

2012 Caltrans Survey of Regional and Local Transportation Partners Final Report

Executive Summary

An objective survey was sent to Caltrans regional and local transportation partners, designed to provide views of California transportation priorities, and strategies to achieve these priorities. It also sought to determine the leadership approach and roles that should be assumed by the related transportation partners in different efforts and finally asked for evaluation of Caltrans performance in its transportation programs and reimbursed work.

The survey was sent to 65 partners, primarily representing Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs), and Congestion Management Agencies (CMAs). Of the more than half who answered the survey, the majority were from larger regional agencies.

Top priorities were identified as reliability and affordability, with service life sustainability and accessibility listed as more medium priorities. Key strategies identified for achieving the priorities were mode choice/connectivity and technology investments.

In most cases, the respondents felt that a coordinated state and regional approach was the best way to achieve the strategies, except for land use coordination, which the majority felt should be best led at the regional level.

The evaluation of Caltrans performance found the most dissatisfaction in Planning and Environment Impact Review. They responded with some dissatisfaction with Public/Stakeholder Outreach, Local Assistance, Cost Estimates, and Travelway Features & Aesthetics.

The majority of respondents came from agencies that contract with Caltrans to perform reimbursed work. The majority felt the work met their expectations. Only a small group expected to have Caltrans perform reimbursed work for them in the next 3-5 years.

Introduction:

The 2012 Caltrans Survey of Regional and Local Transportation Partners was conducted February 13 - 21, 2012 as a component of the Department's program review effort. The goal of the survey was to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of Caltrans from Metropolitan Planning Agencies (MPO), Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPA) and local jurisdictions with whom the Department coordinates planning and project delivery activities throughout the State of California. The survey covers a wide range of program areas including transportation planning, capital project delivery, maintenance and operations, contracting, and the use and availability of other Caltrans products and services.

Development of the Survey Instrument:

The survey instrument was developed by the program review team, with refinement and final configuration coordinated between Caltrans District 11 and the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG). SurveyMonkey, a web based survey tool, was used to design the survey instrument and solicit responses via e-mail. A total of 65 regional and local partners, primarily focused at the executive management level, were identified as survey recipients. The initial survey invitation was transmitted on February 13, 2012, with three reminder invitations sent out prior to the survey closing date of February 21, 2012. A total of 35 responses were collected, which represents a 54% response rate.

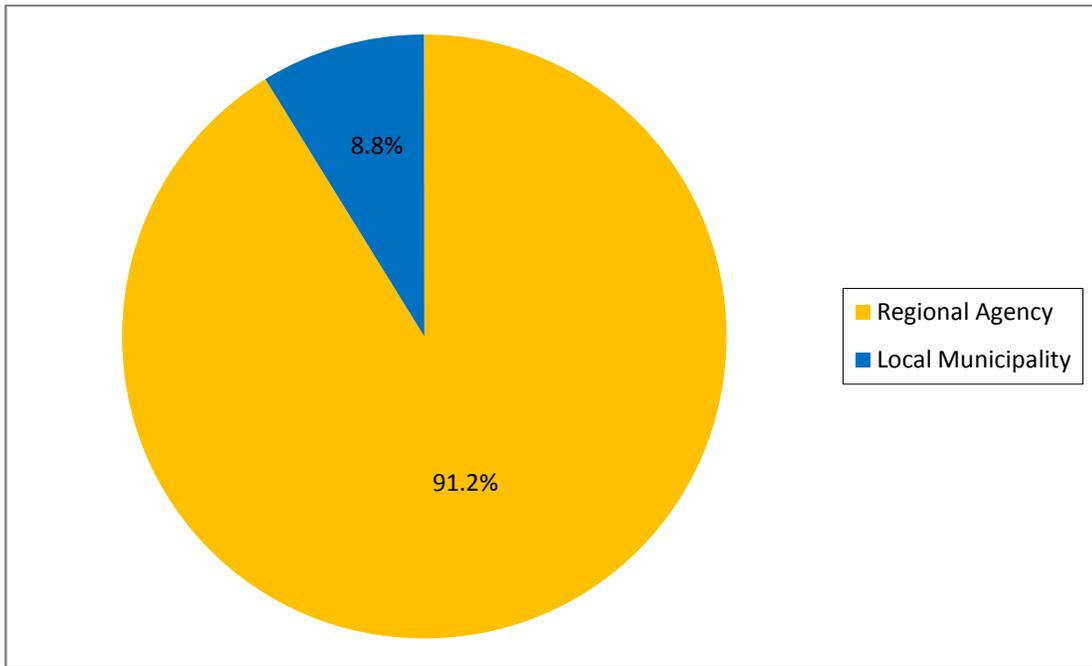
Survey Data Analysis:

The SurveyMonkey program provides several data analysis tools which enable the survey administrator to perform traditional survey tasks such as developing filters, crosstabs, tables, charts, etc. To accomplish survey goals, some additional analysis was performed in order to gauge regional or geographic trends, combine similar responses within program areas, and breakout individual "free-form" responses collected through text input boxes. Respondents providing specific comments for questions with additional input options were kept anonymous.

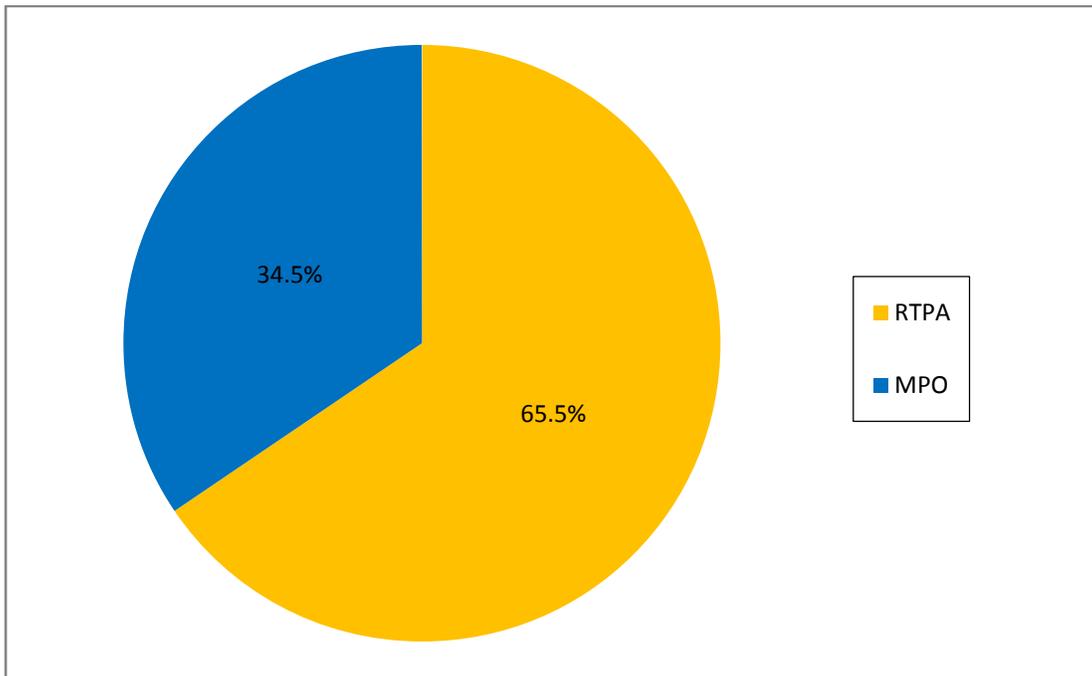
Survey Questions and Results:

The survey consisted of 14 multiple choice questions, including several questions in which respondents were asked to rank their responses in various topic areas. This included an assessment of specific Department program areas and business practices, the utility and effectiveness of Caltrans products and services in meeting customer needs, the level of support for funding strategies for system preservation and maintenance, and respondents views on the respective roles of state and regional/local governments in sustaining and enhancing mobility. The responses for each question have been placed into a chart to provide the program review team and the reader with an easy to interpret summary. For some of the more complex, multi-part questions, supporting information has been added to consolidate data and provide some conclusions in support of specific details. In addition, for questions that provided respondents an opportunity to add additional comments, the individual feedback is included anonymously within the documentation of each survey response.

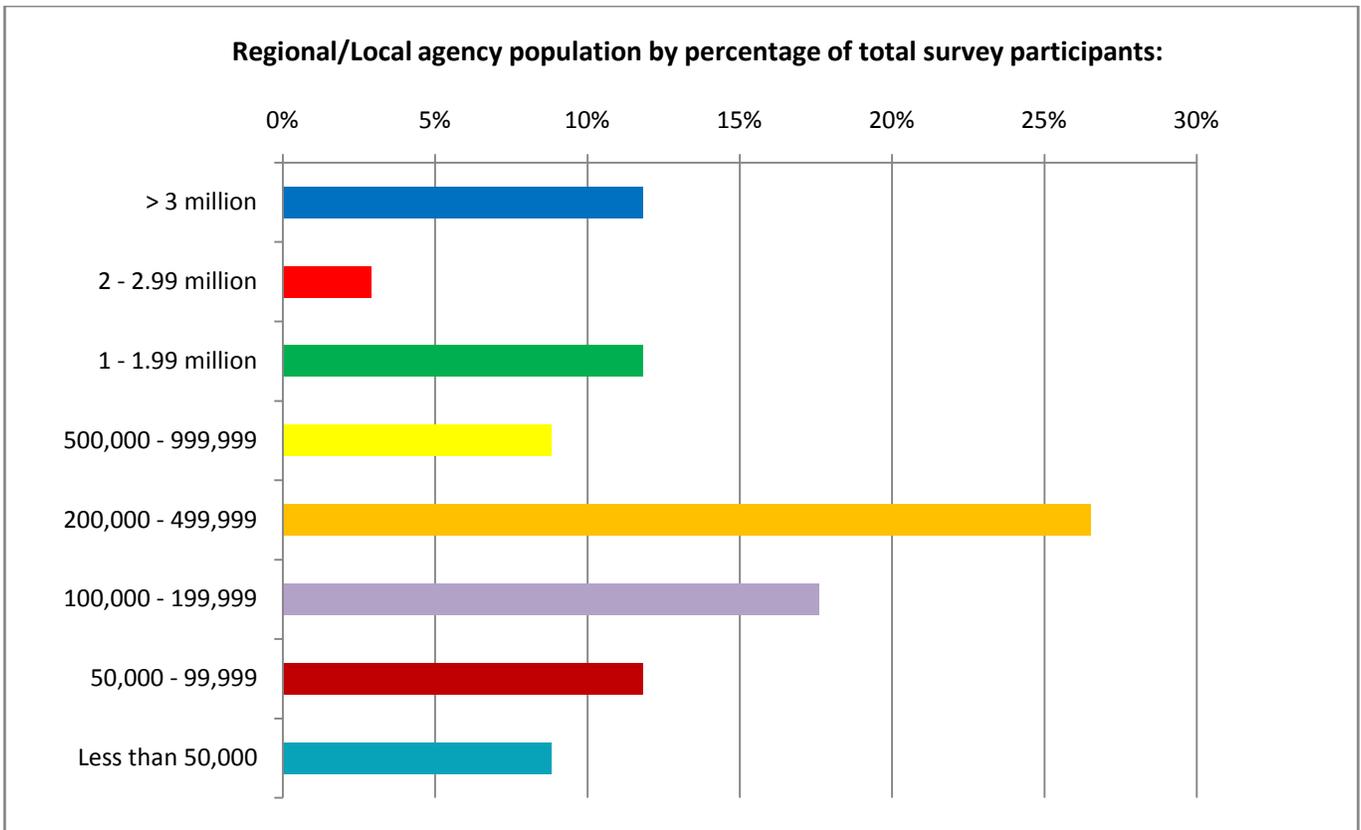
Question #1 – What type of organization do you represent?



