

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

DECEMBER 4, 2014

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CROSS-PARTY POLL FINDS VOTERS WANT BIKE/PED INVESTMENTS

Minimal Constituent Support in Either Party for Attacking Active Transportation

WASHINGTON, D.C. – In an effort to better understand the political motivation behind attacks on federal funding for biking and walking, national active transportation advocacy organization, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), earlier this year engaged leading Republican and Democratic pollsters to analyze the attitudes of likely 2016 voters.

The findings, which will be made public at two events on Capitol Hill on Monday, show that opposing federal investment in biking and walking is not widely popular with supporters of either major political party.

Leading Republican and Democratic pollsters, Christine Matthews of Bellwether Research, and Celinda Lake of Lake Research Partners, surveyed 1,000 likely 2016 voters in September of this year, selecting a proportion of Republican and Democratic voters that matches the national voting population.

The poll found that four times as many voters favor increasing or maintaining current levels of federal investment in walking and biking paths as decreasing them (74 percent – 19 percent). Strong majorities supported this funding regardless of party affiliation.

Despite constituting only 1.5 percent of the federal surface transportation budget, in recent years, biking and walking infrastructure has become a popular target for some federal lawmakers looking to gain political points by highlighting their fiscal conservatism. Recent efforts to reduce or eliminate support for active transportation

include proposals by Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL), Senator Pat Toomey (R-PA), and a House Transportation Appropriations Bill which sought to eliminate biking and walking eligibility in TIGER grants.

RTC Senior Vice President of Policy and Trail Development, Kevin Mills, says that these findings demonstrate that congressional opponents of active transportation are out of step with their own constituents.

“This proves that there is no real constituency for decreasing federal investment in biking and walking,” Mills says. “Ahead of an expected transportation bill reauthorization battle next year, this is an important message for those who would seek to attack active transportation: ‘Your constituents aren’t impressed. This will not win you votes.’”

While the poll found that support for biking and walking was strongest among Democrats, an overwhelming majority of Republicans also supported the federal government’s role in building infrastructure for biking and walking.

“When told that about 1.5 percent of federal transportation funds support walking and biking, 64 percent of Republicans said that figure should be maintained or increased, with only 30 percent saying it should be decreased,” Mills says.

The poll also undermined the frequent refrain of critics that investing in biking and walking is not fiscally responsible, with the message that active transportation is affordable and produces a strong return on investment resonating strongly with voters.

Across the political spectrum, twice as many people indicated they would be less likely (43 percent) than more likely (21 percent) to vote for a candidate who wanted to fund only highways and roads and eliminate funding for walking and biking infrastructure.

When asked how they would apportion \$100 of transportation funding, respondents on average allocated \$26.90 to improving walking and biking paths and sidewalks, a remarkable 18 times the actual current allocation.

“It is clear that, across the political spectrum, American voters expect robust investment in walking and biking as part of the balanced transportation system they want,” Mills says.

Matthews and Lake will be available to discuss the polling results at two events on Capitol Hill on Monday, December 8.

House: Longworth Office Building

Room 1732

Breakfast: 9:15 a.m. Program: 9:30 - 10:30 a.m.

Senate: Russell Office Building, Room 385

Program: 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

For more information or to RSVP, email Leeann Sinpatanasakul at leeann@railstotrails.org

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit organization with more than 100,000 members, is the nation's largest trails organization dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines and connecting corridors. Founded in 1986, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's national office is located in Washington, D.C., with regional offices in California, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. For more information visit www.railstotrails.org.