

## 7.0 INTERVIEWS AND OUTREACH

One of the fundamental principles of Environmental Justice is to *ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process*. According to the October 7, 1999 FHWA/FTA memorandum, *Implementing Title VI Requirements in Metropolitan and Statewide Planning*, minorities and low-income populations should be engaged in the transportation planning process. Additionally, the memorandum poses the following questions as part of the MPO certification review process:

“Does the planning process seek to identify the needs of low-income and minority populations? Have organizations representing low-income and minority populations been consulted with? Have their concerns been considered?”

To help address the above questions and ensure full and fair participation by potentially affected low-income and minority communities in the transportation planning and decision-making process, a telephone interview survey was conducted.

The overall goal of the survey was to reach out to organizations that serve low-income and minority communities, obtain a local perspective about the transportation issues/needs of low-income and minority communities, listen to suggestions for needed improvements, and better understand the organizations familiarity and/or involvement with the SJTPO and planning process. The details of the survey purpose and methodology and the findings are presented in the remainder of this chapter.

### 7.1 Survey Purpose and Sample Selection Methodology

There were four primary objectives of the survey<sup>1</sup>:

1. To reach out to organizations that represent low income, minority, and other disadvantaged populations, including those who have not traditionally participated in the SJTPO’s transportation planning process and consequently develop a contact list that the SJTPO can use to improve the participation of these organizations in future activities;
2. To assess these organizations familiarity and involvement with the SJTPO and select community-based transportation funding programs that can be utilized to enhance the quality of life in local communities;
3. To better understand the transportation issues/needs of low-income and minority populations in the South Jersey region; and
4. To find out if the organizations or individuals interviewed were interested in participating in a focus group or committee regarding environmental justice and the transportation needs of low income and minority populations. Implicitly to identify key individuals that may be interested in participating in advisory committees.

To obtain the survey sample, the SJTPO Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members were contacted and asked to recommend organizations that serve low-income and minority populations. Local and county agencies familiar with groups working with and serving low-income and minority populations in South Jersey were also contacted. Additionally, internet research was conducted to seek out potential interviewees.

The sample list of potential interviewees included eighty-one organizations and this list was shared with the SJTPO staff. Selection of the survey sample was based on three primary factors: 1) the characteristics of the people the organization represented or served (focusing on those representing or serving low-

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<sup>1</sup> The survey instrument and summaries of each interview conducted are provided in Appendix II.

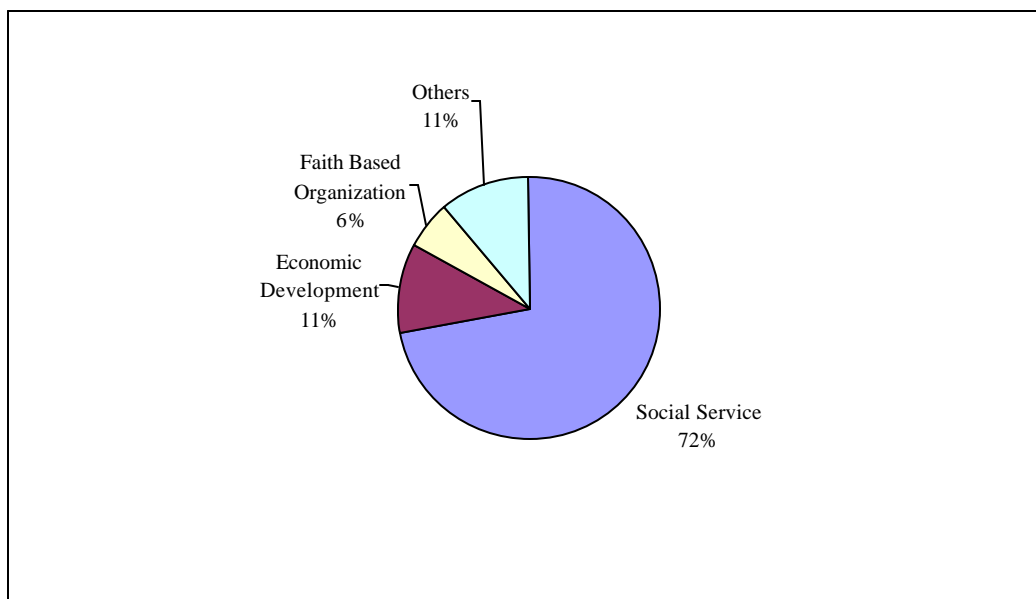
income people and minorities); 2) the type of services the organization provided; and 3) the geographic area it served.

