CIVIC CONFIDENCE SURVEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OCTOBER, 2002

Project Directors

David O’Hara Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Economics

Roger Israel DPA
Associate Professor
Public Administration
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the seventh annual Metropolitan State Civic Confidence Survey. The purpose of the survey is to measure attitudes of residents in the seven-county, Twin Cities area towards government services. Over half of Minnesota’s population lives in the region.

The Survey focuses on citizens’ views on government services and employees, ethics of elected officials, major issues facing government, the regional economy and community connections. The Survey gives more attention than most public opinion polls to residents’ views of their local government.

Because 95% of Metropolitan State’s students come from the seven county region, Metropolitan State has been committed to improving the professional and community life of the metropolitan area since the University’s founding thirty years ago. The Civic Confidence Survey is part of that long-term commitment. It is hoped that both policy makers and citizens can use the Survey’s findings to improve the performance and accountability of public institutions.

Metropolitan State plans to continue to conduct this survey in future years. Each year we hope to learn more about the evolving attitudes of Twin Cities metropolitan area residents. This year's survey is somewhat special since it provides a snapshot of residents' views a year after the tragic events of 9/11/01. Last year's survey was completed prior to 9/11, so this year's results provide us with a unique opportunity to learn how residents' views of the issues we have been tracking may have changed.

Some of the key findings of this year’s poll are:

- Despite increased concerns about the economy, their personal finances and expected retirement income, Metro Area residents remain generally quite optimistic about the Twin Cities' future outlook and their own job security, and continue to believe strongly that the region is headed in the right direction.

- Traffic congestion continues to be seen as the Metro Area's biggest problem.

- Concern about crime has increased and, in the City of Minneapolis, crime surpassed traffic congestion as the chief problem facing the Region this year.
• Race relations is a growing concern of Metropolitan Area residents; and the percentage who think population diversity is a good thing dropped slightly from last year, when this question was first asked.

• In responding to several new questions this year directly related to the impact of the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks:
  - Most Twin Cities residents believe that government at all levels should be expecting greater contributions from average citizens in the region to prevent and combat terrorism
  - A majority also agree that it may be necessary to curb some civil liberties and legal protections dear to Americans to prevent future terrorism
  - Almost three-quarters of residents indicate that the Twin Cities Area should remain welcoming to new immigrants in spite of heightened concern that some immigrants may be a threat to our security

• Overall trust in government continues at a high level and trust in the federal government reached its highest level since the survey was begun in 1996.

• Twin Cities residents also have a great amount of confidence in their local school districts and are satisfied with their services, though less so in Minneapolis than in St. Paul and suburban communities.

• Overall satisfaction with the quality of services at every level of government remains at a high level.

• There continue to be significant gender differences in some results:
  - More women than men believe that the economy is getting worse
  - More women than men are dissatisfied with their expected retirement income
  - Women feel government officials are less responsive than men do
  - Fear of crime is a much greater concern for women than for men

• Residents across the region continue to have a great deal of pride in their neighborhoods, know their neighbors, and believe that their neighbors know and care about each other.
MAJOR PROBLEMS

When asked in an open-ended question what was the area’s most serious, problem, traffic congestion was cited by 37% of area residents and the related problem of urban sprawl by 6 percent. In 1996, traffic congestion was mentioned by only 8% of residents. For the most part, there has been steady growth between 1996 and 2002 in the public's perception of this issue as the region's number one problem.

Crime, which had been the number one problem through 1999, was mentioned second most frequently at 17% and affordable housing was ranked third at 9%. Even as crime took over second place from affordable housing, which was second in last year's survey, those most concerned about crime in 2002 did not come close to the 72% level in 1996 or the 49% level in 1998.

A growing problem continues to be the lack of affordable housing. The percentage of area residents listing affordable housing as the chief problem increased from 7% in 2000 to almost 12% in 2001, and dropped slightly to 9% this year.

Judging by continued concern over such issues as traffic congestion and affordable housing, there seems to be worry among residents about maintaining the convenience and livability of the metropolitan area. In fact, convenience remains the best-liked feature of the Twin Cities at 17%. Because of increased concern in these quality of life categories of transportation, crime, and affordable housing, we believe policy makers will need to pay closer attention to them in the future.

