

# TECHNICAL SUMMARY

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**TOTAL PROJECT COST:**  
\$178,000

**MnDOT SHARE OF  
PROJECT COST:**  
\$20,000



The research from this study will help update [Minnesota GO](#), MnDOT's transportation visioning website.

# Meeting the Transportation Needs of Rural Millennials

## What Was the Need?

Millennials—roughly defined as those born between 1983 and 2000—now make up the largest generation in Minnesota and the rest of the United States. Since they use the transportation system to access education, employment and other economic opportunities, ensuring that the system meets their needs is necessary to promote Minnesota's future economic prosperity.

“[Millennials & Mobility: Understanding the Millennial Mindset](#),” a report released in October 2013 by the American Public Transportation Association and the Transit Cooperative Research Program, is currently the major source of data about how millennials view transportation and how their lifestyles affect their transportation choices.

The report was based on phone interviews and an online survey of people in six cities, and its insights focused on urban millennials. However, more than a quarter of Minnesota's population lives in rural areas, according to [2010 U.S. Census Bureau data](#). MnDOT wanted to understand the mindset of millennials living in rural and small urban areas to ensure that the state's transportation network will meet their needs as well as the needs of those living in major cities.

*Millennials are currently the largest generation in the United States, so understanding their transportation needs and preferences is necessary to effectively plan the transportation network for them. This project collected data about the mindset of millennials in rural and small urban areas.*

## What Was Our Goal?

This project sought to supply information about the transportation-related viewpoints of millennials living in rural and small urban areas.

## What Did We Do?

MnDOT collaborated with transportation agencies from Wisconsin, Montana and Washington state to sponsor this project through the federal [University Transportation Centers program](#).

Investigators collected information through an online and telephone survey of residents of all four states. Approximately 60 percent of respondents surveyed lived outside of an Office of Management and Budget [metropolitan statistical area \(MSA\)](#) to ensure that the project provided insight into the attitudes of millennials in small urban and rural communities. Additionally, 60 percent of respondents were millennials over the age of 18, while the rest of the respondents were from other generations (such as the baby boom and Generation X cohorts). MSA residents and nonmillennial adults were included to provide data for comparison.

The final data set included 2,519 respondents, 625 of whom lived in Minnesota.

## What Did We Learn?

The survey results showed that there are differences in the mobility mindsets of urban and rural millennials. While millennials as a whole are more likely than other generations to use multiple modes of transportation, rural millennials are less interested than their urban counterparts in modes of transportation that are alternatives to cars. Millen-

*“We can find plenty of research about millennials in urban areas, and we know that they have different transportation interests than previous generations. But information about millennials in rural areas is scarce.”*

—**Jeanne Aamodt**,  
Customer Relations  
Manager, MnDOT Office  
of Public Engagement  
and Constituent Services

*“Despite reports in the media, millennials are not car-free. Instead, the study shows that they use the best mode for each travel purpose. Therefore, transportation agencies that provide incentives to use car-free modes are likely to decrease automobile use among millennials.”*

—**Natalie Villwock-Witte**,  
Assistant Research  
Professor/Research  
Engineer, Western  
Transportation Institute,  
Montana State University

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While millennials are more likely than other generations to use alternative forms of transportation, they still have a strong interest in owning a car in the near future.

Millennials are less likely than other age groups to own a car; however, the millennial generation reported the greatest interest in owning a car in the near future.

Smartphones are the most popular source of travel information for millennials, although they are slightly more popular among urban millennials. More than 80 percent of urban millennials prefer travel information by smartphone compared to just over 70 percent of rural millennials. This difference could partly reflect the more limited usability of smartphones in rural areas due to gaps in wireless coverage.

The research also provides information about where Minnesota residents would like to see additional transportation facilities of various types. For example, respondents in the area north of the Twin Cities on the Wisconsin border expressed a preference for additional public transportation, while central Minnesota residents near St. Cloud expressed interest in additional bicycling infrastructure.

### What's Next?

This research provides information about the travel behavior and preferences of millennials in Greater Minnesota that MnDOT and its districts can use in transportation planning. In particular, MnDOT will use this information as it implements its [Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan](#). The research will also inform updates to [MnDOT's family of plans](#) and corridor-planning efforts.

While the research provides general information about rural millennials, there would be value in understanding additional subgroups within the generation both now and in the near future. For example, many of the youngest millennials are still in school, so their travel patterns are likely to change as they graduate and transition to the workforce. Additionally, more than 80 percent of respondents were Caucasian, so it would also be valuable to collect more information about the transportation needs and preferences of millennials from different races and from immigrant populations.

Technology is rapidly changing public attitudes toward transportation options. Mobility-as-a-Service (the shift away from personally owned vehicles in favor of bike- and car-sharing services, ride-sharing and public transportation) and the anticipated development of autonomous vehicles are likely to impact transportation needs and should continue to be monitored.

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*This Technical Summary pertains to Report 2016-35, “Mobility Mindset of Millennials in Small Urban and Rural Areas,” published December 2016. The full report can be accessed at [mndot.gov/research/TS/2016/201635.pdf](http://mndot.gov/research/TS/2016/201635.pdf).*