

## Engagement/Research Executive Summary

August 1, 2018

### INTRODUCTION

The City of Delaware has a lot going for it – a quaint, historic downtown, a popular college, great new shops and attractive parks. But rapid growth and development over the last 20 years have made getting around tougher. And while growth brings benefits like more jobs and fun things to do, it also brings delays, accidents, wear and tear on our streets, and frustration for everyone.

The goal of the Access Delaware engagement and research effort was to seek input from the community on transportation challenges facing the City of Delaware, and also to get the public's thoughts on why the 'Moving Delaware Forward' levy did not succeed.

### METHODOLOGY

Findings were collected over a three-month period through three methods: **Key Influencer Interviews**, **Community Forums** and an **Online Survey**. More than 1,000 people living and/or working in Delaware took part and these results are based on those conversations from March 22-May 28, 2018.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

The key takeaways from the three combined engagement and research methods include:

- **Delaware residents and workers drive to get around town.** Participants mostly utilize a personal vehicle when traveling, though there are users and communities that rely on or would utilize additional modes of transportation (i.e. DATA bus, walking, ridesharing).
- **Delaware roads need some work.** A majority (more than 65%) of participants believe Delaware's existing road network could be better maintained.
- **Driving in Delaware can be a challenge.** Similarly, participants believe driving in Delaware can be a challenge and identified an increase in traffic congestion, deterioration of road conditions and the need for safer streets (for both drivers and pedestrians) as the top issues.
- **The 2016 levy failed because residents felt overtaxed and messaging was vague.** Even though nearly half of the participants voted for the 2016 'Moving Delaware Forward' levy, those that did not said the levy failed because Delaware residents didn't want a permanent tax, felt an increase for aiding transportation improvements is not needed, and many residents already pay taxes in Delaware and another municipality.
  - Residents felt the levy message was confusing, misleading and not explained well enough.
  - Many had concerns with how Delaware's finances are collected and spent.
  - Need for better accountability, responsibility and efficiency surrounding financial resources
  - Delaware residents working outside of the city are feeling pinched twice because they pay taxes in Delaware and to another municipality

- **Maintain and improve roadways.** Participants' priorities for transportation issues include maintaining existing roadways, reducing traffic congestion at key areas and improving driver and pedestrian safety.
- **Communicate better with residents.** In order to build trust, participants asked for city officials to seek input on transportation priorities through online surveys, public meetings and more user education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on input collected for the Access Delaware initiative, the following recommendations are offered.

- **The City of Delaware must make a stronger case for transportation investment needs.** While the City's resources are stretched thin, the public still sees transportation projects move forward and does not understand why funding gaps exist. The public won't support fixing a problem if they don't believe one exists.
- **The City of Delaware must communicate best practices in transportation planning and engineering.** It may seem like the best way to solve congestion, but adding more highway lanes is not always the best solution. Access Delaware should redouble education efforts to explain why the "obvious" choice is not always the right one and share with the public the trade-offs involved. Additionally, Access Delaware should strive to demonstrate how the City prioritizes and funds transportation initiatives today.
- **The City of Delaware must build trust and understanding.** There is a suspicion of government and residents are quick to assume the worst: public officials aren't spending their money wisely and they just want more of it. The reality is much different, and the City constantly has to prove it through a combination of transparency, inclusion and education. Methods for doing this include:
  - Convening a community task force to review the City's transportation/infrastructure needs, how the city can/cannot pay for them (identify gaps), review what fiscal stewardship strategies the City has already implemented, and to devise recommendations on how to meet gaps.
  - Talking to the public early and often about transportation needs and solutions. Solicit and respond to public input through letters, email, quarterly public forums, public meetings at key project milestones, and through engagement and surveys via social media platforms.