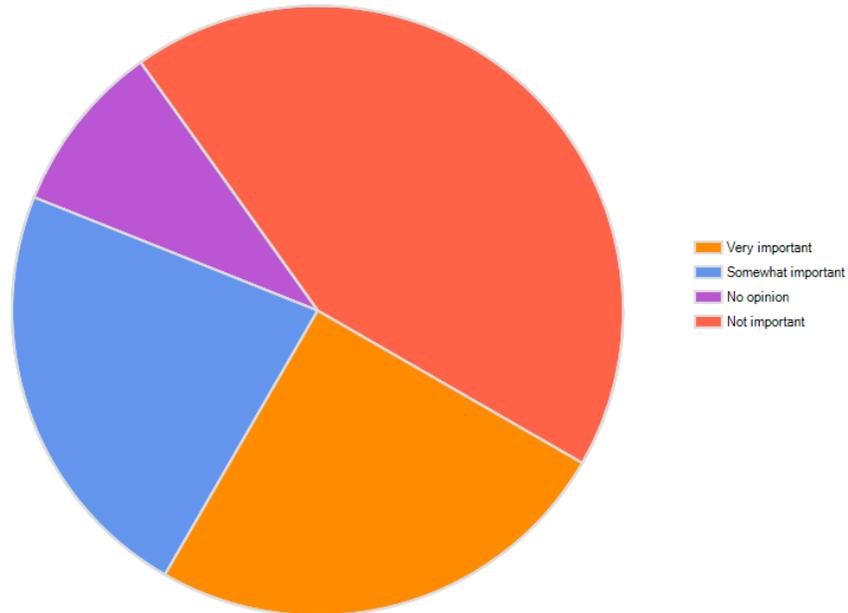
Safe places to walk/bike throughout the community:



Douglas business owners expressed an overwhelming preference for safe places to walk or bike throughout the community, not just within areas surrounding the downtown. We have found that nearly 80% of Douglas business owners polled felt this was either very important or somewhat important. This preference was also illustrated among those who work within Saugatuck/Douglas, 82.3% of whom expressed significant preference for safe places to walk or bike throughout the community. This illustrates that both workers and business owners have a high degree of preference for a walkable community. Further supporting this preference is a nearly 82%

majority who favored improved crosswalks among business owners, and 83.4% favoring the same among the local workforce.

Speedy traffic flow at all hours of the day:

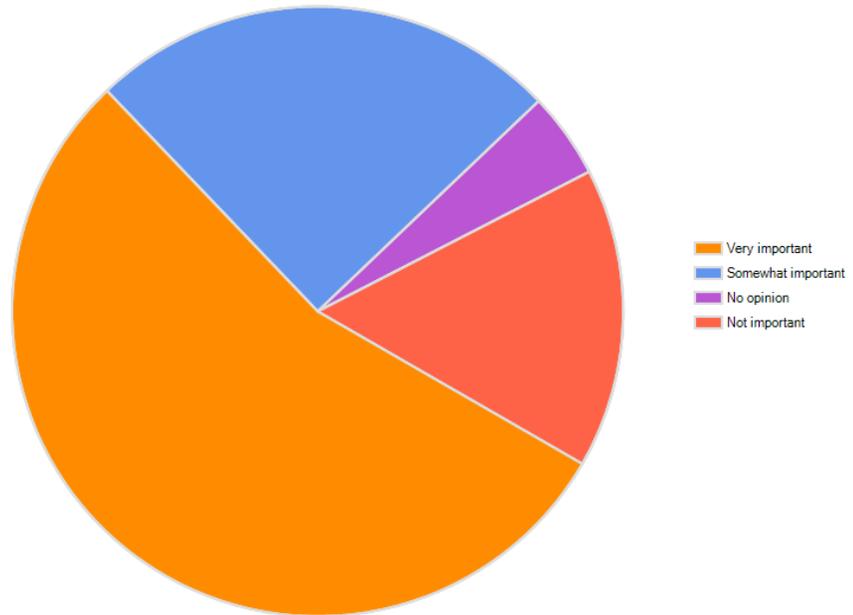


Douglas business owners expressed some resistance to high traffic speeds along Blue Star Highway. Just over 52% of business owners felt that speedy traffic flow at all hours of the day was either not important or had no opinion about the matter. However, 25% of business owners felt this was very important and 22% felt it was somewhat important. This compares with an even split among the Saugatuck/Douglas workforce in general, 50% of whom felt speedy traffic flow was either not important or had no opinion.