Question #2 – Please specify Regional Agency type.



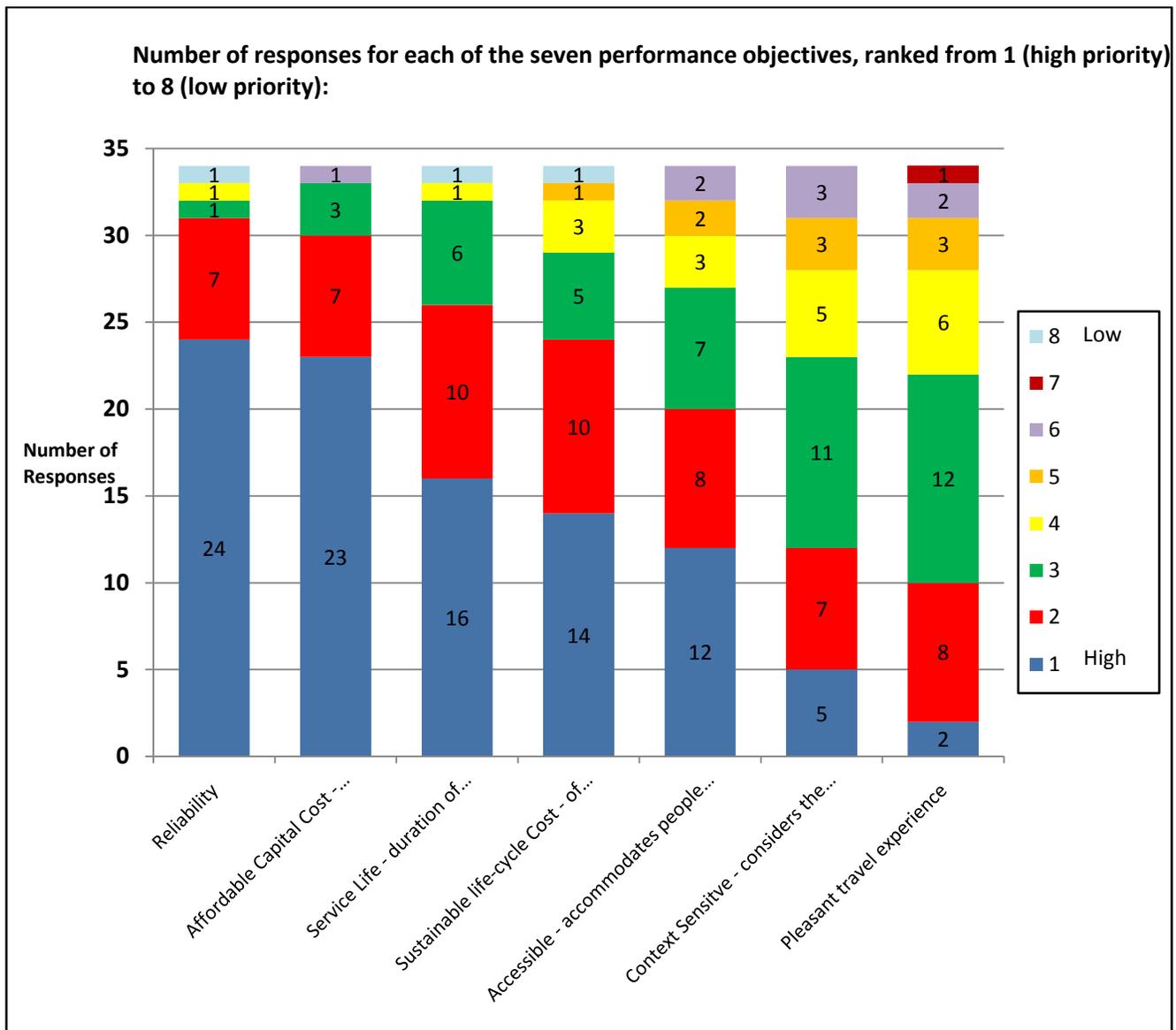
Question #3 – If you represent a Regional Agency or Local Municipality, please provide the population of your jurisdiction:



Question #4 – Together we share the goal of providing a safe and effective transportation system for California. Please prioritize the following performance objectives on a scale of 1 to 8, with 1 being the highest degree of importance (relative to all modes of land transportation):

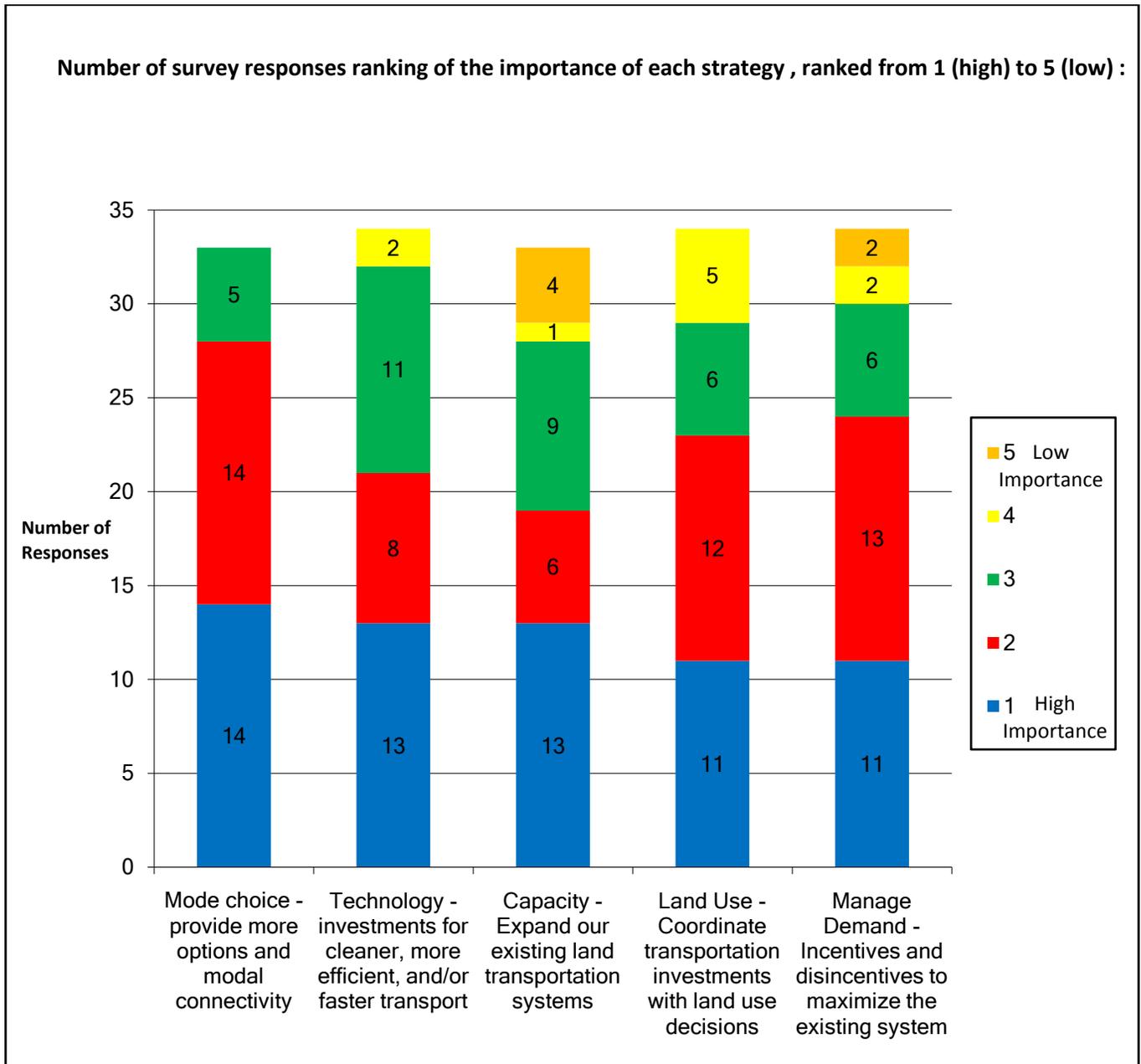
Responses to Question #4 indicate a high level of support for system Reliability and Affordability (capital cost), with over 85% of all respondents ranking these high in level of importance (1 or 2 priority) as key performance objectives. Service Life and Sustainability (life-cycle cost) objectives follow at approximately 70%, and Accessibility was at 57%. Context Sensitive solutions and Pleasant Travel Experience ranked comparatively low at 34% and 28% respectively.

The chart below displays the level of support (by number of “votes”) survey respondents had for each of the seven performance objectives, based on the ranking priority from 1 (high) to 8 (low).