Convenience is of course a double-edged sword when it comes to urban life. For example, if you live in a suburb or neighborhood without a mall with the typical entertainment, dining, and shopping options, you will likely have to drive farther to do those things and your life will be less convenient. However, when there is a sufficient population mass in your community you will confront more traffic and congestion, and thus also have a less convenient lifestyle.

9/11 AND ITS AFTERMATH

Perhaps in response to 9/11/01, race relations was identified as the Area's chief problem by 6% of residents. Between 1996 and 2001, it was never greater than 2%. And in spite of the growing population diversity in our region and the concerns about and among certain immigrant groups in the aftermath of 9/11/01, it is encouraging that 77% of Twin Cities residents in 2002 still regard increasing population diversity as a "good thing", although this percentage dropped below the 83% reported in 2001, prior to September 11.

Several additional questions were added to this year's survey that directly relate to the events of 9/11/01 and their aftermath. When asked whether our national, state and local governments should be expecting greater contributions from average Twin Cities citizens to prevent and combat the threat of terrorism, 63% agreed or somewhat agreed.
Residents were also asked if it might be necessary to curb certain civil liberties and legal protections that have been very dear to Americans in order to prevent terrorism in the future, and almost 60% agreed. 70% of Twin Cities residents agreed or somewhat agreed that the Twin Cities Area should remain welcoming to new immigrants even though, after 9/11/01, there is heightened concern that some immigrants may be a threat to our security.

EDUCATION

Consistent with the past three years, most Twin Citians are happy with their local school districts and have a great deal of confidence in them. 66% are either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with quality of services provided while 79% have either a lot or some confidence in their public school system. These are high overall ratings considering that education is the state’s largest and most scrutinized public expenditure.

However, residents of Minneapolis have a more negative view of their local districts than do St. Paul and suburban residents. 28% of Minneapolis and 20% of St. Paul and suburban residents have no confidence or not very much confidence in their local schools.

In terms of satisfaction, 44% of Minneapolis residents are either dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with the quality of services provided by their local school district compared to 36% of St. Paul residents and 33% of suburban residents who feel that way. The trend here is mixed, with Minneapolis and suburban residents indicating a small decrease in satisfaction while St. Paul received a slight increase in satisfaction from last year’s results.

It is beyond the scope of this survey to pinpoint reasons for the disparity between the views of inner city and suburban residents. However, in future surveys we hope to obtain more information on these and other differences within the metropolitan area to assist policy makers and government officials.

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT/SATISFACTION WITH PERFORMANCE

Twin Cities residents are more trusting of local governments than they are with larger federal and state governments. When asked which level of government Twin Citians trust to do what is right most often, almost 51% said local government, 31% said state government and 18% replied federal government. This represents a small increase in trust toward the federal government and a small decrease in trust toward local government. It is quite possible that the increased responsibility and visibility of the federal government in response to the events of 9/11 may account for this change. When asked about quality of services provided by respective governments, 81% of metro area residents said they were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with city government; 66% were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their school district; 80% were satisfied with county
government; 74% were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with state government and 68% were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with federal services. These are very similar to the results of the 2001 Civic Survey.

Metro residents continue to hold public employees in reasonably high regard. 72% think they do as good a job as other Twin Cities employees and 9% think they perform better, for a combined total of 81%. The comparable figures in Minneapolis, St. Paul and suburban/rural communities were, respectively, 72%, 81% and 82%.

A substantial majority (63%) of the region’s residents continue to agree or somewhat agree that government officials are responsive to their needs. The breakdown by communities shows Minneapolis at 56%, St.Paul at 65% and suburban/rural areas at 64%.

The perception of the honesty of elected officials was consistent with the 2000 survey. In this year’s poll 52% believed elected officials are as honest or more honest than average Minnesotans while 48% believe elected officials are either less honest or actually dishonest. The results show a slight negative shift from last year's results. The highest positive perception at 61% occurred in 2000, while the lowest, at 50%, occurred in 1998, perhaps due to the Clinton sex scandal.