When reviewing the entire sampling of respondents regarding this issue, 43.2% of all survey respondents felt that speedy traffic flow at all hours of the day was not important while 20.4% felt it was very important and 31.6% felt it was somewhat important.

It is important to note here that the phrasing of the question may have created bias in the response. Had the term “efficient traffic flow” been used in lieu of “speedy traffic” the response rates may have been altered. However, responses to the question as phrased indicate that vehicle speed along this corridor is not a top priority and in many cases may be something to be avoided.

Improved landscaping along Blue Star Highway:



Finally, 79.5% of business owners in Douglas felt that the landscaping along Blue Star Highway could be improved. This compares to 82% of the general population who felt similarly and 77.4% of the general workforce in Saugatuck/Douglas.

Age Breakdowns

The following tables illustrate respondent preferences by age group.

Table 1.0: Percent response indicating “Very Important”

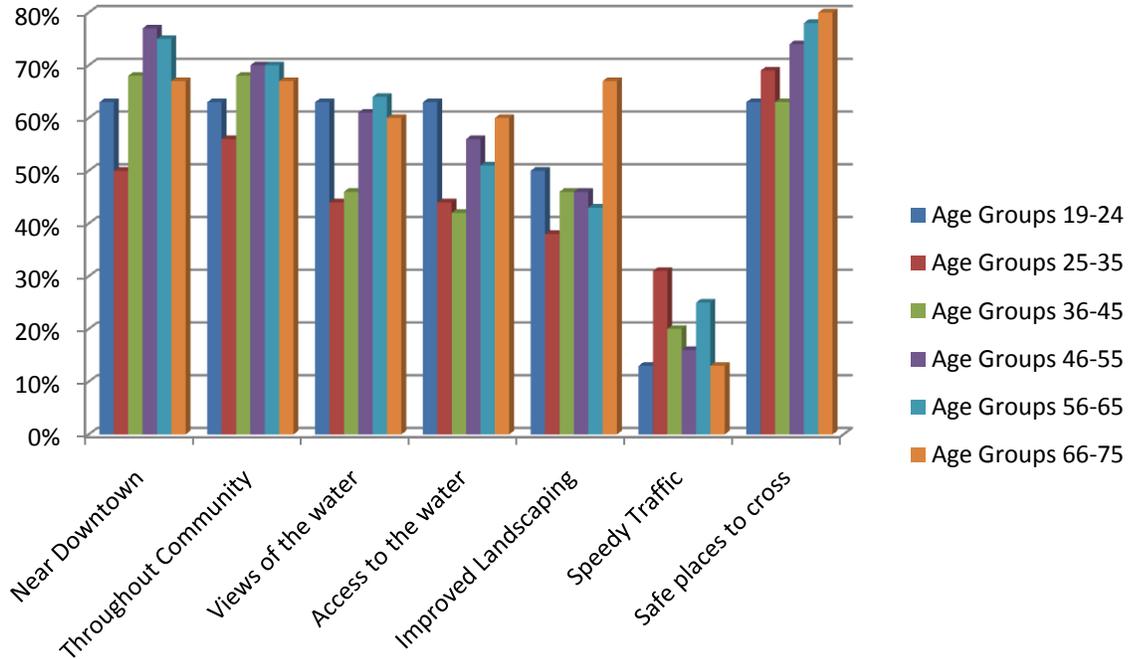
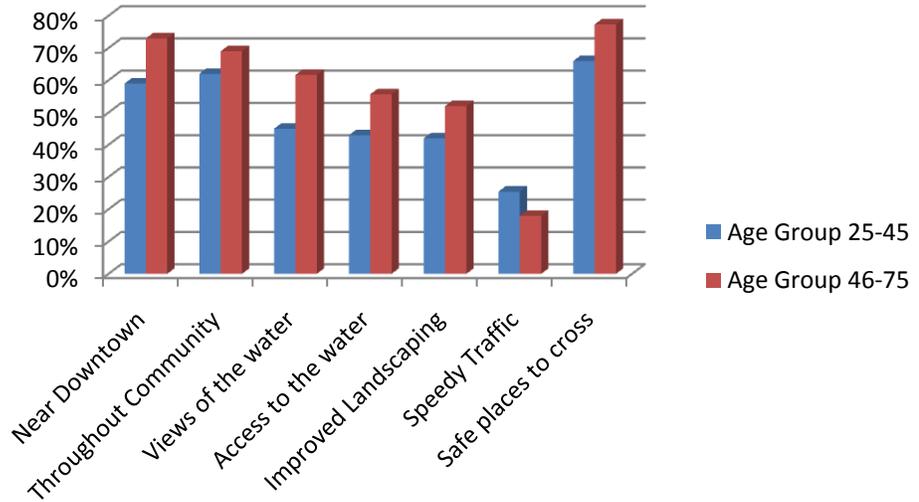