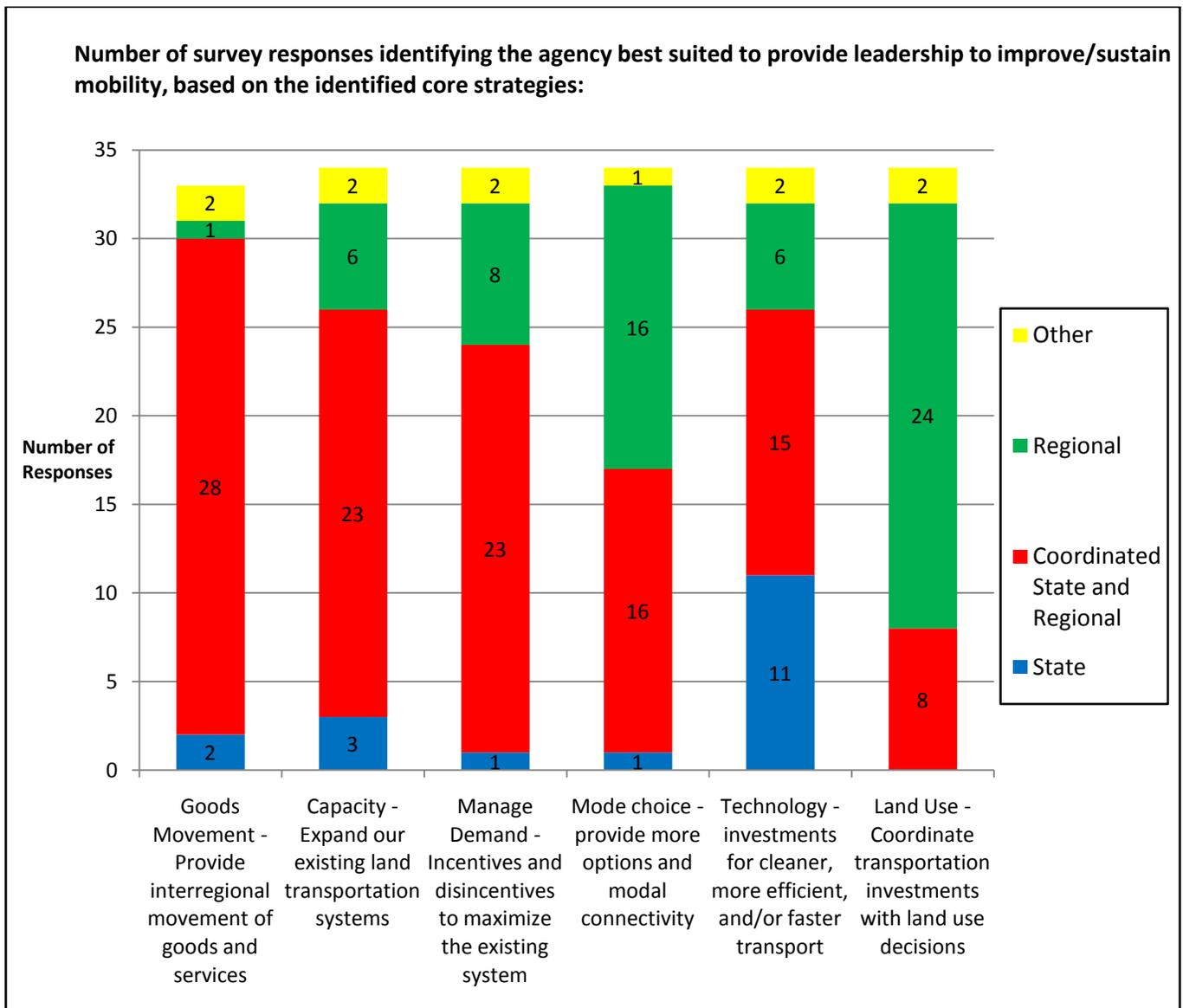
Question #5 – To best foster California's mobility goals, please prioritize the following strategies on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the highest degree of importance:

Responses to Question #5 indicate strong support for providing additional Mode Choice options and improved Modal Connectivity, with nearly 85% of all respondents ranking this as a high level of importance (1 or 2 priority). Land Use/Investment Decisions and Demand Management strategies follow with approximately 70% of respondents indicating a high level of importance, followed by Technology Investments (61%) and Capacity Expansion (57%).



Question #6 – Regarding the above core strategies (Question #5) to improve/sustain mobility, which agency is best suited to provide leadership?

In the areas of Goods Movement (80%), Capacity Expansion and Demand Management (66% respectively), survey respondents indicated that a coordinated State and Regional effort was best suited to provide leadership to improve and sustain mobility. For Mode Choice and Modal Connectivity, respondents appeared split on whether a coordinated State/Regional or Regional only effort is the best approach, and respondents clearly viewed Land Use strategies should be primarily coordinated at the Regional level. Only in the area of Technology investment did respondents indicate a prominent role was desirable for the State, though the majority felt that a coordinated State and Regional effort was best suited.

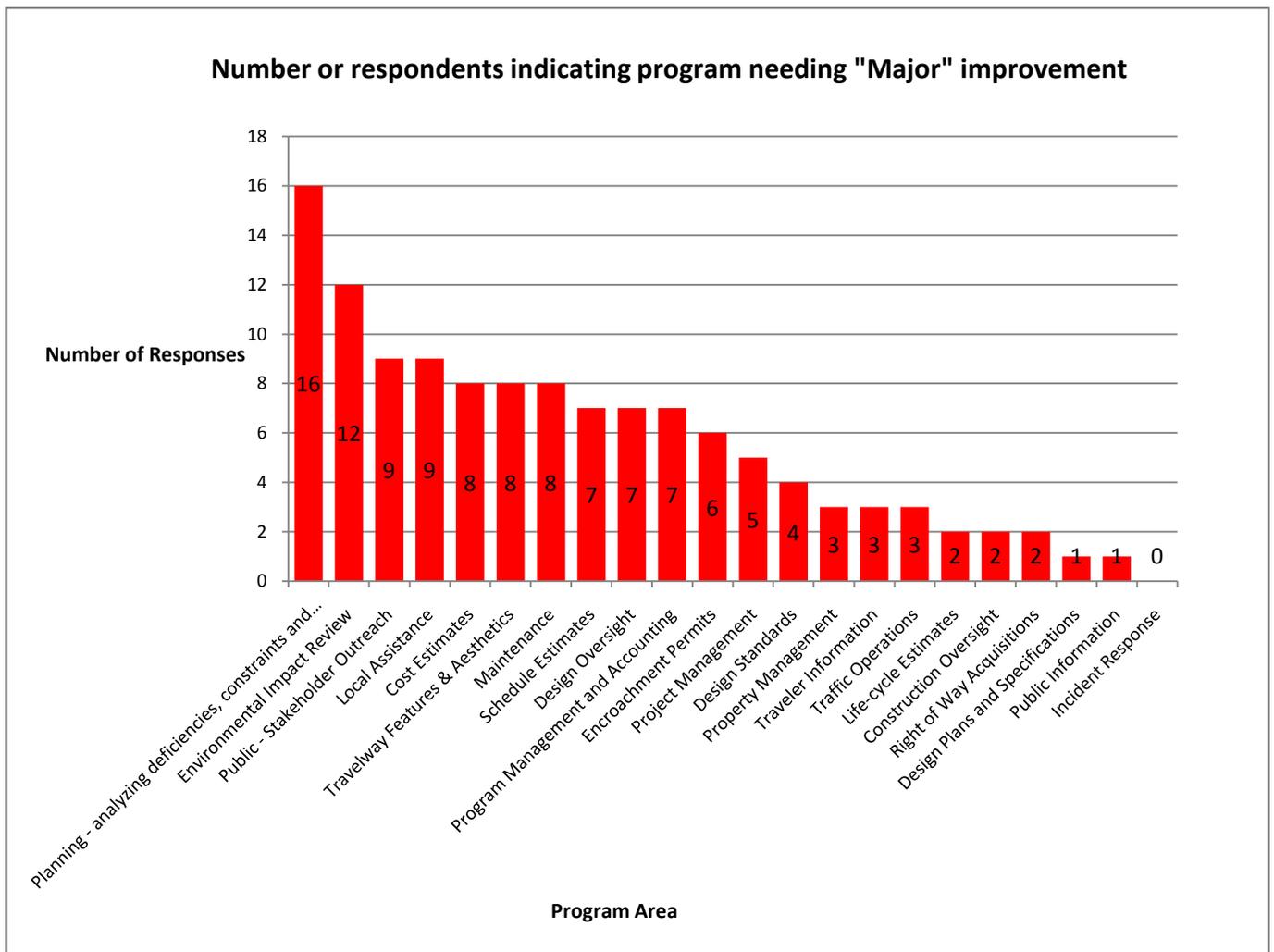


Question #6 included an optional text box for entering additional comments. These comments are included below and will remain anonymous:

