

# Oregon Department of Transportation Rest Area Survey

## *Survey Results, Fall 1996*

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### *Introduction and Background*

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) contracted with the Oregon Survey Research Laboratory (OSRL) to investigate the public's perception of highway rest areas. This survey is part of ODOT's continuing effort to determine how the public perceives the services provided in rest areas. Additionally, ODOT is considering the introduction of commercial activities in rest areas and was concerned about the public acceptance or rejection of such activities. Planning for the survey began in August of 1996 with Karen Morrison from ODOT and proceeded until the start of the actual survey in October. Working closely with representatives of the ODOT, OSRL conducted a survey of 409 adults in Oregon. This survey was done to current scientific standards and is representative of the Oregon population.

### *Survey Methodology*

#### *Survey Instrument*

The overall goals of the survey were to obtain valid and reliable information from adults in Oregon regarding their perception of services provided at highway rest areas and their support and interest in the possible introduction of commercial services in these rest areas. In designing the survey instrument, OSRL used a multipath approach which included: drawing from OSRL's survey archives and professional networks for questions related to ODOT's needs; creating original survey questions; and extensively pretesting individual questions and the entire survey instrument on members of the survey population, professionals, survey experts, and potential users of the data from ODOT. The survey instrument was then programmed into OSRL's computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI) system and further pretested.

The survey instrument comprised the following subject areas:

1. **Use of rest areas** including if visited or not in last 12 months, why, and the number of times used in the last 12 months;
2. **Reasons for use and non-use** including using telephones, the restroom, an RV dump station, picnic areas, getting free coffee, stopping for car trouble, to rest, stretch or take a nap, to care for children, to walk your

- pet, get travel or tourist information, buy things from vending machines, or any other reason(s) offered;
3. **Perceptions of rest area facilities and length of visit** including cleanliness of the restrooms, supplies of paper and soap in restrooms, neatness of the grounds, the number of rest areas and how close together they are along the highway, outside lighting, inside lighting, feelings of personal safety, handicapped facilities, parking facilities, tourist information, and average length of visit in minutes;
  4. **Attitude toward potential commercial services in rest areas** including provision of gas or fuel, vehicle repair services, restaurants, traffic and weather information, reservation services for motels, hotels and campgrounds, automated teller machines, truck dispatch services, convenience stores, postal services, or any other services or commercial products that might make people more likely to stop at Oregon rest areas;
  5. **Demographic and background characteristics**, including age, sex, employment status, and driving patterns while on the job.

A facsimile of the survey instrument is provided in Section 2 of this documentation. All interviews were completely anonymous, and human subjects approval was obtained.

### ***Sample and Data Collection***

Interviewer training was conducted on September 19, 1996 (see Section 3 for interviewer instructions). Interviewing was conducted at all times of the day and on all days of the week until the target sample size was achieved. Altogether, OSRL interviewers made 3,082 telephone calls to complete 409 interviews with Oregon adults between September 20-23, 1996. All Oregon adults with telephones had an equal chance of being selected. Under five percent of all calls resulted in refusals (see Section 4 for the sample and response rate report). The average length of the interview was about 5 minutes.

Survey sampling errors are calculated to assist data users in assessing how much confidence to place in a particular survey result. Larger random samples reduce sampling error. Results for survey questions in which there is low variability also have less sampling error; for example, a question where respondents give a 50/50 proportional split has wider confidence intervals than a question where respondents give a 5/95 proportional split. For this study, the sampling error is  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points on a question with a 50/50 proportional split (at the 95% confidence level). For a question with a 5/95 proportional split, the sampling error is  $\pm 1.6$  percentage points.

### ***Survey Results***

This presentation of the survey results is organized around the first five survey subject areas identified on pages 1-2. Readers of this report may refer to the banner tables in Section 5 for more detail. In the banner tables, all questions asked in the survey were cross-tabulated with 8 key variables (use of rest areas, number of times stopped in last 12 months, age, sex, number of people in household, physical disability, employment outside the home, and miles driven on the job per month). The banner data include counts and percentages for each question overall and for each row and column of the cross-tabulation. Narrative responses to open-ended questions

are provided in Section 6. Codes developed for those responses are provided in Section 7, and the coded narratives are also included at the end of the banners.

