

2000/2001 Twin Cities Area Survey

Highlights

Results on Major Regional Issues, Regional Rating and Transportation Concerns

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Introduction

Starting in 1982, the Metropolitan Council has regularly asked residents of the seven-county metropolitan area to rate the region's quality of life and to identify the major problems facing the metro area. As part of the Twin Cities survey conducted by the University of Minnesota, the general attitudinal measures provided in this survey serve as a regional barometer.

This activity is part of the Council's broad-based efforts to monitor conditions in the region. From general measures, more detailed questions can be devised to look more closely at areas of concern. These attitudinal indicators can help focus objective measures on identified problems.

The latest survey focused on growth-related issues. Questions were asked about people's receptiveness to "Smart Growth" development patterns. More general questions about residential preference and migration were also asked. To better understand the forces influencing metropolitan growth, some of the questions were asked of an additional sample drawn from four counties adjacent to the seven county metro area.

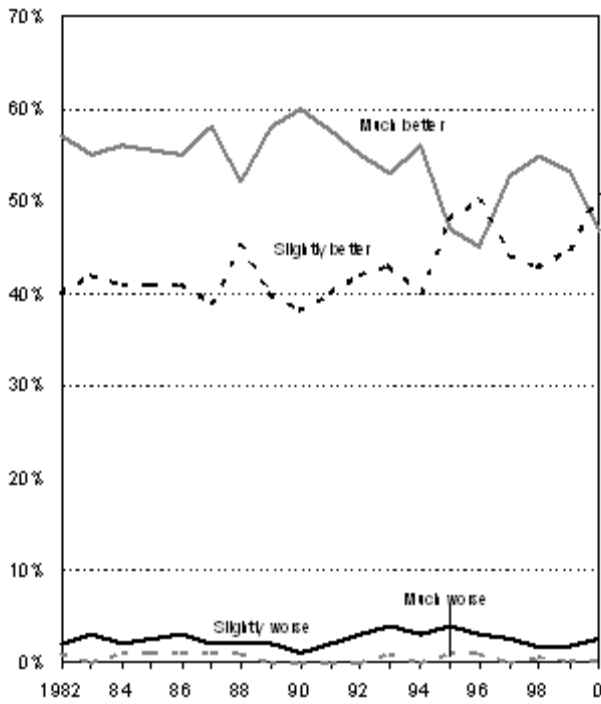
The survey was conducted by the University of Minnesota's Center for Survey Research (MCSR). It was a random phone survey of about 800 seven-county households. The survey results are accurate within plus or minus 3.5 percent. Thus, projections can be made to represent the entire region. It was historically conducted in the fall, but in the past five years, much of the interviewing has occurred in the winter (carrying over into the next year). **The survey has questions related to the regional rating, quality of life, problem identification, transportation, growth and development, location preference, environment, the Mississippi River, parks and technology.** This summary highlights selected questions pertaining to Council and regional issues.

Twin Cities Comparative Rating

As a measure of overall regional health, respondents were asked: "How would you rate the Twin Cities area as a place to live as compared to other metropolitan areas in the nation? Do you feel the area is a much better place, a slightly better, a slightly worse place or a much worse place in which to live?" The results for the recent 2000/2001 survey showed a statistically significant dip, although most all respondents (98.5%) see the Twin Cities as better place to live. The dip was that those who see the region as "much better" dropped from 55% to 47% while those who said it was just "slightly better" rose from 43% to just over half. This is the first significant drop in overall rating since similar ratings were recorded in 1995 and 1996. That drop followed several years of high concern about crime. Between 1993 and 1996 crime was named by 53% to 62% percent of those surveyed. A look at the trends in major problems in the region shows only two areas with significant increases transportation (mostly congestion concerns) and housing (mostly affordability issues).

Figure 1

"How would you rate the Twin Cities as a place to live compared to other metropolitan areas in the nation--do you feel the Twin Cities Area is:"



Survey was not conducted in 1985 or 1991.

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Single Most Important Regional Problem

Each year people are asked: "In your opinion, what do you think is the single most important problem facing the people of the Twin Cities today."