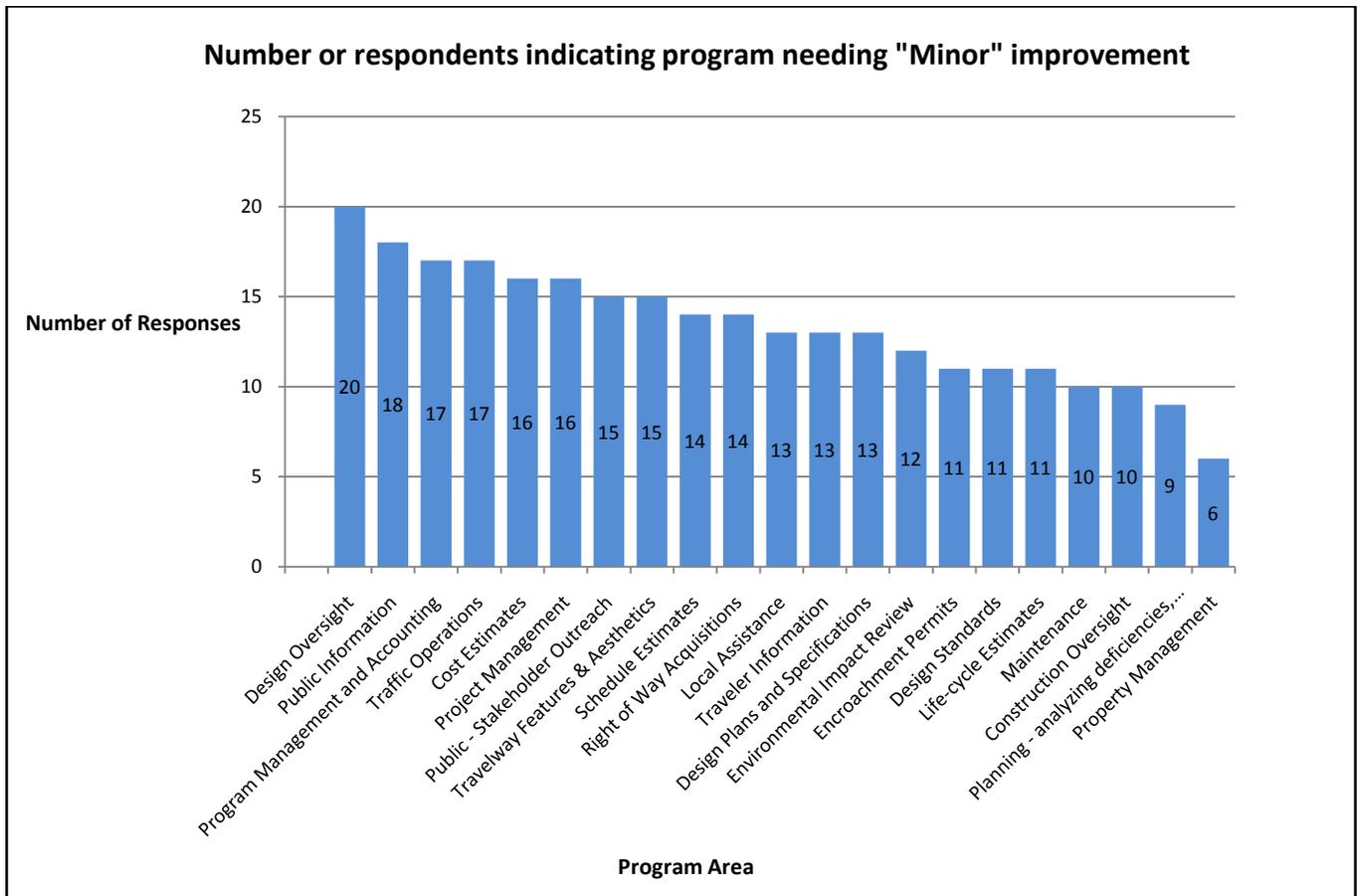
- TDM is mostly happening at the regional level, but we think there could be a helpful role played at the State/CT level. CT should play stronger role in goods movement than they currently do.
- Local jurisdictions.
- The best suited agency for these areas is a combination of state, regional, and local agencies because we are best suited to lead our areas of responsibility.
- Federal Government should take the lead on goods movement issues
- Dependent on issue:
 - Technology - Private sector and federal government.
 - Capacity and Land Use – local.
 - Transportation investments - local, regional state, federal and private.
 - Goods movement - local, regional, state, federal, international and private

Question #7 – The following activities are necessary for maintaining, operating and improving California's transportation system. Please rate how well you think Caltrans is performing these activities:

Survey analysis for Question #7 was focused identifying business areas that partner agencies recommended for improvement. Planning was identified by over 50% of respondents as needing “Major” improvement, followed by Environmental Impact Review at 38%, with Public/Stakeholder Outreach and Local Assistance identified by 28% of respondents, and Cost Estimates and Travelway Aesthetics at 25%.



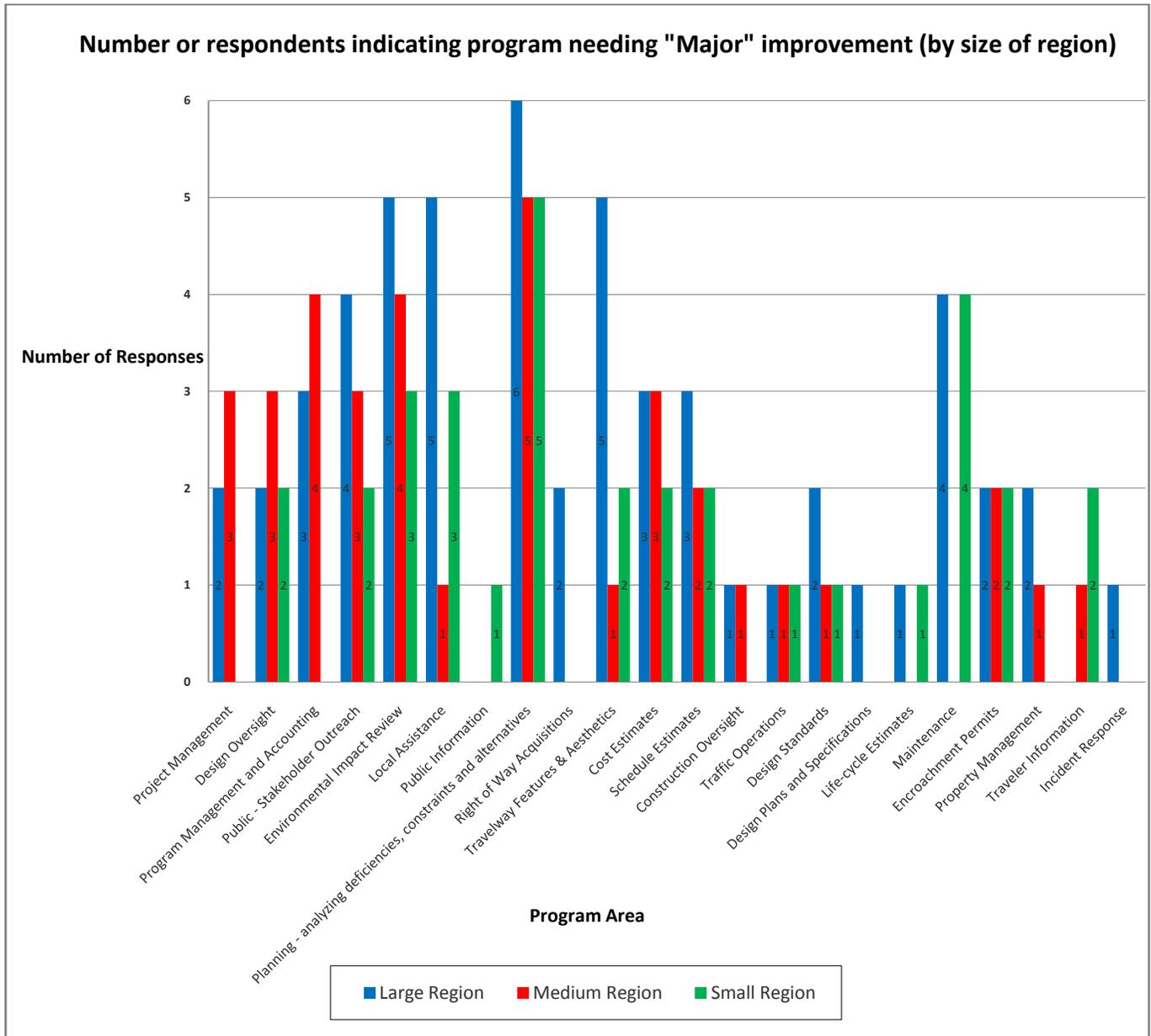
Additional analysis was performed to gain a better understanding of areas where the Department may be meeting most of our customers’ expectations, but where “Minor” improvements are recommended. The program areas identified as “Meets Expectations – Minor Improvements Needed” are displayed in the following chart. The program areas identified most frequently by respondents (over 50%) as needing minor improvement were Design Oversight (63%), Public Information (56%), Program Management/Accounting and Traffic Operations (53%) and Cost Estimates and Project Management (50%).



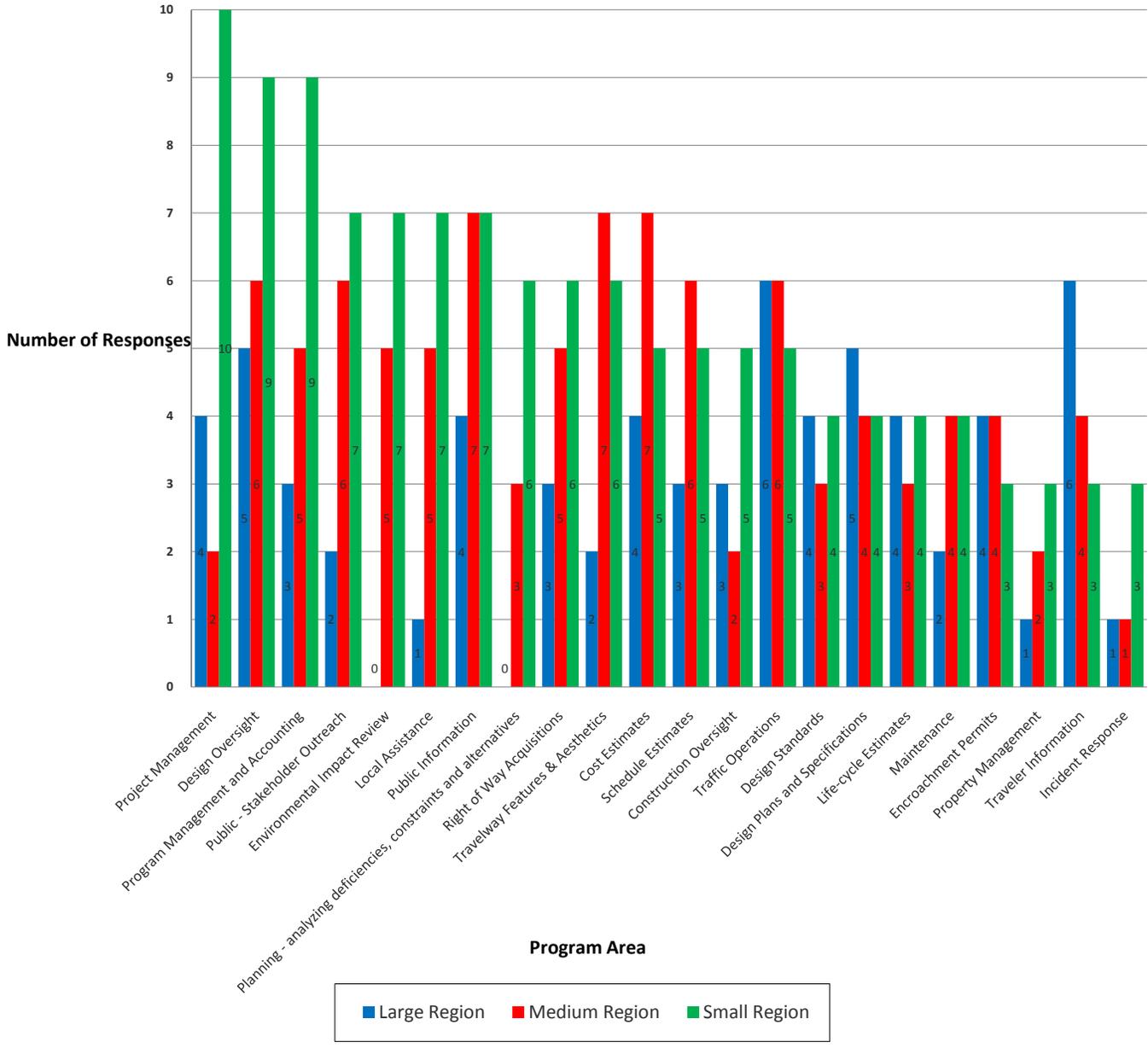
Understanding the distinction between “Major” and “Minor” improvement needs is an important consideration moving forward, as is determining whether these are statewide or regional concerns. Therefore an additional filter was added to determine if there is a significant difference in the responses between small, medium and large jurisdictions or regions (based on population), and was defined in the following manner:

- Small - < 200,000 (9 Agencies)
- Medium - 200,000 --> 1,000,000 (13 Agencies)
- Large - > 1,000,000 (13 Agencies)

The following charts provide a breakdown of the number of responses, by agency size, of the combined responses on the previous two pages. Specific program areas where a number of agencies, regardless of region size, indicated a need for major improvements include Planning and Environmental Impact Review. With respect to program areas needing minor improvement, small regions indicated Project Management, Design Oversight and Programming/Accounting as key improvement areas.