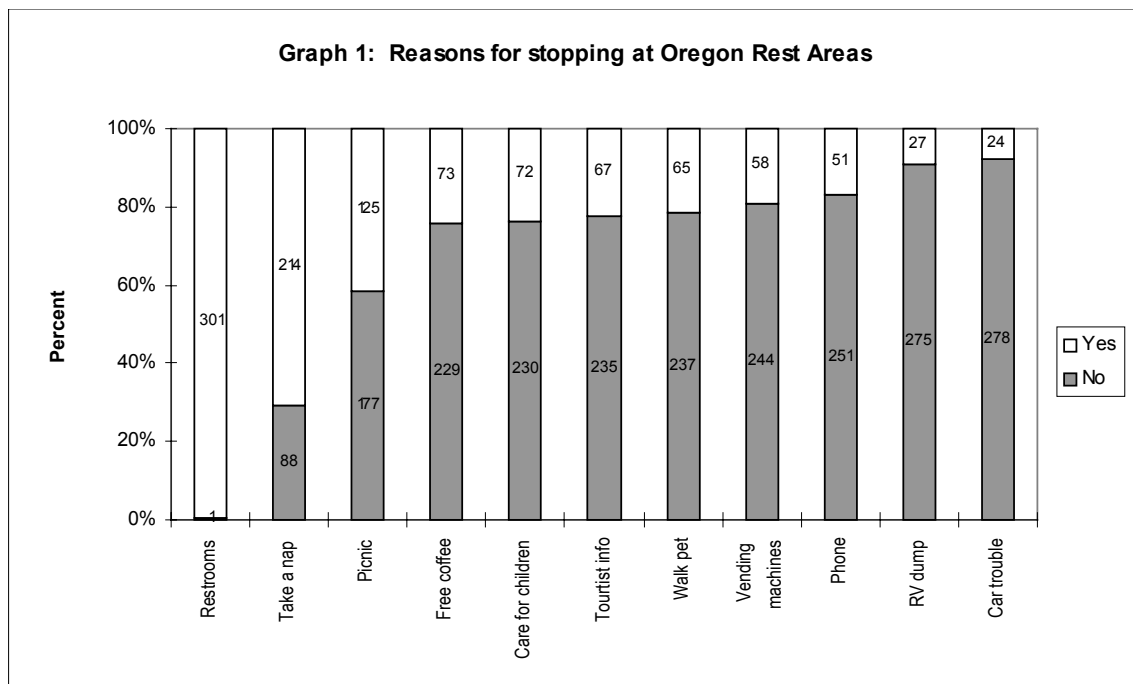
**Use of Rest Areas**

The first question asked of respondents was if they had stopped at least once at an Oregon highway rest area in the past 12 months. Almost 75% of the respondents said yes. The average number of times respondents reported stopping in the last 12 months was 7 times.

Of the one-quarter who had not stopped at an Oregon rest area in the past 12 months, 20% have never stopped at a rest area. When asked why they had not been to an Oregon rest area 45% reported that they have not traveled, 27% reported “no need to stop”, 11% reported that it was because of the location, 6% reported not stopping due to health or age issues, 5% said they just moved here, 4% felt rest areas were not safe or clean, and 3% gave other reasons.

**Reasons for Use and Non-use**

Respondents were asked about various services currently offered such as public telephones, restrooms, RV dump stations, picnic areas, free coffee, etc., and whether or not these services were reasons for stopping at Oregon rest areas. Graph 1 (below) summarizes the responses given regarding each of these services.



