May 2023

Transit Messaging Research *Results and Recommendations for Mobilizing and Moving Communities*



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Purpose and Measured Outcomes

Through two rounds of research, we crafted and tested messaging that could persuade and mobilize community members, both current riders and non-riders, to demand more robust public transit.

Our aims for this messaging:

- Increase belief that more public transit would improve communities and quality of life.
- Inoculate against and rebut standard opposition arguments against robust public transit.
- Increase public will to pressure decision-makers to fully fund and enact more accessible, expansive, and clean-powered transit.
- Increase the desire to take various forms of action, including voting for pro-transit candidates and ballot measures.

THEORY OF CHANGE







ENGAGE AND UNLEASH THE BASE

MOVE PERSUADABLES REPEL THE OPPOSITION







Qualitative Testing: LRP Focus Groups

Methodology



- Lake Research Partners conducted six virtual focus groups with participants from the following metro areas:
 - Los Angeles, California
 - Sacramento, California
 - Detroit, Michigan
 - Buffalo, New York
 - New York, New York
 - Houston, Texas
 - Washington, D.C.

Date of Group	Group Demographics
March 28 th	White Adults – Base
IVIAICII 28	Adults of Color – Base #1
March 29 th	White Adults – Persuadable
IVIAICII 29	Adults of Color – Base #2
March 30 th	Mixed Race – Persuadable
IVIAI CIT 30°	Adults of Color – Base #3

- Participants were recruited to be either base or persuadable adults based on potential participants' responses to value-based questions around the status of people of color, reasons for wealth and poverty in America, the role for government, and the best way toward a better future.
- Participants were also recruited to reflect a mix of gender identity, age, race/ethnicity (in the mixed race and adults of color groups), educational attainment, partisanship, parental status, marital status, and ideology.

FOCUS GROUP LEARNINGS: see full key findings report here

- "Good" public transit is accessible, affordable, clean, on time, safe, and reliable.
- Of 15 value statements tested, strongest focus on accessibility, freedom, avoiding traffic, affordability, and mobility.
- In contrast, appealing to kids' joy on transit, bringing people together, or riding because taxes already pay for it, proved ineffective.
- Personal experience with public transit determines attitudes toward it. Base adults of color overall are more negative, likely because they use transit more than persuadables.
- Yet, people who rely on transit and base adults of color are more likely to support increased funding. They emphasize positive economic impact, integrality to community and desire to ensure accessibility.
- Those in opposition to more funding tend to be white and either do not think additional funds are needed or question the utility of more funding.

FOCUS GROUP LEARNINGS: see full key findings report here

• Opposition dog whistles and fear-mongering dominates conversations across audiences, rendering critical that we push back and inoculate.

"In recent years, crime is so bad and the homeless and mental illness... people are, you know, moving out as a result because they, they don't, they can't take the trains." – White woman, persuadable

"I think there would be too much riff-raff... I think that people would just get on it, just to get on it and it would make it even more dangerous." - White man, base

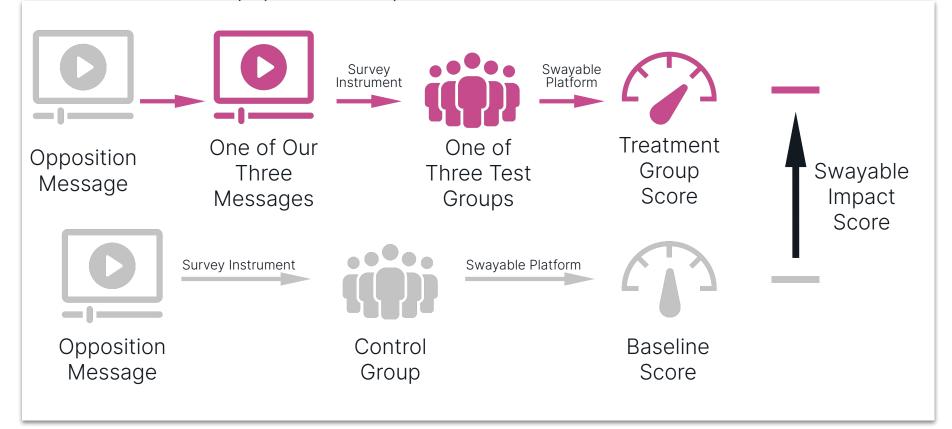
- People recognize our infrastructure built for cars but struggle to see Big Oil or car industry as cause of current underfunded public transit.
- Instead of free transit, most across groups favor subsidized fares to make transit more accessible and encourage riding.
- Across groups, people raise concerns about crowding or types of people who may ride fareless transit. Some participants of color also thought free fares would mean transit would receive less funding and therefore worse service.