Number of respondents indicating program needing "Minor" improvement (by size of region)



Question #7 included an optional text box for respondents to enter additional feedback. This information is anonymous and included below:

- Design Oversight role seems to be a challenge for many CT staff at both district and HQ level. Making the transition from being the designers to oversight of the design process is not being executed gracefully. Communication with the project team early in the process could help clear up issues that should be easy, rather than lengthy, frustrating and expensive to resolve. Project Management does not fit easily within the silo type structure of the Department. PM's are not empowered direct changes, improvements to other "functional units". While some PM's are

quite capable, the really good ones don't seem to last, and understandably move on to other positions requiring less frustration and less unpaid overtime.

- Small local agencies are in need of technical support and training for administering federal-aid local programs. District Local Assistance is not adequately resourced to provide training and support to local agencies in their efforts to comply with FHWA mandates for project administration and management.
- Working w/regions to develop effective and fundable improvements, including operational. Often plans focus on long-term capacity projects that cannot be funded w/foreseeable resources. Environmental impact review now places too much emphasis on each concerns of each section (bio, arch, noise, ROW, etc) w/o a concern of overall costs, schedule, and fundability. Design standards are too rigid, exceptions are too difficult. Process is largely broken: major project: 3 yr PID and 10 to 12 yr to construction, now average 12 to 15 years for average project: Need to dramatically shorten process. W/such lengthy reviews conditions change, options are lost and costs escalate. Inability to fund and construct small useable segments that can be funded Sequential decision-making vs. concurrent analysis Focus on process at all costs vs. results Needs increasing emphasis on phasing, flexibility, and constructability, with an increasing need to reduce process and focus on results, and value added.
- Regional system planning performed by RTPA's. NEPA QC/QA process is too long. Project managers are not empowered. Traffic operations is inflexible.
- Project Mgt and Program Mgt/Accounting - We do not have much experience with direct project management by Caltrans; unclear what was meant by Project Mgt and Program Mgt.
- Better coordination with regions and establish common goals
- Project managers are not really managers. They do not have any decision making authority. They just coordinate the functional units. Call them Project Coordinators instead.
- 1. Still treats RTPA's like a developer 2. Early R/W Capitol estimates need improvement 3. Roadway and Landscape conditions are deplorable
- Caltrans needs to modernize and make timely their accounting information. Some standardization and a far more rigorous integration of all Caltrans activities are essential. I really have no idea how they financially function with their porous accounting.
- I find it is getting harder to follow what the latest rules are for local assistance. It is also frustrating that web sites and information is not always current during storm events.
- Caltrans is too large and too slow at delivering projects. It is too hard to get decisions made at the lowest level possible. CT needs to be down sized considerably. CT needs to learn how to provide effective oversight to regional transportation agencies, who should take the lead in project development.

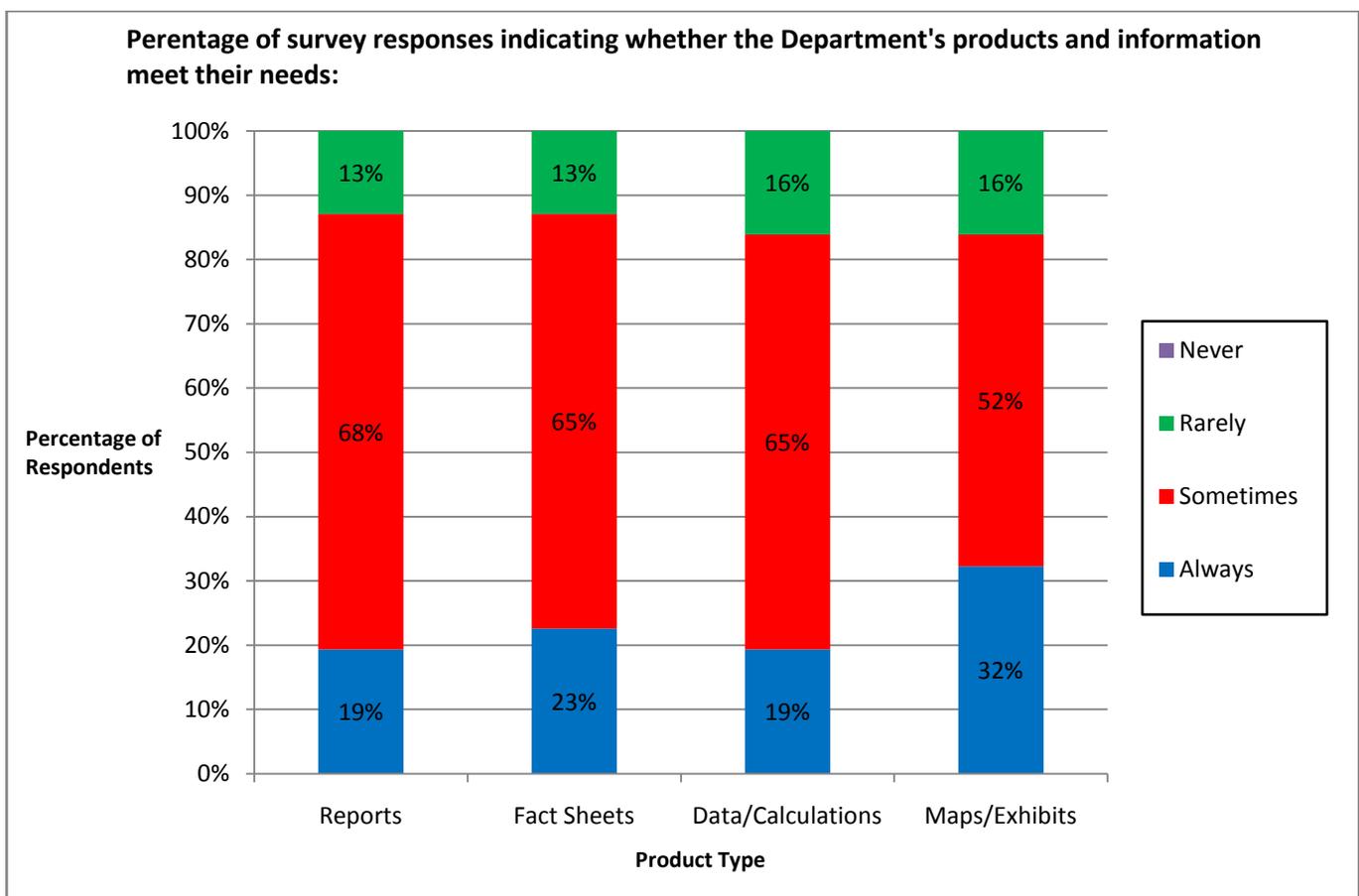
- The Department is overly restrictive and risk averse. Particularly and perhaps especially in controlling approvals and processes where the Department has little to no risk involved. The Department's policies should reflect their roles and responsibilities which have changed dramatically since SB 45 was enacted.
- In many areas it is obvious to local agencies that Caltrans is the most experienced entity and those areas make sense that the state should be the lead. In many other areas it often seems that the state goes way overboard to attempt to please every single citizen who has a concern. In so doing the complexity of the process grows and grows as procedures are modified to insure that every conceivable issue is addressed. This is insane and unnecessary. We will never be able to please everyone. Why try? I would favor a much simpler and less complicated approach to the entire way Caltrans does things. I think the time for that change in philosophy is long overdue.
- Regarding cost and schedule estimates, CT staff is not committed to delivery and there are no observable consequences when projects are inexplicably delayed or over budget. There may be commitment at the management level but it is the staff who must deliver the project and there appears to be a disconnect between staff performance and staff pay. One CT staff member said to me last week: "Why work hard?" Overall, CT disregards staff-level accountability.
- Planning - I truly do not understand the amount of labor Caltrans puts into planning, as a significant portion of these efforts - particularly at the district level - are largely redundant of regional agency planning requirements. My expectations would be met if Caltrans reduced these activities. Stakeholder Outreach and Public Information - Both are adequate in terms of the effort, but execution is lacking. Press releases and meetings tend to be dry and technical, coming from Caltrans viewpoint rather than that of the traveling public. Is there any training for engineers or public information folks on outreach or public speaking? Our agency has ended up taking the lead on these functions on projects in our region. Project Management - Our current project manager is great, and exceeds expectations. It has not always been the case - turnover is a huge problem here, as is lack of control over units they are providing work needed to deliver projects the manager is responsible for. Construction management - You have to be able to get managers that commit to a project through completion - it makes all the difference. The one manager we have had for one major construction project has been stellar. For another project, there were three managers in the two years of construction, and none were particularly good. Lack of consistent management led to at least one issue being overlooked, and a pricey change order.

Question #8 – For the following information, how often does Caltrans meet your needs?

