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Texans Respond to Rising Fuel Costs in Second Annual Texas Lyceum Poll

***Results show more than half may not take a summer vacation and 66%
would consider buying a more fuel-efficient vehicle***

(AUSTIN) The Texas Lyceum, the statewide, non-profit leadership group, released results of its second annual public opinion poll taken June 12-20, 2008. The results reveal rising fuel costs are seriously causing Texans to re-think how to get around, and many are considering staying close to home this summer.

“As we know, most Texans highly value the freedom of driving and owning their own car, but our survey shows the pinch of rising gas prices, increased congestion, and the costs of transportation projects are changing how people feel about transportation in Texas,” said Daron Shaw, Lyceum pollster and Professor at the University of Texas.

“Perhaps the number that sums it up best is the response to rising gasoline prices; more than half of those polled (51%) are strongly considering not taking a summer vacation.” Shaw continued. “They want less congestion on the roads, and hope their governments will put more money into public transportation. But they don't like gas taxes and toll roads.”

Shaw said the survey of 1,000 Texans, selected randomly and interviewed via telephone, contains evidence that Texas drivers are looking for alternatives to the status quo. For example: 66% would strongly consider buying a hybrid car or a more fuel-efficient vehicle; almost two-thirds, (63%) said they would strongly consider carpooling; and over half, (53%) said they would strongly consider taking public transportation to work or to school.

The poll also tested how Texans feel about increasing taxes on gasoline to pay for new transportation projects and road maintenance, showing that most (60%) strongly oppose such a move.

“This may give policy makers pause as they look to using the gas tax to either generate revenue or encourage conservation,” said Professor Jim Henson, Director of the Texas Politics Project at the University of Texas, who assisted in the survey.

“When it comes to paying four bucks for a gallon of gas, Texans appear more likely to consider buying a hybrid, carpooling, or taking public transportation than they are likely to approve of increasing gas taxes at the pump,” Henson continued. “This seems to make the resurrection of any legislative proposals to increase the gas tax, already pretty unlikely, dead on arrival in the next legislature.”

Other interesting poll findings include:

- Nearly every Texan surveyed owns a car and they drive a lot: 88% said they own a vehicle and most use their own vehicles to drive to work.
- Not surprisingly, Texans think something ought to be done about traffic congestion, with 49% saying it's "very important" compared to other issues facing the state and 35% saying it's somewhat important.
- Three-fourths (75%) said they would support regional rail systems connecting adjacent cities like Dallas and Fort Worth or Austin and San Antonio.
- Texans are willing to spend more on roads, but 51% of respondents said they oppose the state using its power of eminent domain to secure right of way for new transportation projects.
- Texans oppose tolls on new roads, and they like it even less on existing ones. On new roads, 66% oppose tolls (including 46% who strongly oppose them), and on existing roads, opposition to tolls climbs to 69% (including 53% who strongly oppose tolls on existing highways).
- Slightly more than half support "the state of Texas allowing private business contractors to handle transportation projects and improvements." 53% favor the private work, another 41% really don't like the idea, and only 6% are undecided.
- A majority strongly favors a ban on drivers using cell phones. 60% would "strongly" or "somewhat" support a ban on cell phone use

while driving, even though more than a third of respondents said they used cell phones while driving.

“We are extremely proud to share the results of the second annual Texas Lyceum Poll with the media and the general public,” said 2008 Lyceum President John Boettiger. “The subject matter and timing couldn’t be better as our local, state and national leaders look for new ways to tackle the difficult policy challenges of transporting Texans and the goods we buy and sell more efficiently and safely in the midst of record high fuel prices.”

Lyceum leaders will rollout survey results over three days, which, in addition to transportation issues, will include how Texans view the upcoming presidential election as well as the 2010 statewide political matchups.

The objective of the Texas Lyceum Poll is straightforward – the poll is a non-partisan, high quality, scientific survey designed to provide specific data points on issues of interest, as well as a time series of key demographics, attitudes, and opinions. Last year the group polled Texans on the prickly subject of separation of church and state prior to a public conference on the issue. This year, the polling data will also be used as a discussion springboard for the group’s conference on transportation and infrastructure to be held October 3rd at the Reliant Center in Houston. For more details, visit www.texaslyceum.org. The conference is open to the media.

About The Texas Lyceum

The Texas Lyceum, a non-profit, non-partisan group, is the premier statewide leadership organization. The Lyceum consists of 96 men and women from throughout the state, who begin their six-year term while under the age of 46, and have demonstrated leadership in their community and profession, together with a deep commitment to Texas.

In 2008, the Lyceum will conduct the second annual Texas Lyceum Poll, an independent survey of Texans’ attitudes about issues facing the state and the nation, and in October, the organization will hold its 23rd annual public conference in Houston on the topic of Transportation Infrastructure in Texas.

The Lyceum has an impressive list of former members who are serving or have served in the public office including: President George W. Bush, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, Governor Rick Perry, former Texas Comptroller John Sharp, Texas State Senators Rodney Ellis and Kirk Watson, Houston Mayor Bill White, and Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings.

The Texas Lyceum acts as a catalyst to bring together diverse opinions and expertise to focus on national and state issues, and seeks to emphasize constructive private sector, public sector, and individual responses to the issues.

To accomplish these purposes, the Lyceum conducts periodic public forums, publishes the Lyceum Journal, produces The Texas Lyceum Poll, and convenes programs for the Directors to explore and discuss key economic and social issues of the state and nation. For more information visit: www.texaslyceum.org.

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