As shown above, use of the restroom seems to be the most frequent reason given for stopping at an Oregon rest area (100%) followed by taking a nap (71%). Others like to picnic (41%), get free coffee (24%), and walk pets and get tourist information (both 22%). Reasons such as using

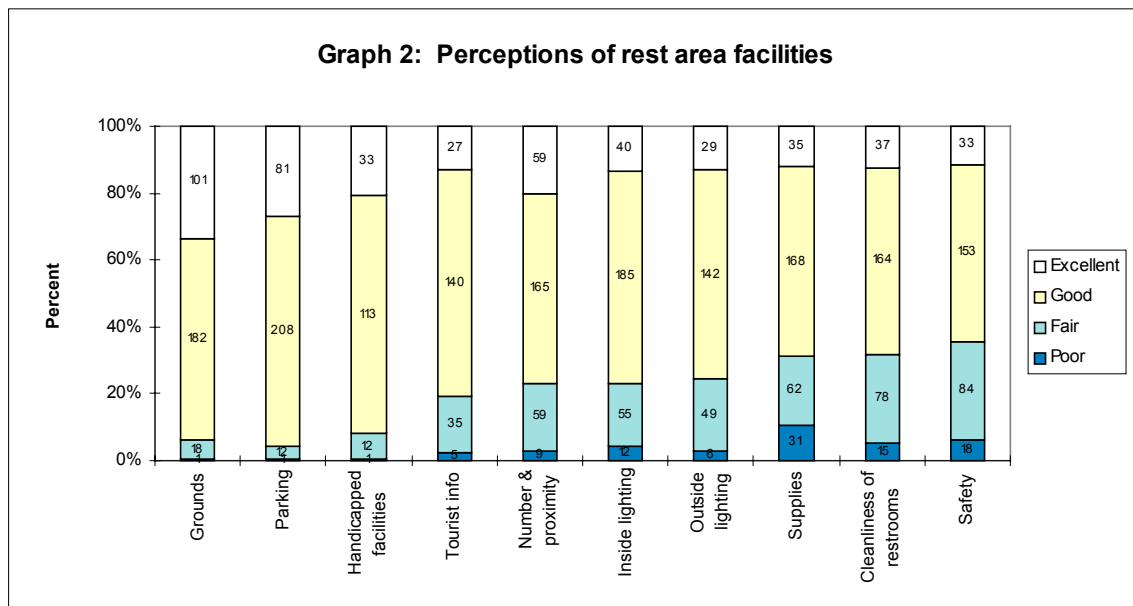
an RV dump (9%) and stopping for car trouble (8%) were the least cited but were not insignificant uses.

Respondents were also asked if they stopped for any other reasons and 8% responded yes. When asked what those reasons were, 26% of these respondents reported car and driving issues (i.e. change drivers, clean the car, catch up with other cars in party), taking a break from driving (26%), stopping for water and the natural surroundings (both 17%), and various other reasons (13%).

**Perceptions of Rest Area Facilities and Length of Visit**

Respondents were also asked a group of questions about the quality of features provided at Oregon rest areas (see Graph 2). Overall, people were positive toward the quality of features offered. When the response categories ‘excellent’ and ‘good’ are combined, people were most positive toward the parking facilities (96%), neatness of the grounds (94%), handicapped facilities (91%), and tourist information (80%). Cleanliness of the restrooms (67%) and personal safety (63%) ranked the lowest.