The purpose of Question #8 was to gauge how the Department’s partners viewed the utility of the Department’s products or information, and whether these products meet their needs. Question #8 uses a weighted average for ranking responses. The weighting is as follows:

- Always = 4
- Sometimes = 3
- Rarely = 2
- Never = 1

An average of 23% of all respondents indicated that the Department’s products and information “Always” meet their needs, 63% stated “Sometimes”, and 15% responded “Rarely”. There were no responses that indicated that products “Never” meet their needs. The chart below breaks down the survey responses by product type:

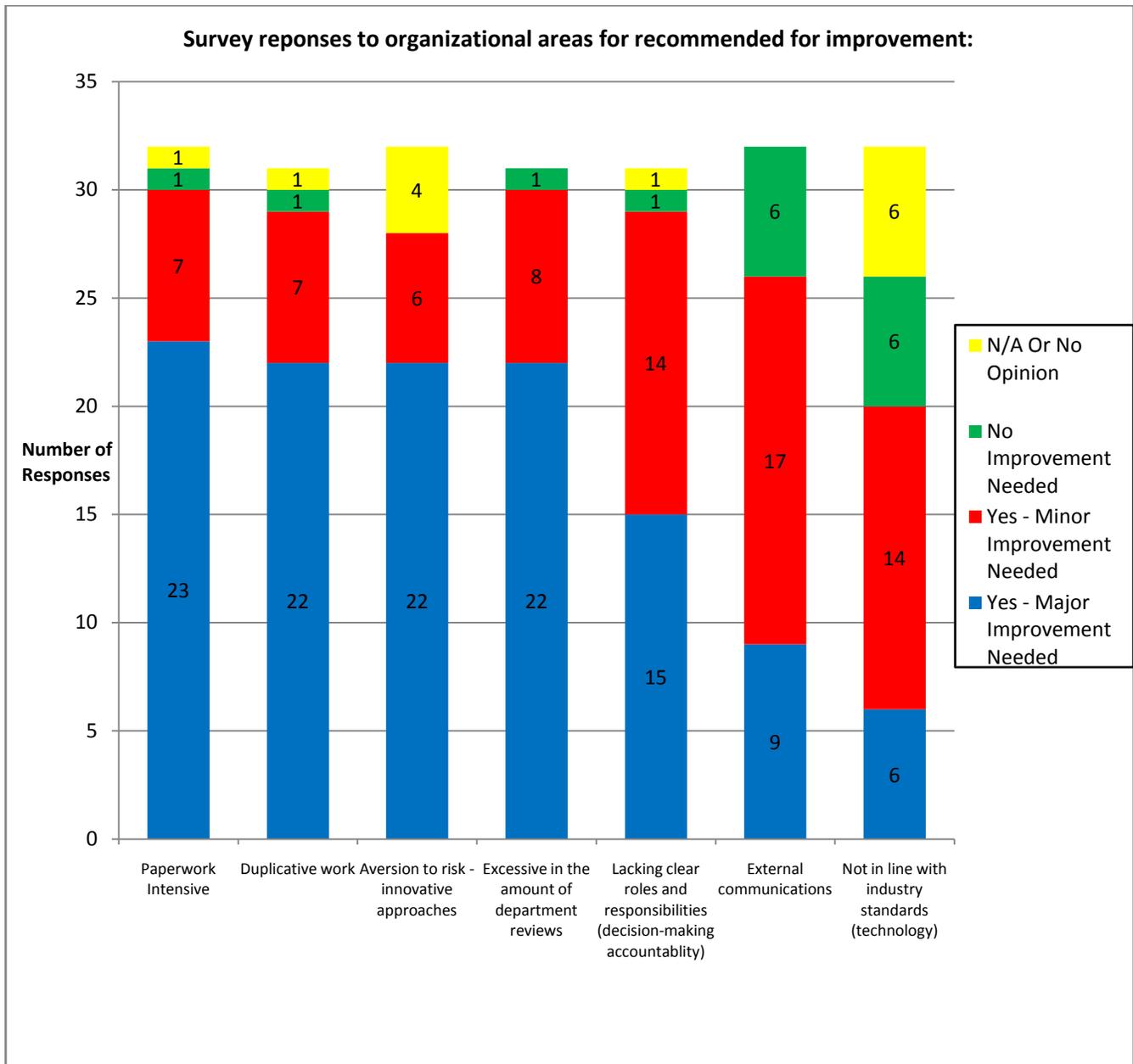


Question #8 also included an optional text box for entering additional comments. These comments are included below and will remain anonymous:

- We need more drawings that are understandable to the public (3D, simulations) rather than engineering drawings. Also, more frequent actual traffic counts and real-time travel time/travel time delay information is needed to be accessible at a regional and traveler level.
- Caltrans used to provide reports, fact sheets, data, and maps. and make presentations to Boards and councils. This rarely happens anymore w/ the lack of resources being the main stated reason. I have seen a major deterioration in this arena since the passage of SB 45. It appears more of a shift in emphasis than a lack of resources.
- VTA does not rely on Caltrans for reports, fact sheets, data/calculations and maps; we usually lead project development work with Caltrans providing oversight.
- It's hit or miss with Caltrans reports. Most environmental docs are late.
- You really have to go searching for reports. I usually just ask Staff.
- Never for Data and Calculations mainly due to CT PM's inability to control employee charging and accounting on projects.
- Many reports are not so much intrinsically useful, but allow us to move to the next step in the process. For example, PIDs without cost estimates for construction do not meet my need to know how much a project might cost, but without a PID you can't get a cooperative agreement.

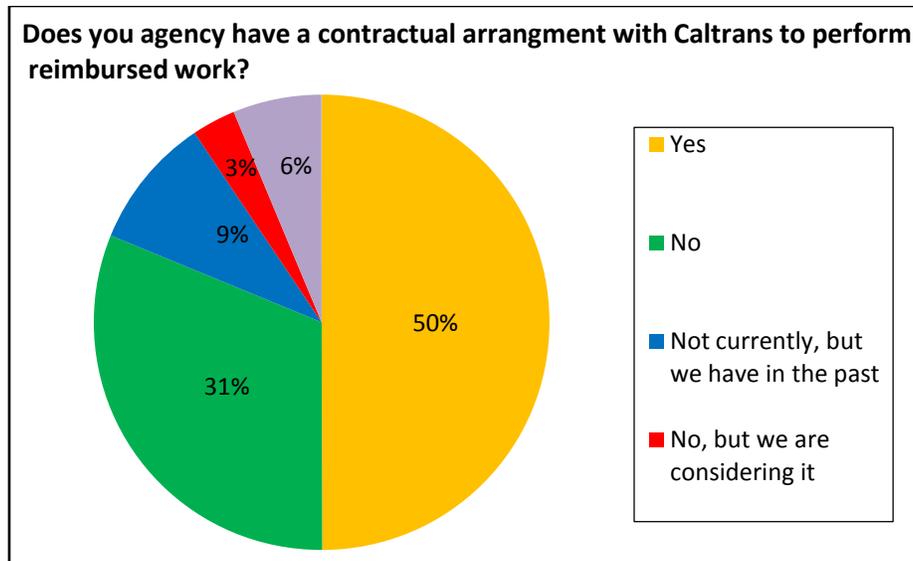
Question #9 – Could Caltrans improve in the following organizational areas?

Survey respondents were asked to rank organization areas within the Department that they viewed as needing improvement, and whether those improvements were “Major” or “Minor”. In addition, respondents could also state whether they felt that no improvements were needed. Nearly 70% of all respondents identified four areas needing “Major” improvements. These include the perception that the Department is “Paperwork Intensive”, performs “Duplicative Work”, is “Risk Averse”, and that there are “Excessive Departmental Reviews”. The survey responses are documented in on the following page.

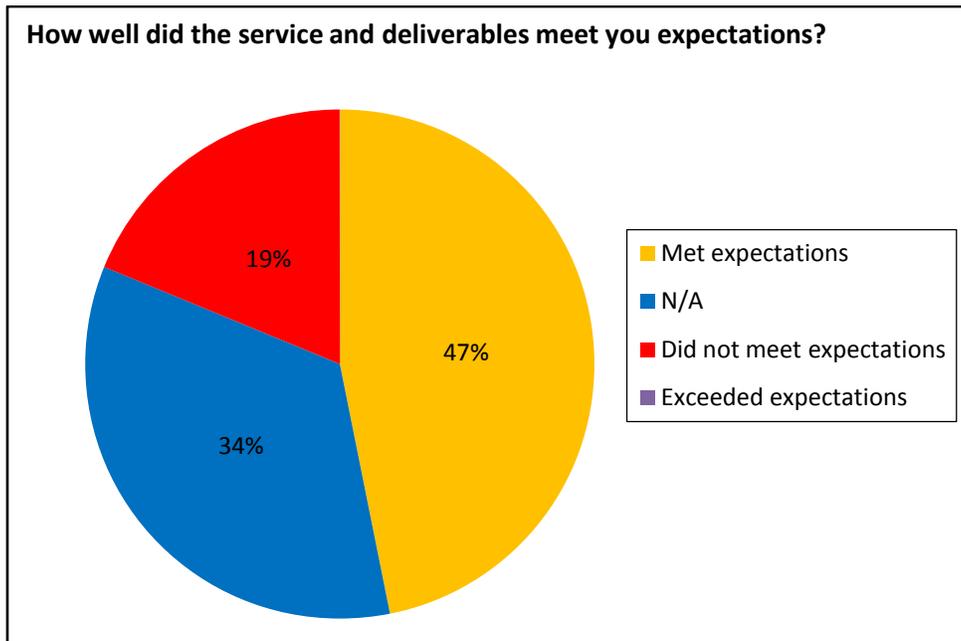


Question #10 – Does your agency have a contractual arrangement with Caltrans to perform reimbursed work?

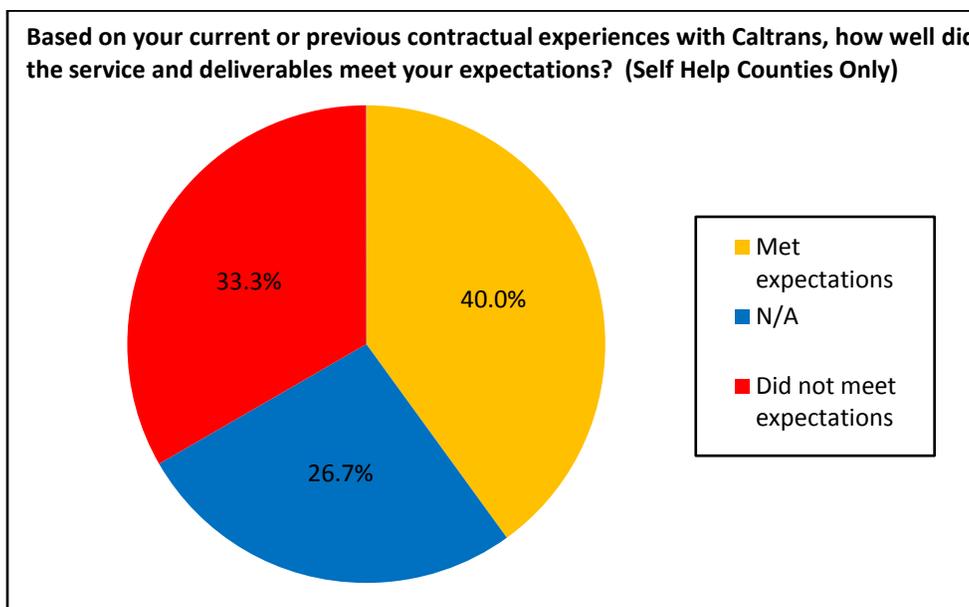
Question #10 queries partners to determine whether they currently have (or have had in the past) a contractual arrangement with the Department to perform reimbursed work. 50% of survey respondents indicated they currently have a contractual arrangement, while 9% indicated that they've had an arrangement in the past. These respondents were subsequently asked to provide feedback on their contractual experience in Question #11.