**CRIME**

Citizens are more concerned about crime this year. The proportion of citizens who rated it the number one problem in the Region increased for the first time in the survey's history, from 11% in 2001 to 17% in 2002. However, it is important to note that this year's 17% level is still considerably below the 72% level in 1996, which steadily declined to 17% in 2000 as concerns about traffic congestion in the Region grew considerably. When asked if there is an area within one mile of their home where they would be afraid to walk at night, 36% said yes compared to 33% in 2001.

Fear of crime was greatest in Minneapolis and Saint Paul and much less so in the suburbs.
ECONOMY

In the midst of an economic slowdown, Twin Cities residents sent mixed signals in their views about the Region's position and their personal financial situation,

People feel less confident about the Metropolitan area's economy and their personal financial situation. 30% of the region's residents believe the Twin Cities economy is getting worse, an increase of 5% over last year's results. 54% believe it is staying the same, compared to 51% last year. Only 17% believed the Area's economy is improving, compared with 24% last year and 50% in 2000. 40% were satisfied with their personal financial situation this year, 33% were somewhat satisfied, 18% were somewhat dissatisfied and 9% were dissatisfied. A year ago, 55% were satisfied and 23% somewhat satisfied with their financial situation.

We also observed a significant increase from last year in the percentage of area residents who have cut back their spending due to uncertainties in the economy, from 51% who said they had cut back spending a lot or somewhat in 2001 to 60% who reported cutting back a lot or somewhat in 2002.

At the same time, residents report the same level of confidence in the Region's future outlook as they did last year, 86% (confident and somewhat confident), and even slightly greater agreement that the Twin Cities area is (usually or always) headed in the right direction--52% in 2002 compared to 50% in 2001. When asked about their concern for maintaining a satisfactory retirement income and life style, 36% were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their expected retirement income compared to 41% last year. 64% viewed their employment situation as somewhat or very secure this year compared to 68% last year.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Twin Cities residents continue to report a high level of community connectedness in this year's survey. 16% of the region's residents consider themselves active in civic activities, compared to 18% in 2001. 27% said they were somewhat active; 17% said they were not very active while 41% said they were not active at all. These are very close to last year's results.

Over half of the region’s residents, 52%, said they had never contacted an elected official; 28% said they seldom contacted one; 15% said they contacted officials somewhat often while 4% said they often contacted officials. These are almost identical with last year's results.

Last year we added some questions that address community connectedness and attitudes toward cultural diversity in the Twin Cities Area. We currently have only two years of data available but we look forward to tracking these items for many years to come.
The vital signs in this important dimension of metropolitan life continue to be very encouraging, even after the shock of 9/11/01. When asked for their views about neighbors and neighborhoods: 82% of Twin Cities residents said their neighbors know and care about each other; 87% said they would feel comfortable discussing neighborhood issues and problems with neighbors; 87% said people have pride in their neighborhoods; 91% said they know the names of their neighbors on their street or in their building; and 93% said they would feel comfortable contacting their neighbor in an emergency situation.

These responses are very consistent with last year's results and continue to be strong across both Minneapolis and St. Paul and suburban/rural communities in the Region. Given the concerns about American social disconnectedness often expressed in the media and in prominent studies like Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam’s recent book, “Bowling Alone”, these numbers are certainly encouraging.

**GENDER DIFFERENCES**

34% of women in the Metropolitan area believe that the economy is getting worse, while only 23% of men feel this way. This is a significant change from last year's results that showed significant agreement on this question by both men and women at 25%.

19% of women and 12% of men indicated that they had cut back their spending a lot in 2002, which is consistent with the results in last year's survey. There continue to be substantial differences in the fear of crime among men and women as well. In 2002, 45% of women agreed that there were areas within one mile of their residences in which they would not walk alone at night; only 21% of men said yes. This is very consistent with the results in last year's survey.
1996-2001 COMPARISON

This is the seventh annual Civic Confidence Survey. Some interesting changes have occurred in public opinion.

CHIEF PROBLEM

Traffic Congestion continued to be the chief problem facing the Twin Cities Metropolitan area. In 2001 traffic congestion continued to surpass crime as the region’s number one problem, with crime in second place. In 1996, crime was overwhelmingly the number one problem with 72%, while traffic congestion was a distant second at 8%. Traffic congestion, crime, and affordable housing continue to represent the biggest challenges for policy makers in this year's survey.

