

## Professional Analysis of Community Survey

What is not as readily apparent is that, the broader the participation, the less impact any one group -- local residents, for instance -- will have on the outcome. Is this simply a "best practice" process? Or is it a skillful way of diluting negative opinions? If I wanted to diminish the effect of a troublesome or outspoken group, this certainly is an approach I would recommend to my clients. I'd want as large a universe of potential respondents as possible -- people whose interests were not aligned with those of the neighborhood group.

- The survey ultimately asks, in Q12 and 13 -- after it may have lost some participation because of length -- if the respondent lives or works in the area. This at least offers the possibility that ETC will differentiate the responses of those who live or work in the area from those who do not; if they fail to do so, the results are far less useful. However, I certainly would ask this work-live nearby question AT THE BEGINNING, so respondents will understand that their "natural" interest will be taken into account in the survey that follows.

I'd also ask directly whether the respondent primarily uses Red Bridge Road as a convenient means for point-to-point travel. Comparing the answers of those who work nearby with those who use Red Bridge Road as a thoroughfare would give even more meaning to clusters of answers, particularly if some respondents fit neither category.

- The survey is reasonably well done, and should offer quite a bit of information to guide recommendations and decision-making.

- Like all surveys, it starts with a point of view and asks questions that allow respondents to comfortably support that point of view, without being blatant about it. But some of the questions -- see below -- simply are poorly thought-out or worded.

- Without in-depth study, I notice -- and object to -- the following:

.. Q4 A, B, and C need "why do you say that?" follow-ups. Responses to Q4 A, in particular, are difficult or impossible to interpret, for local residents and regional, point-to-point travelers (and pedestrians and cyclists) might give the same answer for conflicting reasons. Because of the wording, the surveyor has no idea what the answers mean, unless the respondent elaborates further.

.. Q4 E. It is less significant, but, with no definition of "quality," what is ETC to make of any responses? If you're a local resident, high-quality landscaping doubtless means something different than it does to a passer-by or a point-to-point traveler or, perhaps, a naturalist or someone with high environmental sensitivity. If people don't rate it high, what are they saying? What is it they like or don't like? What would they change?

.. Q5 A. Most folks are for "ease of traffic flow," but, again, local residents and point-to-point passers-by and hikers and bikers likely would have dramatically different reasons for giving precisely the same answer and different definitions of what they consider "ease of traffic flow." So, how is ETC to interpret the data?

.. Q5 B and, to a lesser extent, E, are a waste. Is anyone truly going to say that "driver safety" or "pedestrian safety" are unimportant? Even if everyone surveyed were to unanimously say these factors were totally unimportant, would any traffic engineer or city official pay the slightest attention? So what is the value or point of the question? It is, of course, a form of "push," getting the respondent to start

nodding and agreeing with the folks who are promoting the survey

Q5 H. Let's see. Do we want a plan that makes it easy to get on and off Red Bridge Road from bordering residences and businesses? Well, if you're a point-to-point driver, unless you need gas or fast food, you really don't care, and might even like it better if such interference in your personal thoroughfare were curtailed. After all, the whole point of this exercise is to diminish the bothersome influence of those who border your "how-fast-can-I-get-to-work" trafficway, isn't it? What does the answer to this question tell us, anyway?

.. Q5 J. Two points: You don't know what the response to this terribly worded, poorly thought-out, multi-part question actually means. Is the respondent more concerned about train delays, or preventing collisions? If so, why isn't he given some option OTHER than "building up and over the tracks"?

And how many train/vehicle collisions actually happen at the Red Bridge Road crossing, anyway? [I don't know the answer to this question, but I suspect the incidence is very low.]

.. Q6. Want to bet on whether "driver safety" is identified as one of everyone's top three choices? With a bad Q5, one or two of the Q6 answers are all but forced.

.. Q7. I'm not going to write their survey for them, and I "get" the idea behind this question, but the simpleminded approach certainly doesn't allow for nuance or for other answers. "No opinion" isn't the same as "I have another idea."

.. Q8 forces the reader into what could be two equally unappealing choices. Despite their "if a new bridge were designed" condition, MANY respondents would have an opinion, and it would be something other than choices (1) or (2). This is a blatant attempt to be able to say, "The majority of the people who responded to the survey preferred x."

So, I rate this as a skillfully designed survey, likely to be effective in eliciting responses that support the survey-writers' points of view. However, it is not designed to give reasons for certain key opinions or strength-of-feeling (importance) of various responses, and it certainly is not designed to be evenhanded.

I understand that these results will be used in conjunction with other information. However, in the context of what they say they are trying to do, I personally find the survey unsatisfactory, annoying, and a bit unprofessional.

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