Quantitative Testing: Swayable Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)

Methodology

ASO Communications conducted an online Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) message test through Swayable on April 27th, 2023 with a nationally representative sample of 4,848 adults in the U.S.

🚿 SWAYABLE



Issue Persuasion Metrics

 Quality of Life - Which of the following is closest to your thinking? Having more public transit would improve our communities and our quality of life. Having more public transit would not have any impact on our communities and our quality of life.

Having more public transit would negatively impact our communities and our quality of life.

- 2. Funding Which of these is closest to your thinking? Providing more public transit funded by taxpayer dollars is a waste of resources. Improving and expanding public transit by making wealthy pay what they owe improves our communities and quality of life.
- Solutions Which of the following do you agree with more? (sliding scale) We should provide public transit to everyone, free of cost. Most people should pay to take public transit, but we should provide free or lower fares for people who are struggling. Everyone should pay a set amount to take public transit.
 - A) Everyone pays the same \rightarrow B) \rightarrow C) Free for everyone

Mobilization Metrics

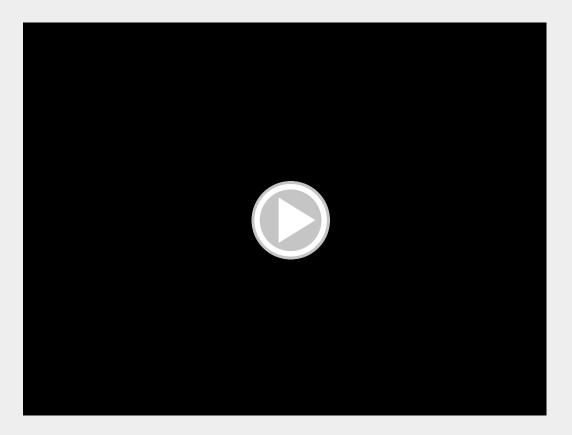
- Take Action How likely are you to take action in support of public transit, such as sharing information, joining an organization that advocates for more robust transit, or contacting your elected representatives to provide and fund public transit? Very Unlikely Neutral/Unsure Very Likely
- 2. Pro-Transit Candidate Vote Support If a candidate running for office wanted to increase funding for public transit, how much more or less likely would you be to vote for them? Much More Likely No Change Much Less Likely
- 3. Pro-Transit Ballot Vote Support Would you vote for or against a ballot

measure to fund public transit? Vote For Vote Against

Opposition Message



Thriving Communities Message



Key Findings: Thriving Communities Message

Persuasion on Issues

- Highest scores for being credible, matters to me, and worth sharing.
- Consistently moves people on all key metrics: quality of life, funding, and fare solutions. Especially effective at conveying disparities.
- Strong performer across target base and persuadable audiences.
- "Better transport" and "environment" are among top repeated terms in respondent comments.

Whether we are Black, white, or brown, most of us want our communities to be inclusive and vibrant. Public transit, like trains and buses, and accessible walking and bike routes, give us a healthy, clean, and affordable way for everyone to get around. But for too long, politicians and wealthy corporations have sold us the idea we can't have the transit we need- all while they profit off of gouging us at the pump and fueling divisions between us. We know what makes communities thrive. By raising our voices together, we can design and demand an upgraded public transit system that not only connects and improves our neighborhoods but protects the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we call home, for generations to come.

Mobilization

 Only message above water overall on willingness to take action – ie joining an org or calling a representative.

Future Message



Key Findings: Future Message

Persuasion on Issues



Strongest on moving people to view more transit as improving communities and quality of life.



Consistently moves people toward our side on funding public transit and fare solutions.

Mobilization



Strongest positive impact on boosting vote support for pro-transit candidates and ballot measures.

Only message to backlash across audiences on taking action in support of transit, notably with Black respondents, Democrats, and in DC and Detroit metros. Whether we're in a city, suburb, or a small town, most of us work hard to make a better future for our families. And we should be able to rely on good public transit to keep us on the move. But for too long, certain politicians with the help of the auto and road-building industry have fueled fears about transit and denied us true choices in how we get around, blocking the transit solutions we need to move forward. But just as generations past created Social Security, Medicare and our National Parks, we too can create what we need for a better future. By coming together across race and place, we can demand fully funded and widespread public transit so we all get where we need to go.