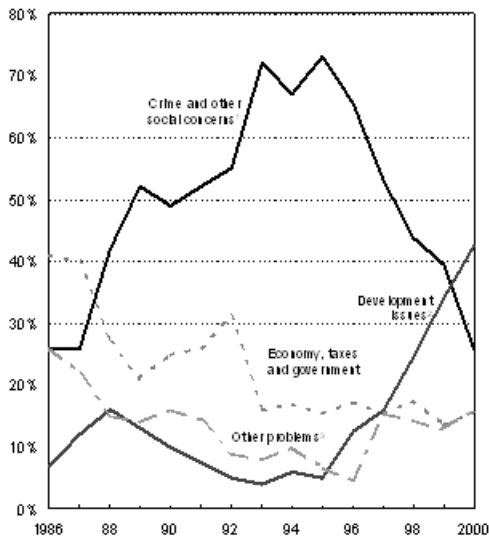
Trends for General Categories of Problems (Development, Social, Economic and Other)

To better highlight trends that reflect the Metropolitan Council's focus on development as part of its current smart growth effort, regional problems have been grouped into four main categories (see Figure 2). These categories are: development related (transportation, housing and urban sprawl), social concerns (primarily crime, but also including poverty, drugs and family issues), economic issues (including jobs, taxes and government concerns) and other problems (such as concerns about the environment, health and education).

The message is clear, people are becoming increasingly concerned about how the region is growing. From 1989 to 1995 development issues were mentioned less than the other three general groups. From a modest peak of 16 percent in 1988, concern about development issues dropped to just five percent by 1992. Beginning in 1996 concerns about development issues have skyrocketed to over one-third of those surveyed citing these issues in the 1999 survey and 43 percent in the most recent survey (2000/2001). Over this same time period social problems, driven by concern about crime jumped from just over one quarter citing them in 1986 to nearly three-quarters by 1995. With the rise of concerns about development, social concerns have declined to about one-quarter in the latest survey. Economic problems, including taxes and government were the top concern in 1986 at over 40 percent, but since 1993 they have been around 16 percent. It should be noted that this survey was conducted in the late fall of 2000 and early part of 2001, before the downturn in the economy had taken hold. Except for a sharp jump from 1996 to 1997 "other problems" have been dropping since 1986. They remain at 16 percent, about the same percentage as economic problems. The next section covers the trends for the individual problem areas (see Figure 3).

Figure 2

"In your opinion, what do you think is the single most important problem facing people in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area today?"



Notes: Categories above are groupings of responses to open-ended questions. Survey was not conducted in 1991.

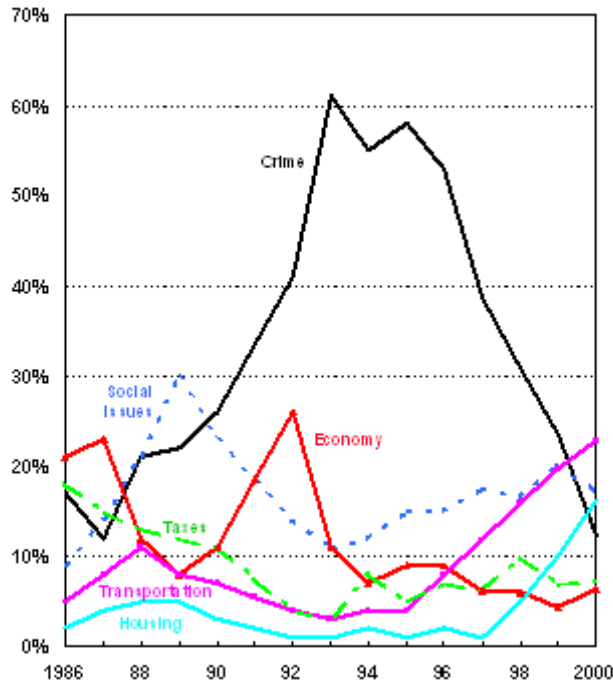
- ¹Includes: homelessness, poverty, drugs and family problems.
- ²Transportation, housing, urban sprawl and population concerns.
- ³Includes: environment, education and health.

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Figure 3

“In your opinion, what do you think is the single most important problem facing people in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area today?”



Notes: Categories above are grouping of the response to an open-ended question. Survey was not conducted in 1991.

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Transportation

Identification of transportation concerns, primarily traffic or congestion, continued its remarkable increase since 1995. It accounted for 3 or 4 percent of responses from 1993 through 1995, but has risen 4 percentage points each year since then, reaching 20 percent in 1999 and 23 percent in the most recent survey. Nearly double the concern about crime. In 1993 crime was at 61% and transportation concerns a mere 3%! Despite the steep rise in concern in the past five years 27 percent of those surveyed in 1999 still believed it was easier to get around in the Twin Cities than in other metro areas, while only 15 percent believe it is more difficult. More than half think it is average in accessibility. It is unlikely that those perceptions will persist much longer with the continued rise in concern about transportation.