Organizations in the survey sample were contacted via telephone and asked to participate in the telephone interview survey. Of the eighty-one organizations contacted, thirty-seven participated in the survey. Findings from these thirty-seven interviews are discussed in the next section.

## **7.2 Survey Findings**

A majority of the organizations surveyed were government and non-profit social service providers (72%). Over 10% provided economic development services and the remaining six organizations included faith-based, transportation, news, local planning, and affordable housing agencies (see Figure 7.2.1).

**Figure 7.2.1**  
**Profile of Organizations Surveyed**



Almost all the organizations surveyed served low-income people and their target population was effectively multi-racial and multi-ethnic. Although most of the organizations were based in Atlantic City and other towns in Atlantic County, the other three counties were also well represented. Surveyed organizations served communities in all four counties.

### **7.2.1 General Issues and/or Needs of Disadvantaged Populations**

The four primary issues that clients of the respondents face were:

1. Lack of employment opportunities;
2. Poor access to transit services;
3. Low levels of education, work preparedness, and training; and
4. Lack of affordable housing.

Many respondents indicated that the people they serve generally were hampered by their low level of educational attainment, which limited their employment opportunities. Several respondents also indicated that inadequate transportation services to employment centers limited their clients access to employment opportunities and other services, such as vocational schools and supermarkets.

Greater access to affordable housing, improvements in public transportation services, access to education opportunities, and affordable childcare were the most needed services to address their clients issues. An increase in suitable employment opportunities for lower educated/skilled workers was also indicated to be an important needed improvement.

### **7.2.2 Transportation System Effectiveness and Community Conditions**

Respondents were asked to rank their clients proximity and mode of accessibility to employment, education opportunities, social services, medical and dental services, grocery stores, transit stops, childcare, and elderly/senior centers. Proximity was quantified on a scale of 1 to 5, where “1” referred to very close and “5” referred to very far.

Overall, respondents indicated that bus and jitney stops were generally close to where their clients lived and within walking distance. However, the same could not be said for the other services. For the most part, the other services were considered fairly far away and only accessible by transit or auto.

Respondents were also asked to rate the condition of select features of the existing built environment of where their clients lived. The features included roads, sidewalks, crosswalks, safety, noise levels, air quality, and parks/open space. Condition was quantified on a scale of 1 to 5, with “1” referring to very poor and “5” referring to excellent. In *general*, the respondents indicated that:

- Roads, sidewalks, and crosswalks were in fairly poor condition and could use improvement;
- Safety, noise levels, and air quality were fine and did not adversely affect their clients daily lives; and
- Parks and open space were in fairly good condition, but were not always easily accessible for low-income and minority communities.

Overall, sidewalks were given the lowest rating, with one-third of the respondents indicating that they were in poor condition. To aid pedestrians and facilitate walking, an evaluation of and improvements to the region’s sidewalks, particularly in the more densely populated low-income and minority communities, should be viewed as a priority by the agencies concerned. Through partnerships with local schools, bike/pedestrian facilities can be often inventoried inexpensively to the advantage of empowering local government.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In Madison, Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) engaged local schools and children to identify pedestrian needs in the community. This served as an inexpensive yet valuable method for identifying local pedestrian issues and needed improvements. For more details about this project, visit the FHWA’s

Since the SJTPO region is predominantly rural and suburban, a majority of the region is not highly accessible by public transportation (which was indicated by the accessibility analysis presented in Chapter 5). To get a better understanding of transit service quality in low-income and minority communities, respondents were asked to rate several transit performance measures. These included service coverage, peak-hour weekday service frequency, late night/early morning service frequency, weekend service frequency, seating and shelter at bus stops, and signage. The various performance measure were quantified on a scale of 1 to 5, with “1” referring to low quality and “5” referring to high quality. Overall, respondents indicated that:

- Service coverage was fairly poor and served as a barrier for some low-income and minority people to access employment and other activities;
- Late night/early morning and weekend service frequency was poor and also hampered their clients access to employment and other activities; and
- Seating, shelter and signage at bus stops was in fairly poor condition (and in some cases nonexistent).