Race relations, which previously had never received more than 2% as the number one problem, tripled to 6% in 2002. This is likely related to the growing concern about and among immigrant populations in the region after 9/11/01. While it is a significant increase and certainly an issue to closely monitor in the future, the overall level does not seem alarming in light of the prominence of other concerns identified by area residents.

CRIME

In 1996, 72% of Metropolitan area residents identified crime as the number one problem. This year's survey put crime in a distant second place to traffic congestion with 17%. When asked if there is an area within one mile of their home where they would be afraid to walk at night, this year 36% replied yes, a decline from 52% in 1996. In 1996 there was little difference between the feelings of Minneapolis, St. Paul, and suburban residents on this question. This is not the case in 2001 and 2002. Residents of the two core cities have remained more fearful of crime while suburban residents are feeling much safer. In 2002 only 27% of suburban residents replied yes, compared to 65% of Minneapolis and 55% of St. Paul residents.

TRAFFIC CONGESTION

As previously mentioned, since 2000, traffic congestion has been cited as the region’s number one problem. In 1996 traffic congestion was mentioned by only 8 percent of Twin Cities residents. This grew to 10% in 1997 and 1998, 26% in 1999, 35% in 2000/2001 and 37% in 2001.

A related problem, urban sprawl, which was rated the chief problem by 5% of residents in 1997, is still at 5% in 2002 in spite of the dramatic growth in concern about traffic congestion during the same period. This indicates that the public still does perceive a strong connection between traffic congestion and urban sprawl. Regional planners in the
Twin Cities continue to have their work cut out for them in trying to gain public support for managed growth strategies that might help contain urban sprawl.

**ECONOMY**

People also feel less confident about the metropolitan area’s economy and their personal financial situation. 17% said the area’s economy is improving, less than last year’s 24% and 2000's 50%. In 1996, it was 28%. 30% say the economy is getting worse, the highest percentage in the survey's seven-year history.

72% of area residents are satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their financial situation in 2002, exactly the same percentage as in 1996. The highest recorded satisfaction in the survey's history was 87% in 1999. We also observed a steady increase in the percentage of area residents who have cut back their spending due to uncertainties in the economy, from 44% in 2000 to 51% in 2001 and 60% in 2002.

In spite of an economic recession and other economic concerns in the aftermath of 9/11/01, more Twin Cities residents in 2002 (52%) see the Region as usually or always heading in the right direction than was recorded in 1996 (46%).

Concerns about the current economy also do not seem to have affected people’s future outlook. In each of the seven years of the survey over 80% were confident or somewhat confident that they would be better off in 3 to 5 years than they are now. In each of the past three years, including 2002, it has been consistently at the highest level, 86%.

**TRUST IN GOVERNMENT**

The responsiveness of government officials has also improved in people’s estimation. In 1996 54% believed that government officials were responsive to their concerns and needs. By 1999 this had improved to 61%. In 2000 this increased to 65% and has remained stable at about this level in both 2001 and 2002.

When asked about quality of services provided by respective governments, the ratings of city, county, and federal governments and school districts remained relatively constant. The only significant change over the seven year history of the survey has been a 10% increase in the perceptions of the federal government as most trustworthy, from 8% in 1996 to 18% in 2002, and a corresponding decline of about 10% for local government, from 61% in 1996 to 51% in 2002.
Facts about the Confidence Survey

Results are based on a Metropolitan State College of Management poll conducted between August 13 and 28, 2002 by telephone with 500 randomly selected adults in the seven county Twin Cities metropolitan area. The margin of error in the poll is 4.5% or less, for results based on all interviews in the poll. Margins of sampling error for smaller groups in the poll are larger.

In addition to random error, as with any public opinion survey, other forms of error may be inadvertently introduced by question order, wording, and practical difficulties in conducting the poll, including events that may have occurred during the interviewing period.

The Metropolitan State Civic Confidence Survey is directed by David O’Hara, Associate Professor of Economics (612 341-7674, david.ohara@metrostate.edu) and Roger Israel, Associate Professor of Public Administration (612-341-7436, roger.israel@metrostate.edu). Dr Israel is the primary survey contact person as Dr. O’Hara is on sabbatical. Copies of this executive summary may be obtained by contacting Kim Carlson (612-341-7639, kim.carlson@metrostate.edu).