The sharp concern about transportation is one possible reason why the overall regional rating dropped in the most recent survey.

Housing

Concern about housing problems, mostly cost or affordability, experienced the sharpest jump in concerns over the past two years. The Council's efforts to deal with this issue are evidently raising the region's awareness of this problem. Just three years ago only one percent said housing was the number one problem. In 1999, 10 percent identified it as such and in 2000/2001 the percentage rose to 16.

Crime

The Metropolitan Council is not directly involved in criminal justice issues, but it is concerned about crime (or any other serious regional problem) because it influences areas of direct concern to the Council. High crime rates can undermine the region's the overall competitiveness and vitality, and they influence personal and business location decisions that affect how the region develops. Concern about crime had been the number one concern since 1990, but dropped to number three in the most recent survey. It had been declining in importance since 1995 when it was at 58 percent. It was cited by just 12.3 percent in this year's survey, the lowest level since the survey began in asking this question in 1986. Crime concerns peaked in 1993 at 62 percent.

Social Problems

The number two problem cited continued to be "social issues," although this problem is really a collection of a number of more specific, but related responses, such as drugs, urban sprawl, poverty, welfare, homelessness and family problems. Social issues were at 17 percent in this year's survey, down a bit from last year. Social issues include urban sprawl (including related "population" concerns).

Urban Sprawl (and other population concerns)

Sprawl and other population concerns surpassed drugs as the top social problem in 1999, accounting for 22 percent of social issues in that year and 4.4 percent of all responses. It remained the top social problem in the latest survey, but dropped slightly to 21 percent of social concerns and 3.6 percent of all concerns in the latest survey. Although a small percentage, it translates into over 35,000 households regionwide, a significant number if they are actively involved in the issue. Sprawl was barely mentioned before 1996. When asked directly if "urban sprawl should be reduced", over sixty percent agreed while less than one-quarter disagreed. Twelve percent had no opinion.

When asked about the term "smart growth" 35 percent had heard the term, up sharply from 22 percent last year. Of those, 40 percent had a favorable opinion and 15 percent had an unfavorable opinion. Forty-five percent had no opinion.

Taxes

After a significant rise two years ago, concern about taxes dropped back to about seven percent in 1999 and remained there in the latest survey. Concern about taxes has ranged from a high of 18 percent in 1986 to just 3 percent as recently as 1993.

Education

Education was cited as a problem by just under seven percent, up just one point from last year.

Economic Problems

The percentage of respondents identifying economic problems dropped from six percent to just four percent in the 1999 survey but rose back to six percent in the 2000/2001 survey. The recent economic downturn had not occurred before this survey was nearly completed.

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Transportation

As a result of the rising concern with transportation as a regional problem over the past several years a question was added about traffic congestion. Respondents were asked, "In the past year, do you think traffic congestion in the Twin Cities metro area has increased, stayed about the same or decreased?" Seventy-seven percent said it had gotten worse and only one percent thought it had decreased. This is similar to responses in the two previous years. Last year 81 percent said it had increased and only two percent thought it had decreased.

As a result of the growing concern about congestion, a more detailed question was asked two years ago asking people what to do about it. The question wasn't asked in 1999 but was repeated in this year's survey. Table one below shows this year's results compared to two years ago. Various transit approaches were most frequently noted in both years, although the transit suggestions dropped somewhat, from 46 percent to 40 percent. The big drop in LRT probably occurred because two years ago LRT was not yet approved. Since it is now being built, fewer people would suggest adding LRT. This is most likely why the overall transit numbers dropped somewhat.

The biggest increase was in the number who wanted to improve roads and freeways; it went from 20 percent to 35 percent. Since most people drive it is not surprising that they cite road improvements as a need. Concern about the condition of roads might also be a part of this concern that is not congestion related. Adding roads and freeways went up a bit, 7.3% to 8.3%, but is still not a very popular approach. The tremendous flip-flop on ramp meters is striking, evidently the majority of people saw the need for meters based on the test shut down. Some of

the more innovative responses to solving transportation problems dropped somewhat, for example, carpooling, controlling sprawl and flexible hours.

Table 1
What do you think should be done to address this problem?