Respondents were asked to prioritize various transportation improvement strategies in order to address the proximity/access issues to various opportunities and services, deficient conditions of community features, and transit service deficiencies. The various strategies were quantified on a scale of 1 to 5, with “1” referring to low priority and “5” referring to high priority.

Overall, improving transit services was given the highest priority while roadway enhancements, which included capacity improvements, were given lowest priority. The remaining improvement strategies were rated similarly and were considered medium priority (see Table 7.2.2.1)

**Table 7.2.2.1  
Transportation Strategy Prioritization**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Improving transit service	High
Bringing essential services closer to where low-income and minority people live	Medium
Providing auto-related financial assistance to low-income people	Medium
Improving safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers	Medium
Improving pedestrian/bicycle conditions	Medium
Roadway enhancements	Low

### **7.2.3 Specific Improvements for the SJTPO Region**

Respondents were asked if there were any specific transportation improvements or projects that would improve the transportation system so that it better meets the needs of low-income and minority communities. Their suggestions were grouped into three categories: local improvements, regional improvements, and other suggested improvements. Their ideas are provided below.

#### Local Improvements

- Improve transportation access to employment centers in Gloucester County Industrial Parks
- Improve transit service to medical/dental services

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Environmental Justice website at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/ejustice/case/index.htm#1>. This method of public involvement can be an important means for building partnerships and goodwill in communities.

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- Provide jitney services to connect low-income and minority communities to key manufacturing sites in the Vineland area
- Provide mobile administrative services for communities in rural eastern Salem County
- Provide direct transit routes from Woodbine to Atlantic City casinos
- Connect Woodbine directly to employment centers in Wildwood
- Create a regional bike path system and re-establish passenger rail service between the Shore Mall, Atlantic City and the airport
- Improve signal timing and coordination at the intersections of Webster Street and Washington Avenue and Washington Avenue and Woodbine-Ocean View Avenue in Woodbine Borough

#### Regional Improvements

- Implement express transit service to Atlantic County from large towns in Cumberland County
- Increase east-west transit services from Salem to Cumberland County
- Create transit services that connect workers in Salem County to employment centers in Wilmington, Delaware
- Create transit services that better connect Cumberland County to other centers in the South Jersey-Philadelphia region
- Build light rail service that connects the Philadelphia/Cherry Hill area and Cumberland County
- Improve roadway access from Cumberland County to the Jersey shore
- Improve regional road access on the east-west corridor through Cumberland County

#### Other Suggested Improvements

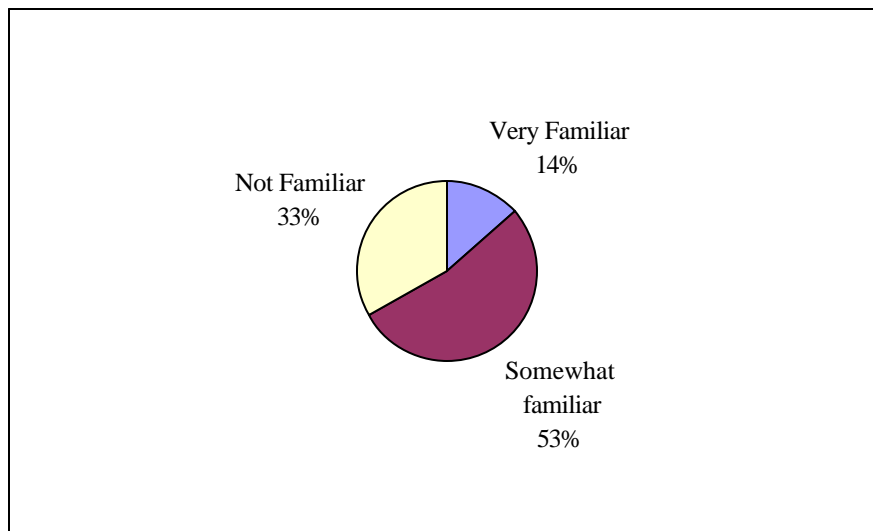
- Provide free or subsidized monthly transit passes to low-income people
- Improve shelters and seating at transit stops
- Improve transit service in low-income and minority communities
- Provide low income loans for transportation and educational needs
- Improve public involvement by leveraging resources and partnering with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Faith-Based Institutions