Question #11 – Based on your current or previous contractual experiences with Caltrans, how well did the service and deliverables meet your expectations?



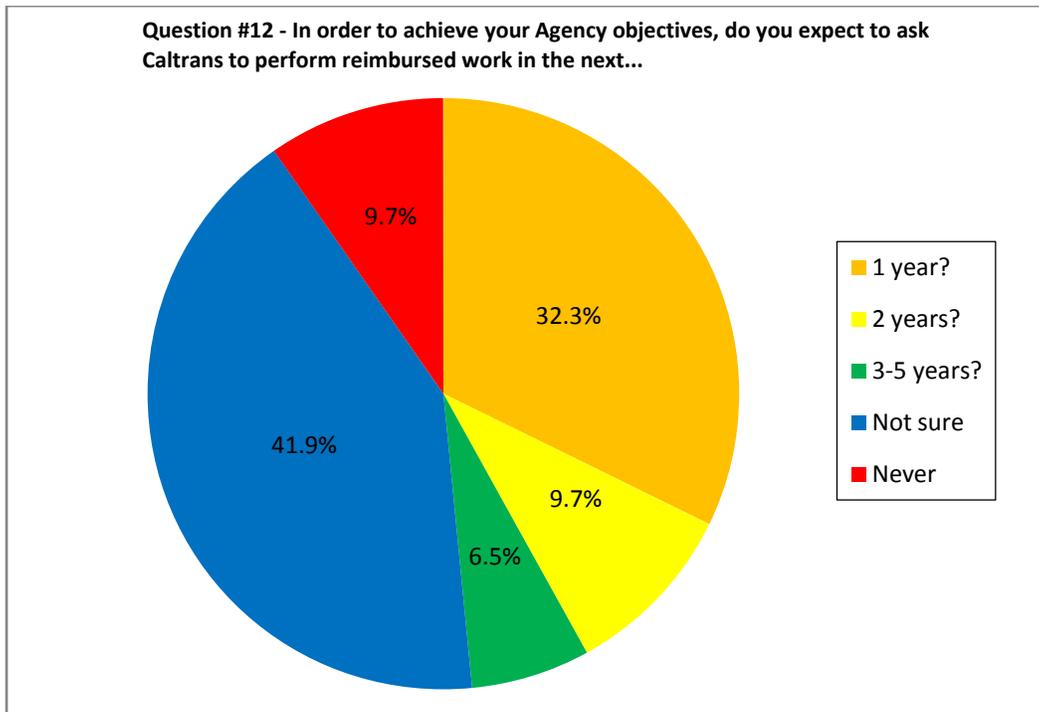
To gain a better understanding of how the Department is perceived in the area of reimbursed work by self help counties (those with a local sales tax measure for funding transportation improvements), survey responses were filtered and compiled for the 15 respondents identified as being from a self help county or region. The following chart displays the results:



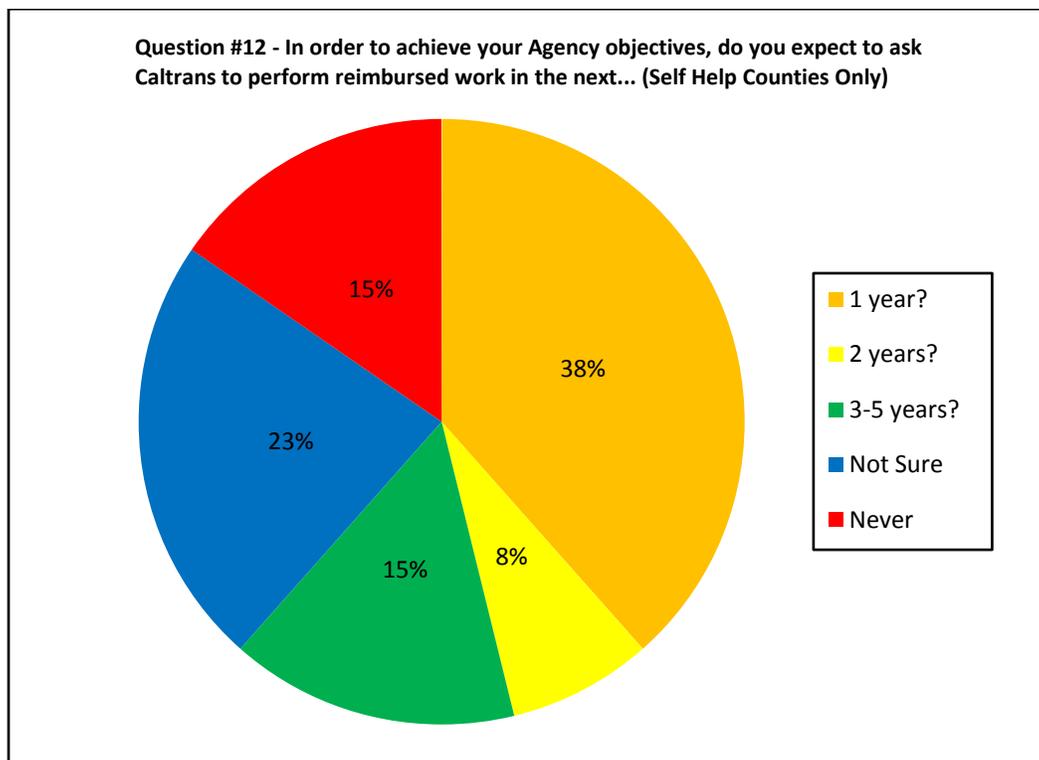
Question #11 also included an optional text box for entering additional comments. These comments are anonymous and are included below:

- The cost for service was excessive.
- Sometimes expectations are exceeded delivery record is very good, but sometimes at the expense of cost containment
- Some of our agencies have contractual agreements w/Caltrans, Most have had problems w/schedule adherence, too costly w/many staff charging on projects and attending PDTs (8to15), data is never good enough; it always needs to be redone at every stage in the Dev /Environmental Review process.
- We're currently developing contracts for PID Reimbursement work. However, we've had two examples to base our opinion on: 1) US 101 Tully, Caltrans construction management performed well. 2) SR 87, Caltrans construction management resulted in \$6.2 M contractor claim partially due to poor management
- I don't want to overstate my concerns, because much of what Caltrans does in the reimbursable work is just fine. But the biggest issue is accuracy of financial information. Work products get done though not always in a timely way, but oftentimes Caltrans has little or no idea what their activity costs or who is charging to it. There have been improvements, but I sometimes think this is just due to complaining.
- It takes too long to develop, review, and approve contracts (i.e. Cooperative Agreements)
- Caltrans has proven to be unable to track cost and invoice monthly. CT cannot control the quality and production of employees provided. CT regularly has exceeded budget, before notifying funding partner. Some at CT still does not understand the role of funding partners.
- While the technical service and deliverables are of high quality and generally on schedule, the Department's inability to control and manage project budget is unacceptable. In addition, the administrative overhead charge is burdensome in that it covers excessive Department and state government overhead unrelated to project delivery. Even with improved project and budget management, the administrative overhead will eliminate the Department as a consultant of choice.
- Quite variable. Sometimes very good, sometimes very off the mark. Always very bureaucratic process which needs simplification.
- Too early in the project to report.
- Mixed bag. Some work has been exactly as promised, others not so much. Seems to depend on who the project manager is. Fortunately, our current one is good, but it hasn't always been that way.

Question #12 - In order to achieve your Agency objectives, do you expect to ask Caltrans to perform reimbursed work in the next...

