

# ***Business Community Supports Light Rail, But Reluctant to Change Their Ways And Only If the Feds Help Out***

Almost three quarters (71%) of business and community leaders in Maricopa County support the construction of a light-rail system in the Valley, according to the

Three-quarters (72%) also said, however, that the allocation of federal funding for the system is a very important (43%) or important (29%) factor in their decision to support or oppose light rail.

“Three-quarters in favor of light rail is obviously a strong vote of business and community leader support,” said director Dr. Michael O’Neil, “but that picture

would be incomplete without the disclaimer that the support is conditional. It looks like it may be

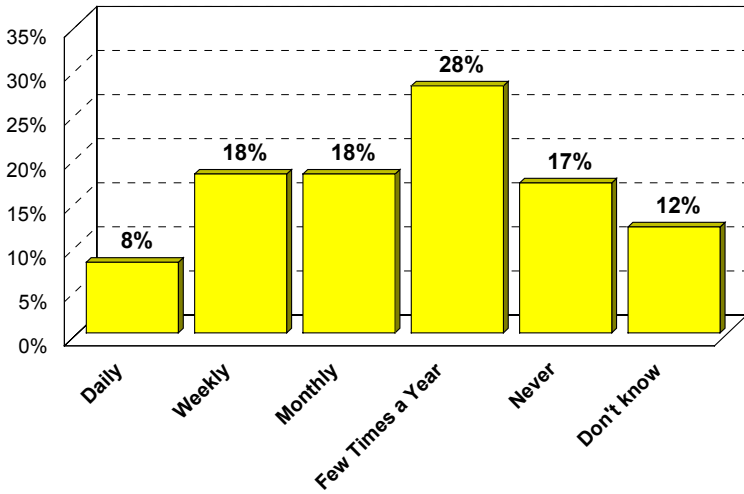
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The is a web-based survey that was sent to all members of Greater Phoenix Leadership, Valley Leadership, East Valley Partnership, and Westmarc. As such, this survey does not purport to be a random or representative sampling of the general population of the Phoenix metropolitan area. It would be difficult, however, to conceive of a more comprehensive representation from which to draw inferences about the opinions and sensibilities of than the combined membership of these organizations, although, inevitably, any definition of influentials is somewhat subjective. The persons surveyed are likely to exert disproportionate influence on and be an early indicator of community opinion by virtue of their position, community involvement, and political participation. The *O’Neil Associates Valley Influentials Poll* Three hundred

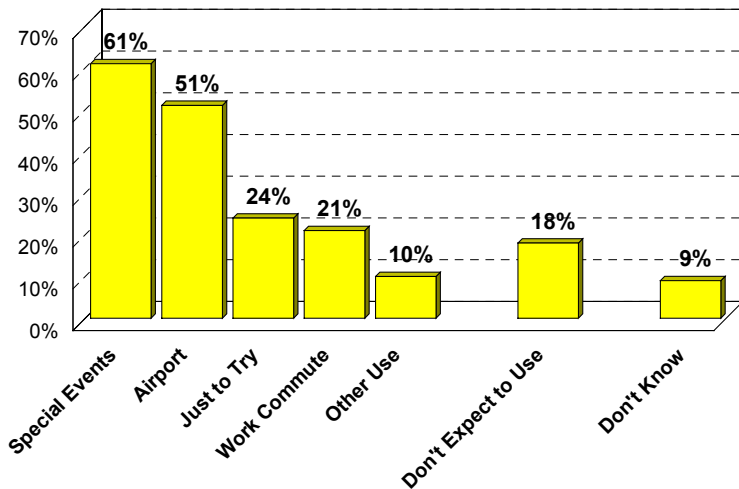
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withdrawn if the federal funds are also withdrawn.” Arizona’s congressional delegation is currently fighting to secure federal money for light rail in Phoenix, Tempe, and Mesa. Scottsdale has not yet decided how to tackle its traffic-related growing pains.

**EXPECTED FREQUENCY OF LIGHT-RAIL USE**



**EXPECTED TYPE OF LIGHT-RAIL USE**



**“Do As I Say, Not As I Do”**

Even if the business community embraces the light-rail system in principle, it most likely will not provide the system’s most loyal users. The largest group of respondents (28%) expect to use a light-rail system only a few times a year. Another 17% expect they will never use it. This combined group (45%) of low-frequency users and non-users is matched in size, however, by higher-frequency users (44%) who expect to travel by light rail either monthly (18%), weekly (18%), or daily (8%).

Respondents were also asked about the specific purposes for which they might use light rail. Again, the Valley’s business community does not seem to be the strongest underpinning for the day-to-day operation of a light-rail system in the Valley.

Only 21% expect to use light rail to commute to work. Factoring in the lower number (8%) expecting daily use, it is clear that most of these light-rail commuters would not even make it their daily mode of transportation.

The most common uses are expected to be transportation to special events (61%) and to the airport (51%). Another 24% expect they simply want to try it out, and 18% could not think of a purpose for which they might travel by light rail.\* O’Neil commented, “While the current routing has the rail going right by such amenities as Bank One Ballpark and America West Arena, the current plans to essentially skirt Sky Harbor seem particularly ill-considered, given that airport transportation would be among the most popular uses for the rail system.”

“Light rail would have several purposes in the Valley. One would be to alleviate traffic congestion, another to provide convenient transportation for people without cars,” continued O’Neil. “Business people, however, are not likely to be without own transportation, and their workdays may often require them to have that transportation handy. Many of them need to be able to attend meetings in locations all over the Valley in places that may not be included in the initial mapping of the light-rail system.”

\* Respondents were allowed to select all uses that applied; thus, the sum is greater than 100%

“Also, there is bound to be a discrepancy between the desirable answer and actual future behavior,” said O’Neil. “Most people may say they will use light rail one way or another—and probably even *expect* that to be the case—but when push comes to shove, it may prove difficult for most of us to give up our car habits.”

### **But the Need Is Genuine**

The professed willingness to use light rail at least occasionally clearly stems from the perception that traffic in the Valley is a serious problem that is not getting better.

Fully 53% think traffic is a very serious problem, and only 8% think it is not much of a problem. Also, in spite of freeway upgrades, only 25% had noticed traffic improvements, while 37% thought it had become worse, and a similar proportion (37%) saw little change.

O’Neil concluded, “No one would probably expect business people to cram into the light-rail cars in large numbers, even if they are at least as bothered as other people by the Valley’s traffic. Still, their support for the system may be important, because business leaders tend to have a voice as opinion leaders in the community more broadly.”

*O’Neil Associates has tracked public opinion across the Valley, Arizona, and the Nation since 1981. To be healthy, public debate must be informed—this is why we commit our resources to measuring opinions on the political and social issues people care about and talk about. O’Neil Associates, however, is much more than that. While the  
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may be our most publicly visible activities, we do most of our work for private businesses and organizations as well as state and other public agencies. As a full-service research firm, we assist our clients with a broad range of research efforts to measure customer satisfaction, improve customer service, fine-tune public images, focus marketing campaigns, engineer products, increase market shares, strengthen employee relations, and plan, refine, and assess business strategies.*