#### **7.2.4 Familiarity/Involvement with the SJTPO and Transportation Funding Programs**

A majority of the respondents (53%) said that they were not familiar with the SJTPO while approximately one-third were somewhat familiar with the agency (see Figure 7.2.4.1). Additionally, most of the respondents were not familiar or were only somewhat familiar with the SJTPO and did not participate in the SJTPO's regular meetings.

Respondents' familiarity with funding programs such as the Transportation Enhancements (TE), Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC), Transportation and Community and System Preservation (TCSP) and Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) were very low. As a result, very few organizations had applied to and received funding from these programs. It should be noted that program requirements, eligibility, and the staff or financial resources of small agencies may preclude their ability to apply for federal funding.

**Figure 7.2.4.1**  
**Familiarity with the SJTPO**



### **7.2.5 Future Outreach Activities Related to Environmental Justice**

Several respondents identified specific facilities, locations, or events that the SJTPO could utilize to engage minority and low-income populations in transportation studies, projects and planning. These included:

#### Facilities/Locations

- Woodbine Chamber of Commerce
- Spanish Community Center – Landisville
- Port Authority of Woodbine
- Atlantic County Transportation – Northfield
- WIB and One-Stop Career Centers – Pleasantville
- Martin Luther King Center – Atlantic City
- Egg Harbor Township Community Center
- Shiloh Baptist Church – Vineland and senior complex on Mattoli Way
- Cape May County Fare-Free Transportation
- Migrant Head Start Program
- Vision 2000
- Salem Middle School
- Salem Community College

#### Events that SJTPO Could Attend

- AARP Chapter Meetings
- Park/Community Day through the Spanish Community Center (which occurs every May)
- Farm Worker Festivals (Bridgeton, May 19<sup>th</sup> 2002; Rosenhayn, June 9<sup>th</sup> 2002, and Hammonton, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2002)
- “Festival of Friends”
- Egg Harbor Township Community Center Family Day (Fall 2002)
- Atlantic City Housing Authority – Monthly Tenant Organization Meetings

- Hispanic Family Day – Woodbine
- Hispanic Festival – Vineland

### **7.2.6 Willingness to Participate in Focus Groups/Committees on Environmental Justice**

Many respondents expressed an interest and willingness to participate in future activities related to improving transportation for low-income and minority populations. Over three-fourths of the respondents (77%) responded favorably to the idea of participating in a focus group regarding environmental justice and transportation issues. The names of these prospective participants (organizations and individuals) will be added to the database maintained by the SJTPO.

### **7.2.7 Conclusions**

Overall, the survey effort and findings provided information for future public outreach and several valuable insights. The highlights of which include:

- The survey effort effectively reached out to organizations that represent low-income and minority populations, especially those who have not traditionally participated in the SJTPO's transportation planning process, and consequently helped develop a contact list that the SJTPO can use to improve the participation of these organizations.
- The survey findings provided valuable insights into the transportation needs/issues of low-income and minority populations. Most notable were the expressed concerns that current transit services hamper low-income and minority populations' access to essential opportunities and services, such as employment and education.
- The survey measured an organization's familiarity and involvement with the SJTPO and its understanding of community-focused transportation funding programs. While most respondents were not very familiar with the SJTPO and such transportation funding programs, many of the respondents were interested in learning more about them.
- The survey allowed organizations an opportunity to express an interest in participating in a focus group or working committee regarding environmental justice and the transportation needs of low-income and minority populations. Most respondents expressed a willingness to participate in a focus group or committee, which would facilitate greater involvement or perhaps continuing involvement with the local community in the transportation planning process. Respondents were often highly committed to advocacy for their clients and several respondents may be interested in participating in future studies, becoming future project sponsors, or willing to serve on advisory committees or working groups. This survey was a good initial step for giving exposure to interested parties and discussing the role of transportation in the lives of their client population.