Top message overall for Sacramento, NYC, and LA metro areas. Top message for increasing vote support for pro-transit ballot measures in DC, Houston, and Detroit metros.

Imagine + Freedom Message



Key Findings: Imagine + Freedom Message

Persuasion on Issues

Especially effective at universalizing benefit of public transit.

 Moves the most people on the challenging metric of free transit, driving people to desire free fares for all - especially effective on this in Buffalo and Detroit metros.

- Affordable, reliable, accessible, save, and freedom are top repeated terms in respondents' comments.
 - Lowest performer on moving people to believe more transit improves communities and quality of life and to support funding public transit.

Imagine all of us having the freedom to get where we need to go: from our cities to our suburbs to our small towns. The freedom to read, text or work on the go without having to gas up a car, to celebrate without designating a driver, to get to a concert or game without searching for parking. For too long, a wealthy and powerful few have denied us this freedom, profiting by making us pay to pump and maintain cars while they peddle fears about public transit and the people who ride it. By joining together across race and place to demand our elected leaders deliver fully funded, accessible, and reliable transit, we can ensure all of us have the freedom to move, save money, and live a good life.

Mobilization

- Top message for activating young adults to take action in support of transit.
- Little to no measured effect on boosting vote support for pro-transit candidates or pro-transit ballot measures.

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

Recommendations

Make the case for more robust transit by emphasizing how it will **create thriving communities** and **make a better future** for our families.

• Use the **value of freedom** when making the case for free fares.

Name the villains behind blocking good public transit for our families or your audiences will fill in the villain for themselves: repeating the scapegoats our opposition relentlessly offers them.

- A wealthy and powerful few, wealthy corporations, certain politicians are all effective broad villains and you can adapt this to actors specific to your region or fight, such as the auto and road-building industry.
- Expose the financial motive of villains for fueling deliberate division and scapegoating.

Make concrete and tangible the shared benefits of more public transit. Compelling descriptors of this include "a healthy, clean, and affordable way to get where we need to go" and "reliable and accessible transit that improves our neighborhoods and protects our air and water."

Deliver a clear, aspirational call to action, such as, "demand our elected leaders provide / fund the transit solutions we need to get where we need to go."

THRIVING COMMUNITIES (updated)

Whether we are Black, white, or brown, most of us want our communities to be inclusive and vibrant. Public transit, like trains and buses, and accessible walking and bike routes, give us a healthy, clean, and affordable way for everyone to get around. But for too long, certain politicians and wealthy corporations have sold us the idea we can't have the transit we need– all while they profit off of gouging us at the pump and fueling divisions between us. We know what makes communities thrive. By raising our voices together, we can design and demand an upgraded public transit system that not only connects and improves our neighborhoods but protects the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we call home, for generations to come.

Lead with shared values across race

Emphasize positive benefits of transit

Name villains and expose their motivations

Close with our vision, desired outcomes, and call to action

FUTURE (updated)

Whether we're in a city, suburb, or small town, most of us work hard to make a better future for our families. <mark>And we</mark> should be able to rely on good public transit to keep us on the move. But for too long, **[**certain politicians - with the help of the auto and road-building industry **OR** bankrolled by billionaires and corporations **OR** backed by a wealthy and powerful few**]** have blocked transit solutions and denied us true choices in how we get around, profiting by making us pay at the pump while peddling fears about public transit and the people who ride it. Just as generations past created Social Security, Medicare and our National Parks, we too can create what we need for a better future. By coming together across race and place to demand our elected leaders provide fully funded, accessible, and reliable public transit, we can ensure we all have the freedom to get where we need to go.

Lead with shared values across place

Emphasize positive benefits of transit

Name villains and expose their motivations

Close with our vision, desired outcomes, and call to action

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QUESTIONS?