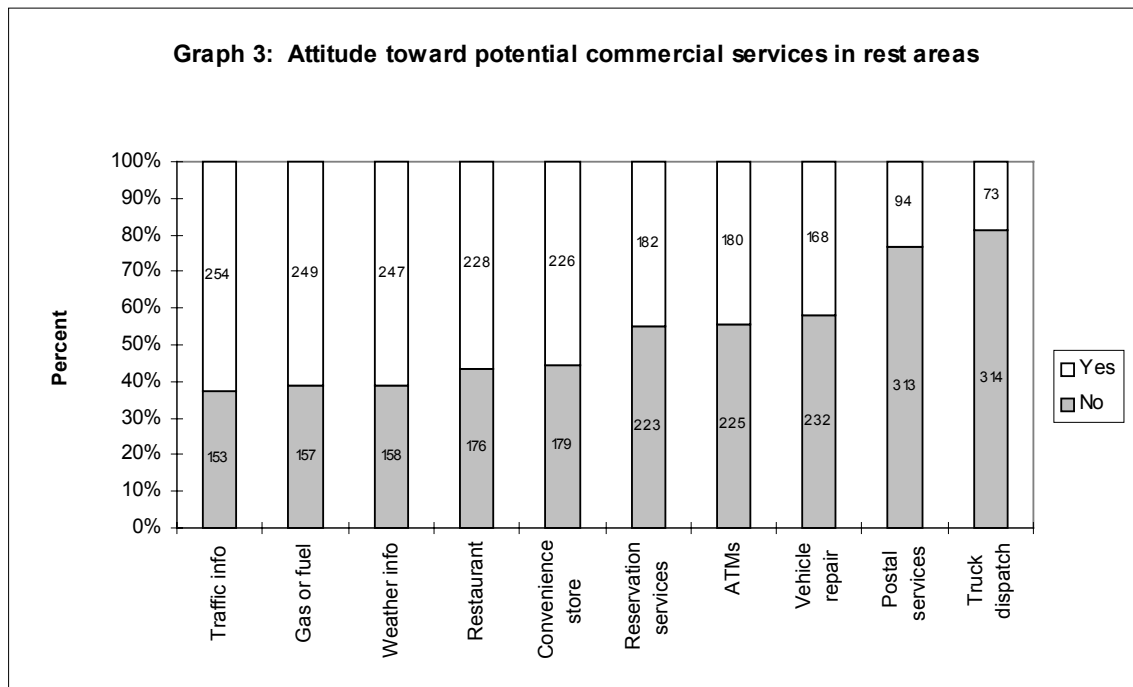
Looking at just the ‘excellent’ and ‘poor’ categories independently, neatness of the grounds received the highest ‘excellent’ percentage score (33%), followed by parking facilities (26%). The highest percentage of ‘poor’ ratings occurred when respondents were asked about supplies of paper and soap (10%), followed by personal safety (6%), and cleanliness of restrooms (5%).



Respondents were also asked when they stop at a rest area, how much time they spend. Less than 20% spend 5 minutes or less per visit, 30% spend 6-10 minutes, 29% spend 11-15 minutes, and 24% spend 16 minutes or more. The average length of a visit is 15 minutes.

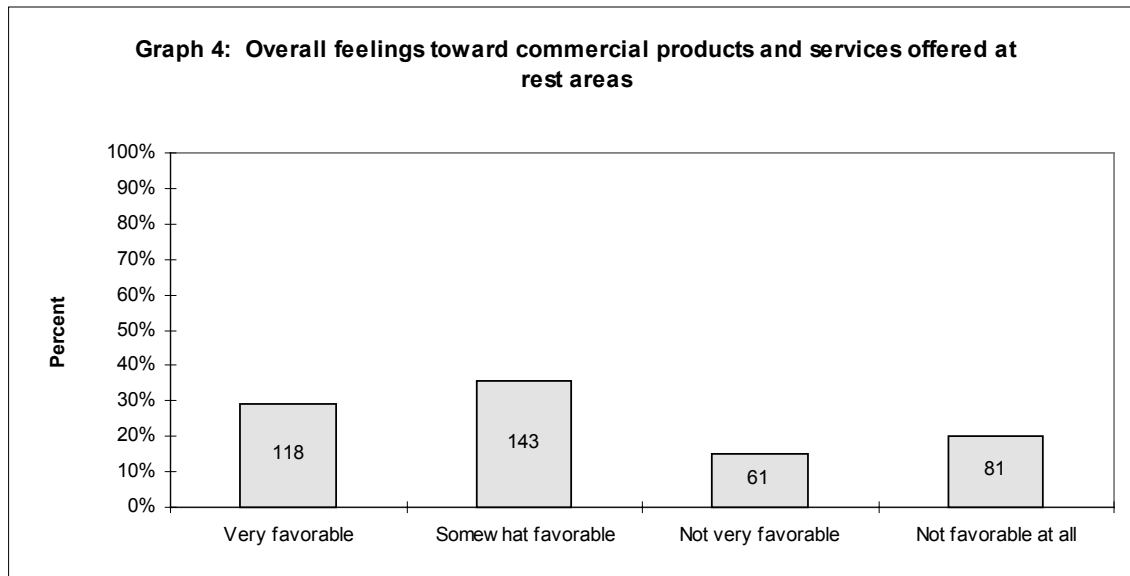
**Attitude toward Potential Commercial Services in Rest Areas**