Responses (summarized)	2000/2001		1998/1999 (first responses*)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Transit related	223	40.0%	261	46.4%
Add or build light rail	83	14.9%	131	23.3%
Increase mass transit	88	15.8%	70	12.5%
Improve bus services	22	3.9%	40	7.1%
Other	30	5.4%	20	3.6%
Improve roads or freeways	192	34.5%	114	20.3%
Improve roads	74	13.3%	29	5.2%
Improve freeways	118	21.2%	85	15.1%
Add roads or freeways	46	8.3%	41	7.3%
Add roads	22	3.9%	27	4.8%
Add freeways	24	4.3%	14	2.5%
Other responses	98	17.2%	147	26.2%
Add/keep ramp meters	19	3.4%	3	0.5%
Remove ramp meters	6	1.1%	18	3.2%
Promote carpooling	22	3.9%	46	8.2%
Flexible hours	3	0.5%	13	2.3%
Telecommuting	5	0.9%	1	0.2%
Control urban sprawl	4	0.7%	9	1.6%
Other	37	6.6%	56	10.0%
Total	557	100.0%	562	100.0%

*In 1998 some respondents gave more than one response. Since none were recorded in 2000, the 1998 second-responses were not included in the comparison table.

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Another specific question was asked about dealing with addressing the region's transportation needs:

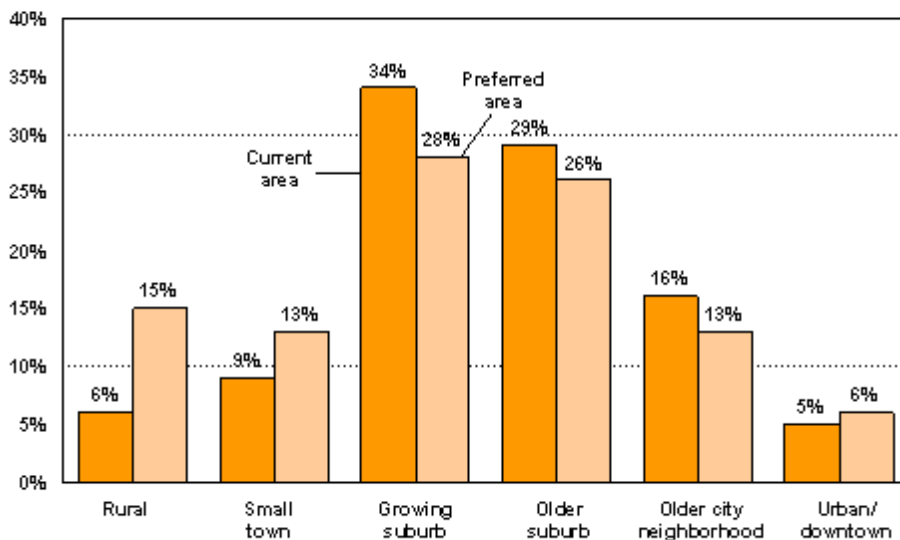
"Do you agree or disagree that light rail, exclusive busways, and commuter rail lines are necessary in order to meet the metro area's long range transportation needs. Would you say strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree? The responses were overwhelming support of these transit alternatives. Forty percent strongly agreed and 39 somewhat agreed. Ten percent somewhat disagreed and only 11 percent strongly disagreed.

Awareness of the (LRT) line being planned for the Hiawatha corridor from downtown Minneapolis to the airport and Mall of America rose from 67 percent two years ago, to 83 percent last year to 89 percent in the most recent survey.

Location Preference

People were asked if they would prefer to live in a different type of area (rural, suburban, etc.). Twenty-four percent said they would compared to 28 percent last year. Of the 24 percent wanting a different type of area, 67 percent said they planned to move to such an area in the next few years. That's 15 percent of all respondents, about the same as the previous year. People who said they preferred a different area were also asked what they like least about that area and what appealed to them most about the kind of area they would prefer to live in. Most of the responses indicate a desire for a less crowded, quieter place. For many this means a rural or small town, but the number one dislike was that the area was growing too fast. While rural areas and small towns are smaller and less crowded they are growing rapidly (faster than the suburbs in percentage terms). There were also some who were looking for more activities and walking access to them which suggests a very urban setting.

**"How would you describe the area where you currently live?" and
"Where would you prefer to live?"
Twin Cities Metro Area**



Source: MDCR Twin Cities Survey, 2000/2001.