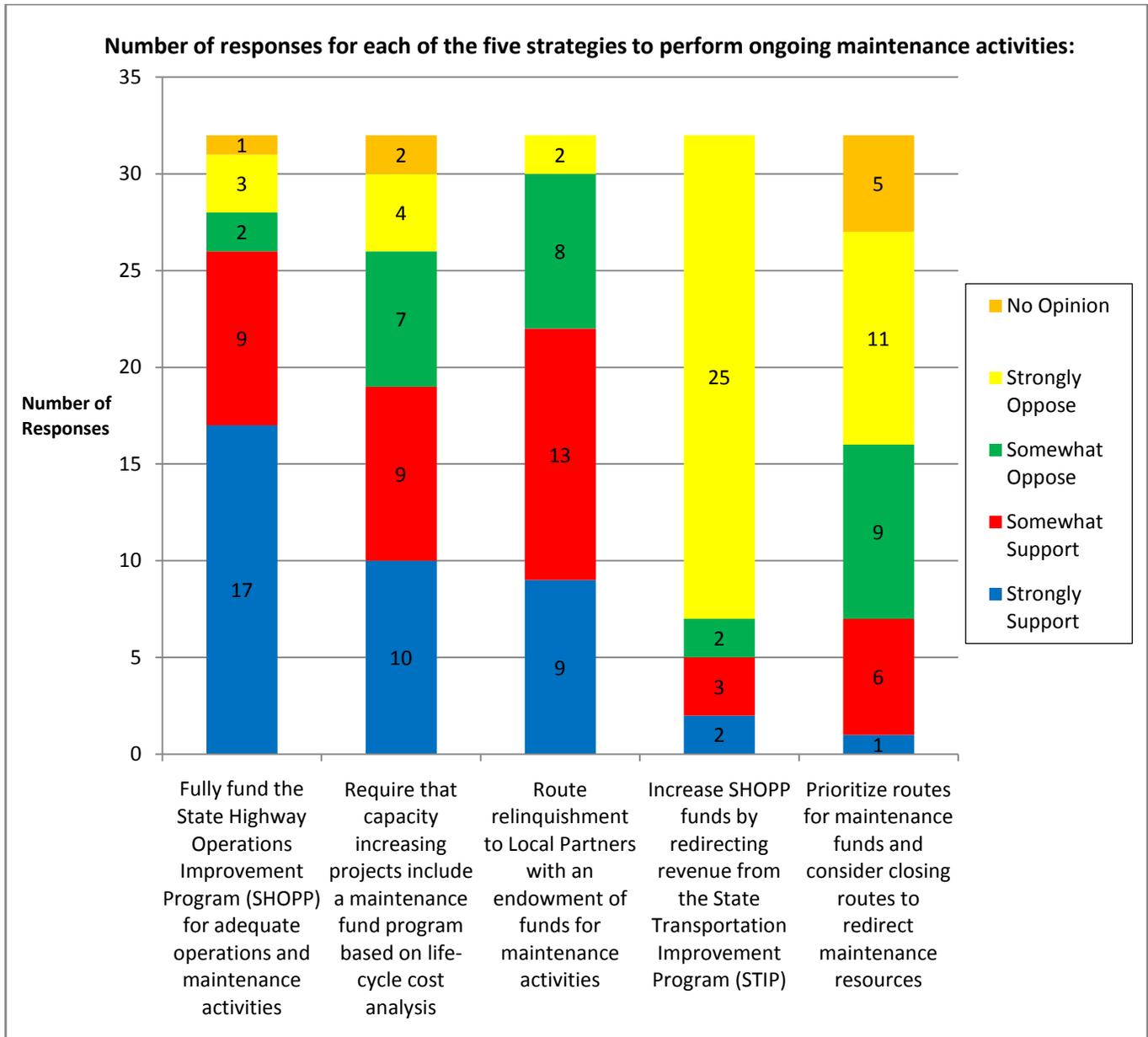


Like Question #11, survey responses for Question #12 were filtered and compiled for the 15 respondents identified as being from a self help county or region. The following chart displays the results:



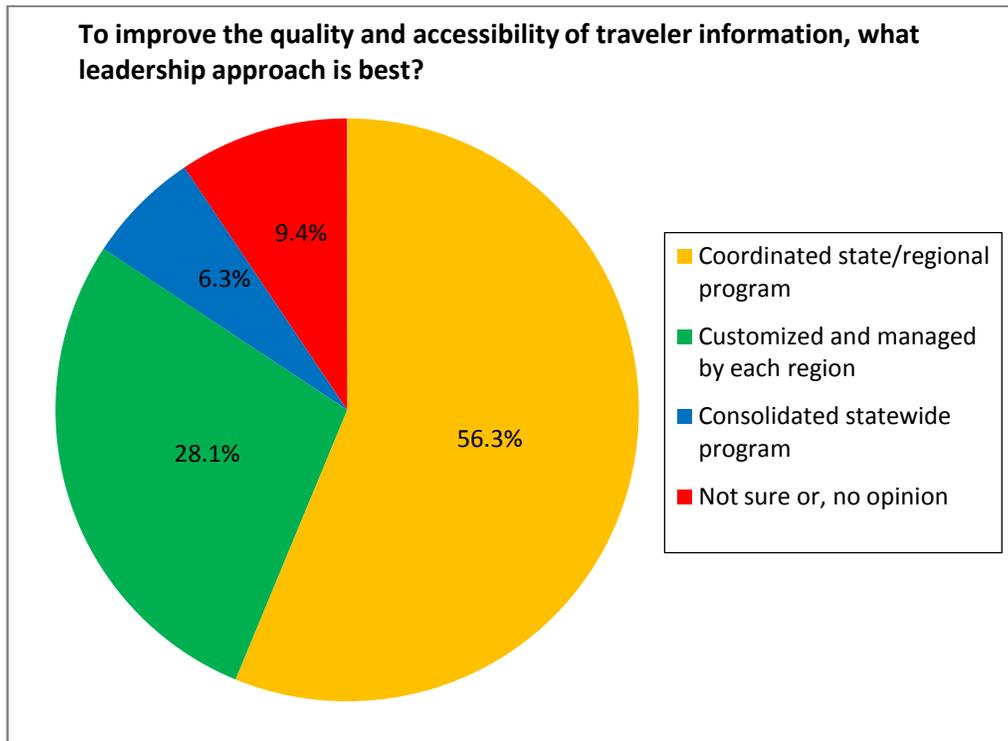
Question #13 - Please rate your level of support or opposition for the following strategies to support funding ongoing maintenance activities:

Question #13 looks at various ideas to help support ongoing highway maintenance. Survey respondents were asked whether they support or oppose strategies such as fully funding the SHOPP program, inclusion of life-cycle costs when funding capacity increasing projects, route relinquishments with an endowment, redirection of STIP funds to the SHOPP, and closing routes and redirecting maintenance funding for prioritized route maintenance needs. Two key observations include support for fully funding the SHOPP program (81% of respondents), though 84% of respondents oppose accomplishing this by redirecting STIP funds to the SHOPP. The chart below displays feedback across all categories:



Question #14 - To improve the quality and accessibility of traveler information, what leadership approach is best:

The majority of respondents indicated that a coordinated state and regional approach to improving the quality and accessibility of traveler information is the preferred choice, while a customized regional approach ranked second. Very few respondents indicated a consolidated, statewide program would provide the best solution. The chart below displays the breakdown of the survey responses for Question #14.



Question #15 - Thank you for participating in our survey, your input is very important to us. If you have any additional comments or suggestions, please share them below.

Question #15 concludes the survey by asking an open ended question of the respondents in order to capture any additional information important to regional partners, but not specifically requested in the survey. The responses are noted below and are anonymous:

- I do feel that Caltrans does duplicative planning and could rely more on regional corridor and route planning efforts instead of preparing transportation concept reports.
- District 2 provides reasonably good service to the local partners; issues that arise are found in the areas of environmental, right of way, and excessive paperwork and multiple tracking of projects through the state and federal process. Too much oversight. Support a block grant arrangement and auditing; if agency performs poorly they will be forced to submit to a higher level of

oversight. Agencies that perform well should not be penalized. The oversight and duplication delays we encounter tend to extend projects and increase their costs, which is not efficient.

- Question 13 would have benefitted from comment box. Some of the questions were situational and several answers could apply to the same question. Some questions were broad and it was hard to answer because of the complexity of the CT organization - HQ, District, Programs, etc. These are the collective responses of SANDAG staff (a group of about 10).
- Our region supports relinquishments to local partners with maintenance endowments for routes or corridors that State, Regional and Local partners have jointly prioritized. Partnership with State, Regional and Local agencies is crucial for all levels of development from land use/transportation Planning to Regional, Interregional, and Statewide Planning to State highway Project Development, Construction and Maintenance
- Thank you for asking for our opinion.
- The nine county Bay Area is too large and too complex to be managed by a single Caltrans district. The Bay Area would be better served by a reorganized Caltrans providing more direct service to major metropolitan areas like Silicon Valley/San Jose Area through partnership with local agencies to more effectively and efficiently deliver transportation services to the traveling public.
- Regarding item #13. The local government stood up to increase the funding for congestion reduction, which is our responsibility. Rehabilitation is your job, stand up on your own and go after funds yourself and stop trying to rob the locals. The facilities you receive are in a "state of good repair" when you receive them from us. I have concerns regarding the role of Caltrans' Division of Rail.
- On several occasions we have asked the Dept. to submit a cost estimate for doing PS and E work. Each time, the consultant community beat the Dept. hands down. On one occasion the Dept. submitted a revised estimate that beat the consultant estimate, but we had no real confidence in the estimate or that the Dept. could control costs. The Department has some great people working for them. They are dedicated, conscientious and at times brilliant. How to give them a financial management structure and the freedom to use innovative management techniques to more quickly and efficiently delivery transportation projects is the challenge for all of us.
- The environmental process has gotten to the point it is beyond frustration. It is starting to overtake design cost on many projects. As a small rural county, most "analysis" is negative toward spending in rural counties because the benefit is not spread over many. The current trends will lead to a loss of ability to travel outside of developed areas.

Conclusions:

The 2012 Caltrans Survey of Regional and Local Transportation Partners provides the Department with valuable information in order to gain a better understanding of how our partners view our current business processes. This information will be used to support the Department-wide program review effort, and will provide additional insight into both where the Department is meeting customer expectations, and where improvements can be made that lead to increased efficiencies and more effective planning, project delivery, operations and maintenance of the transportation system.

Several common themes were identified throughout the analysis of the survey results. Many respondents stated concerns about lengthy approvals processes and regulatory constraints for project development and environmental clearance. Some of the feedback related to this centered on concerns about accounting/program management inconsistencies, maintaining schedules, the need for modernizing, excessive oversight requirements and too much paperwork. Several regional partners mentioned that their experiences can be hit-or-miss, and that sometimes coordination activities go well, but are not replicated on a consistent basis. Many also thought that project managers should have more delegated authority to make decisions regarding project resources and project direction.

With respect to planning activities, a number of survey respondents stated that they also perform regional system planning activities, and that the Department's efforts in some cases are redundant. Some suggested that focus should be shifted from developing mandated, legacy products (such as Transportation Concept Reports, etc.) to more corridor and regional studies that lead to project initiation.

In the area of products and services, many felt that data, reports, and documents produced by the Department are hard to locate, and not always useful and up to date. Fact sheets, exhibits, presentations and simulation/visualization products are not in line with current technology and aren't reflective of industry standards. Some attribute this to a lack of resources which has led to a decline in their quality and availability. There is the perception that the Department is risk averse, and unwilling to try new business practices, and implement new technology.

Public information and public outreach were identified as areas that could be improved, with an inference that the framework is there but there appears that there is a lack of effective execution. Real-time traffic and traveler information is not readily available on a consistent basis across the state.

Customer service was viewed as being in decline, related to inadequate resources and/or staffing issues which lead to inconsistencies in service and responsiveness. The inconsistencies in customer service were noted by respondents within several topic areas.

Some unique characteristics were also discovered that indicate differing perceptions of the Department based on geography, urban vs. rural areas, and self help counties. This underscores the unique nature of the relationships between Districts and regional/local partners and the contrast between how different business areas within the Department (and/or Districts vs. Headquarters) are perceived by our partners. Additional analysis of the survey results and focused outreach will be necessary in order to determine if there are specific circumstances identified that may lead to improvement strategies within a given region.