ODOT is looking at opening rest areas to services or commercial products that might make people more likely to stop there. Questions about the provision of gas or fuel, vehicle repair services, restaurants, traffic and weather information, reservation services for motels, hotels and campgrounds, automated teller machines, truck dispatch services, convenience stores, postal services, and other services were asked of respondents. Graph 3 summarizes what people think of each of these services.



The three most supported services include traffic information, weather information and gas or fuel (all received 61%). The services which received the most ‘no’ answers were a truck dispatch service (81%), postal services (77%) and vehicle repair services (58%).

After asking about specific services, respondents were asked about their general feelings toward commercial products and services being offered at highway rest areas (Graph 4). Twenty-nine percent are very favorable, 36% are somewhat favorable, 15% not very favorable, and 20% not favorable at all. Combining the ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ scores we arrive at 65% favorable and 35% not favorable.



This data tends to support the hypothesis that Oregonians are favorable toward commercial services in rest areas. However, the data was investigated further to see if there are different attitudes among users and non-users. Would non-users be more likely to use rest areas with commercial services than current users? To determine differences between users and non-users we examined changes in 'yes' percentages between users and non-users when asked if they would be more likely to stop if specific commercial services were added (Table 1).

<b>Table 1 More likely to stop? 'Yes'</b>	<b>Used rest area in last 12 months</b>	<b>Used rest area but not in last 12 months</b>	<b>Never used rest area</b>
Gas or Fuel	58%	66%	76%
Vehicle repair	40%	43%	48%
Restaurant	54%	61%	62%
Traffic information	62%	66%	52%
Weather information	62%	57%	52%
Reservations services	47%	38%	38%
Automated teller machine	45%	40%	52%
Truck dispatch	17%	22%	14%
Convenience store	56%	57%	43%
Postal services	23%	23%	19%

Across Table 1, we see only slight differences between groups. The largest difference occurs when respondents were asked about gas or fuel. Respondents who have never used rest areas are 18% more likely to say they would use them more frequently if the service was offered than those who used rest areas in last 12 months. Conversely, when asked about convenience stores, users of rest areas were 13% more likely to say they would use the service than those who have never used rest areas. This is also true of traffic and weather information, users of rest areas said that they would be 10% more likely to use rest areas (for both traffic and weather) than those who have never used rest areas. Interestingly, looking at the percentage distributions, we

see that there is no clear direction or pattern which might indicate that any group of users or non-users is more likely to use rest areas than another.

### ***Demographic characteristics***

To finish the survey, respondents were asked a few questions about themselves and their household. Sixteen percent of the sample were 30 years old or less, 19% were 31-40 years old, 23% were 41-50 years old, 20% were 51-65, and 18% were 66 or older. Thirty-five percent of respondents were male.

Oregonians were also asked how many people live in their household most of the time. Twenty percent lived alone, 37% lived with one other person, 17% lived with two others, 16% lived with three others, and only 7% lived with four or more people. Almost 13% of respondents reported that they, or someone they live with has a physical disability.

Twenty-four percent of Oregonians reported that they are employed outside the home in a job that requires them to drive a car or truck out of town. Of those employed outside the home, 18% drove 5-80 miles per month, 25% drove 81-250 miles, 30% drove 251-800, and 25% drove 801 or more miles per month on average for their job.

### ***Conclusions***

The purpose of this survey was to help ODOT in meeting its information and evaluation needs regarding driver use and perceptions of rest area services. The result of this survey is an exceptionally rich source of current information on the use, reasons, perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, and demographic characteristics of Oregon drivers. These data will serve as a baseline against which ODOT can measure the effects of policy innovations over the next several years. This survey also serves as a model which other planning agencies can use to guide their data collection efforts to address their unique goals and strategies for achieving those goals.