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Table 2

**Likes and Dislikes of People Preferring a Different Type of Location
(24% of survey respondents)**

Like least about current location		Most appealing about preferred location	
Growing too fast	14.7%	More open space	18%
Too crowded	13.9%	Quieter	15%
Traffic	11.3%	Friendlier people	8%
Must drive everywhere	7.5%	Less crowded	7.5%
Crime/unsafe	6.4%	More activities	7%
Noisy	5.4%	Can walk to places	4.5%
Lack of quality housing	3.5%	Where I grew up	4.5%

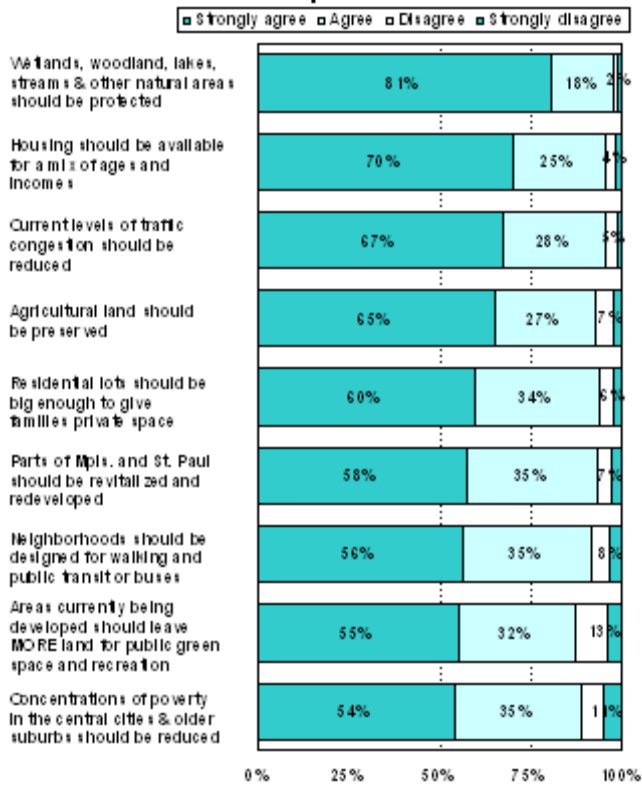
Growth

Respondents were asked several questions about growth. These questions were introduced with the following statement:

Over the next 20 years the Twin Cities metropolitan area is expected to add about 500,000 people, about the same amount as the last 20 years. A growing population needs more homes and more businesses. The Metropolitan Council is looking ahead and planning how to accommodate this growth.

In response to the first question -- "Do you think that the seven county Twin Cities metropolitan area is growing too fast, at about the right pace, or too slow? -- just over half said it was about right but 47% said it was growing too fast while only one percent thought the rate was too slow. The same question was asked about growth in the "city, suburb or township where you live" Only 71 percent thought it was the right pace. Twenty-six percent thought it was too fast and only 3 percent thought it was too slow.

Twin Cities Metropolitan Area Possible ways to accommodate future growth Top nine

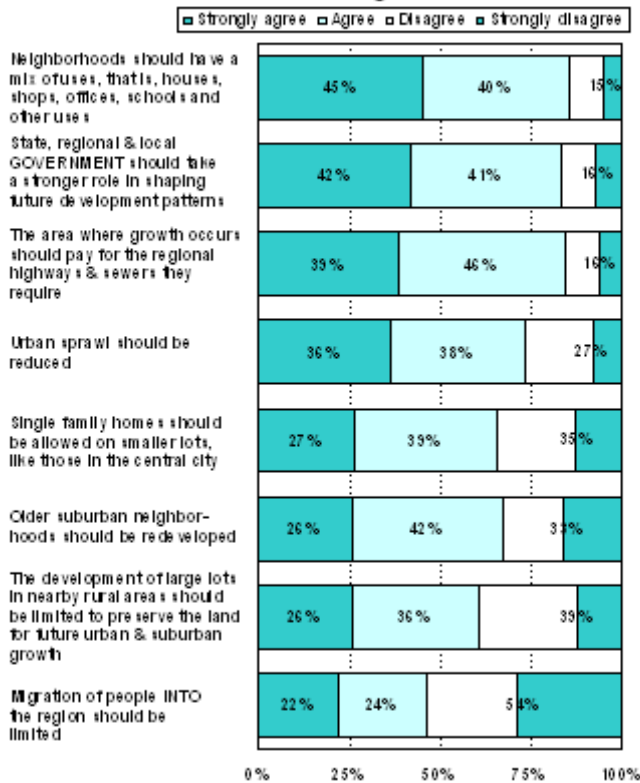


The order in which questions were asked was varied using a random start

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Twin Cities Metropolitan Area Possible ways to accommodate future growth Lowest eight



