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## **Americans Prefer to Spend More on Mass Transit and High Maintenance, Less on New Roads**

*Smart Growth Implementation Assistance program achieves multiple goals and helps federal dollars go further*

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*Washington, DC* – Three-fourths of Americans believe that being smarter about development and improving public transportation are better long-term solutions for reducing traffic congestion than building new roads, according to a survey sponsored by the National Association of Realtors® and Smart Growth America.

The *2007 Growth and Transportation Survey* details what Americans think about how development affects their immediate community, and traffic congestion was a top concern. Nearly half of those surveyed think improving public transit would be the best way to reduce congestion, and 26 percent believe developing communities that reduce the need to drive would be the better alternative. Only one in five said building new roads was the answer.

“Realtors® build communities and care about improving our cities and towns through smarter development,” said NAR President Pat V. Combs, of Grand Rapids, Mich., and vice president of Coldwell Banker-AJS-Schmidt. “With increased traffic congestion and longer commutes, Americans are receptive to new ideas for handling growth, such as better transit or mixed-use walkable communities that allow people to cut down on their driving, as this survey shows.”

Americans give their communities high marks when it comes to providing good public schools, parks and open space. Respondents were less optimistic about their local community’s ability to provide practical and convenient transportation and manage growth and development. While one-third approve of growth in their local area, the percentage of those who disapprove of local growth has doubled since 1999, from 10 to 20 percent.

This year’s survey also showed that Americans are more concerned about how their community is handling that growth and development than they have been in eight years of polling. Only 39 percent say their community is doing an excellent or good job of handling growth, while the majority – 58 percent – believes the community is doing a fair or poor job.

When asked about their top concerns regarding growth and development, respondents consistently cited the loss of farmland to development (72 percent), increased traffic congestion and commute times (70 percent), and loss of open land such as fields and forests (70 percent). Other concerns include the loss of individual character of communities, increased reliance on cars because of sprawl, and the loss of historic landmarks and neighborhoods. The greatest increase was among those concerned about the rise in highway commercial development such as strip malls, up 25 percent in the past six years.

This year the survey also asked about climate change, and more than 70 percent of respondents are concerned about how growth and development affects global warming. Americans expressed strong support for bold measures to combat climate change. Nearly nine in 10 believe that new communities should be built so people can walk more and drive less; cars, homes and buildings should be required to be more energy efficient; and public transportation should be improved and made more available. Americans strongly disapprove of increasing gasoline taxes as a way to discourage driving and reduce energy use, with 84 percent rejecting the idea.

“With concern about climate change rising along with gas prices, Americans are looking for options that allow them to reduce the time they spend in the car,” said Don Chen, executive director of Smart Growth America. “Americans see smarter development patterns as a viable way to achieve that goal, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions.”

Eight in 10 respondents prefer redeveloping older urban and suburban areas rather than build new housing and commercial development on the edge of existing suburbs. More than half of those surveyed believe that businesses and homes should be built closer together to shorten commutes, limit traffic congestion and allow residents to walk to stores and shops instead of using their cars. Six in 10 also agree that new-home construction should be limited in outlying areas and encouraged in inner urban areas to shorten commutes and prevent more traffic congestion.

With road building costs often exceeding revenues, many states are turning to tolls as a key funding source. Americans are divided on tolls, although 55 percent approve of charging tolls on more roads if it improves roads and decreases congestion. On the other hand, six in 10 are opposed to charging tolls on freeways during rush hour to reduce congestion, and respondents are evenly split on charging tolls during rush hour, even if the money is used to provide transportation alternatives to the freeway.

When it comes to spending taxpayer dollars, respondents believe Congress should spend more money to maintain and repair roads, highways, freeways, and bridges and to expand and improve public transit than build new roads.

Americans are overwhelmingly opposed to the private ownership of roads; that is, selling key roads and highways to private companies who would charge a toll and give a portion of the toll money to the state. Eighty-four percent of respondents oppose private ownership of roads; only 14 percent support the concept. Similarly, 66 percent are opposed to allowing private companies to build, own and collect tolls for new roads – even if those companies gave a portion of the toll money to the state.

The *2007 Growth and Transportation Survey* was conducted by telephone among 1,000 adults living in the United States in October 2007. The study has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

Smart Growth America is a diverse coalition of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations with a stake in how metropolitan expansion affects our environment, quality of life and economic sustainability. Coalition partners include national, state and local groups working on behalf of the environment, historic preservation, housing affordability, social equity, land conservation, neighborhood redevelopment, farmland protection, business, labor, public health and town planning and design.

The National Association of Realtors®, “The Voice for Real Estate,” is America’s largest trade association, representing more than 1.3 million members involved in all aspects of the residential and commercial real estate industries.

Information about NAR is available at [www.REALTOR.org](http://www.REALTOR.org). This and other news releases are posted in the Web site’s “News Media” section in the NAR Media Center.

**Smart Growth America** is the only national organization dedicated to researching, advocating for and leading coalitions to bring smart growth practices to more communities nationwide. From providing more sidewalks to ensuring more homes are built near public transit or that productive farms remain a part of our communities, smart growth helps make sure people across the nation can live in great neighborhoods. For additional information, please visit [www.smartgrowthamerica.org](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org).

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