Table 1.0 above illustrates the percentage of respondents within each age group who responded to questions of preference by marking “Very Important” to each question. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from this data is the stark difference between respondents selecting ‘Speedy Traffic’ as “Very Important” as opposed to those selecting ‘Safe Places to Cross...’ as “Very Important” as selected by all age groups. Clearly, the entire community agrees that pedestrian safety is more important than high vehicle speeds.

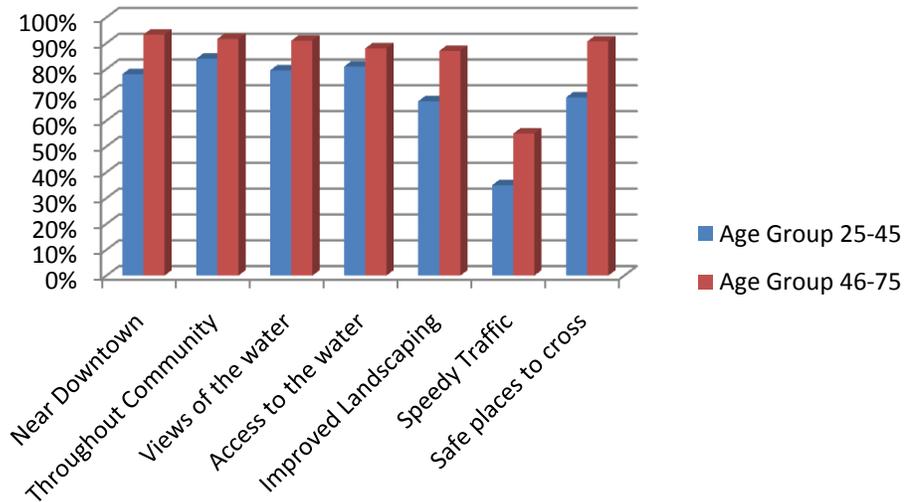
However, additional interest can be taken from this data by reviewing the difference among age groups as relates to each question. For example, younger age cohorts within the community appear to have placed less emphasis upon the importance of nearly all of these attributes than the older age cohorts. In contrast, seniors (those over the age of 65) seem to place pedestrian amenities (access to the water and improved landscaping) in higher stead than their younger counterparts.

Table 1.1: Percent Response Indicating “Very Important”



When age cohorts are combined to establish more general characteristics of community preference as defined by age, the differences are a bit more evident. In Table 1.1 above, we have combined the age groups of 25 to 34 year olds with the 35 to 45 year olds. We have also combined 46-55 year olds with the 56-65 year olds and 66-75 year olds. What we find is that, generally, the older population cohorts find pedestrian accessibility and attractive amenities to be slightly more important than their younger counterparts. It is important to note that the 2010 census reveals a median age of 54.5 years in the City of Douglas. Significantly higher than that in Allegan County (39.2) and the State of Michigan (38.9).

Table 1.3: Percent Response Indicating “Very Important” or “Somewhat Important” combined



Summary Findings:

The general results of this community opinion survey have revealed that a majority of the local and regional population is in favor of improvements to the Blue Star Highway corridor which would improve pedestrian accessibility and the visual appearance of the corridor via landscaping or similar measures. In certain circumstances, the general population of respondents would be willing to sacrifice vehicle speeds for improved pedestrian accommodations and aesthetics.

Next Steps:

On November 16, 2011, the Douglas Advisory Committee will host a community forum at the Saugatuck Brewing Company to gather additional public opinion regarding these issues as well as to begin to establish specific goals and objectives from which the group may begin to move forward.