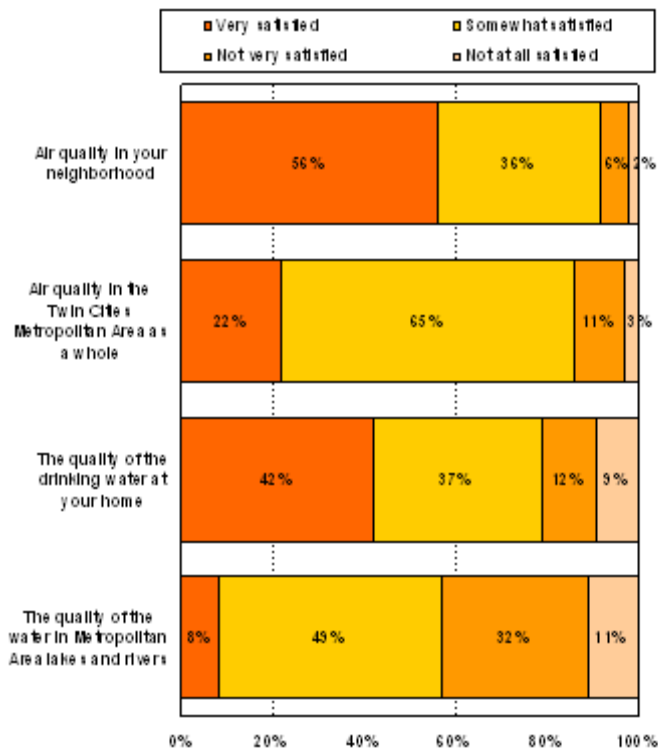
The order in which questions were asked was varied using a random start

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Environment

Residents of the region continue to rate the quality of air and water high for their neighborhood. Nearly 92 percent were either very satisfied (the majority) or somewhat satisfied with their neighborhood's air quality. Quality of drinking water was rated highly, but not as strongly as air. Nearly 80 percent were satisfied, more very satisfied than somewhat satisfied. These ratings did not change noticeably from the previous two surveys. Air quality and the quality of lakes and rivers in the region weren't rated as highly, but the majority were satisfied, although most were just somewhat satisfied. The ratings for both regional air and water quality both slipped slightly from last year.

**Twin Cities Metropolitan Area
Metropolitan Council Environmental Services Division
“How satisfied are you with:”**



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For the first time several questions were asked about the Mississippi River. Ninety percent said they valued the Mississippi River as a scenic resource--over half saying they valued it very much. Respondent did not have nearly such a positive rating of the water quality of the river. Only 20 percent rated it good (only one percent very good). Fifty-seven percent rated it poor or very poor while 23 percent had no opinion.

Thirty-six percent said they used the Mississippi River or the area next to it. The primary uses were walking or hiking and boating, 34 percent and 31 percent respectively. Fifteen percent used it for fishing, 13 percent for biking, 12 percent visited the parks and 11 percent had picnics by the river.

Communications Technology

Communications technology is becoming an ever more important component of the region's economic vitality. This is particularly true as the region attempts to enhance its competitive position in a global marketplace. Home computers and personal Internet access and use are one

indicator of how the region's citizens are participating in this technological transition. Internet access is up sharply over the past three years, from 57 percent in the 1997 survey, to 90 percent in the most recent survey. Access has increased both at home and at work. Forty-six percent surveyed now have access in both places, compared to just 18 percent three years ago and just over one-third last year.

Table 3
Twin Cities Metropolitan Area

"Do you have access to information on the Internet?"

	1997	1998	1999	2000
Yes, at work	18%	19%	14%	13%
Yes, at home	16%	19%	23%	22%
Yes, at both	18%	26%	35%	46%
Other access	5%	10%	10%	8%
Total with access	57%	74%	81%	90%

Seventy-nine percent of those surveyed had personal computers up sharply from 66 percent two years ago, but only three percentage points higher than last year. This seems like a very high figure and may reflect some of the biases that affect such surveys besides sampling error. People without phones are unlikely to have computers, but that is a small percentage of the population and wouldn't distort the results by more than a few percent. It might also reflect differences in who is willing to complete the survey, but that is conjecture. The percent having cable TV was 69 percent, six points higher than in last year's survey.

Table 4
Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and Four Collar Counties

"Do you have a personal computer in your home?"

	1998	1999	2000
Yes	66%	76%	79%
No	34%	24%	21%

"Is this computer in you home used for work or business?"

Yes	58%	53%	54%
No	42%	47%	46%

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