APPENDIX: Swayable Message Testing Results with Priority Audiences identified by Transit Center

MESSAGE PERFORMANCE: OVERALL SAMPLE

		Matters to me	Credible	Worth Sharing	Improve communitie s and life	Making Wealthy Pay	Ride for free	Mobilization - Take Action	Mobilization - Vote Support	Mobilization - Ballot Support
Opposition Message + Future Message	Overall	62.1	63.6	60.3	+6.7	+3.1	+2.3	-1.7	+3.2	+2.9
Opposition Message + Thriving Communities	Overall	67.7	66.8	64.7	+5.0	+3.3	+2.8	+0.4	+0.8	+0.3
Opposition Message + Imagine+Freedom	Overall	63.5	64.4	62.2	+4.2	+0.8	+5.9	-0.4	+0.4	+1.0

MESSAGE PERFORMANCE: ADULTS OF COLOR

			Matters to me	Credible	Worth Sharing	Improve communitie s and life	Making Wealthy Pay	Ride for free	Mobilization - Take Action	Mobilization - Vote Support	Mobilization - Ballot Support
	Opposition Message +	Black	67.6	64.7	66.0	+7.0	+3.1	+2.3	-2.6	+4.1	+2.0
	Future Message	Asian & Pacific Islander	62.3	61.9	59.5	+7.5	+3.0	+2.3	+0.3	+3.9	+3.3
		Hispanic & Latino	61.4	62.2	62.0	+6.9	+3.1	+2.3	+0.9	+3.7	+3.2
6	Opposition Message + Thriving Communities	Black	70.3	70.0	69.8	+5.3	+3.3	+2.8	+0.5	+0.9	+0.2
	Message	Asian & Pacific Islander	66.2	65.2	64.4	+5.7	+3.2	+2.8	+0.9	+0.1	-1.5
		Hispanic & Latino	67.2	66.9	67.6	+5.2	+3.3	+2.8	+0.9	+1.1	+0.3
	Opposition Message + Imagine+Freedom	Black	67.8	68.2	67.7	+4.4	+0.8	+5.9	+0.1	-0.8	-1.9
	Message	Asian & Pacific Islander	62.9	61.6	61.4	+4.8	+0.8	+6.0	+1.7	+0.2	+1.6
		Hispanic & Latino	62.5	63.8	62.6	+4.4	+0.9	+6.0	+0.4	-1.0	+0.4

MESSAGE PERFORMANCE: TRANSIT RIDERS <-> NON-RIDERS

		Matters to me	Credible	Worth Sharing	Improve communitie s and life	Making Wealthy Pay	Ride for free	Mobilization - Take Action	Mobilization - Vote Support	Mobilization - Ballot Support
Opposition Message + Future Message	Non-Transit Riders	60.6	60.2	54.9	+6.5	+3.0	+2.2	-1.9	+3.5	+2.8
	Occasional Riders	61.5	65.2	63.4	+6.8	+3.2	+2.4	-1.1	+2.7	+2.9
	Frequent Riders	66.5	70.5	70.4	+6.9	+3.0	+2.2	-1.7	+2.9	+3.0
Opposition Message + Thriving Communities	Non-Transit Riders	67.3	62.8	60.5	+4.9	+3.3	+2.7	+0.6	+0.9	+1.1
Message	Occasional Riders	65.7	68.5	66.7	+5.1	+3.4	+2.9	0.0	+0.6	-0.4
	Frequent Riders	70.7	75.2	73.1	+5.2	+3.3	+2.7	+0.3	+0.7	-1.1
Opposition Message + Imagine+Freedom	Non-Transit Riders	62.5	60.7	57.1	+4.1	+0.8	+5.9	-1.5	+0.7	+1.5
Message	Occasional Riders	62.6	66.0	64.7	+4.3	+0.9	+6.2	+0.5	+0.2	+0.5
	Frequent Riders	66.7	72.0	72.2	+4.3	+0.8	+5.7	+1.5	+0.0	+0.4

MESSAGE PERFORMANCE: ADULTS UNDER 35

		Matters to me	Credible	Worth Sharing	Improve communitie s and life	Making Wealthy Pay	Ride for free	Mobilization - Take Action	Mobilization - Vote Support	Mobilization - Ballot Support
Opposition Message + Future Message	Under 35	63.9	63.8	63.4	+7.0	+3.1	+2.3	0.0	+0.5	+2.3
Opposition Message + Thriving Communities	Under 35	67.3	66.3	66.0	+5.3	+3.3	+2.8	-0.5	-0.2	-1.3
Opposition Message + Imagine+Freedom	Under 35	64.2	64.4	63.6	+4.4	+0.9	+6.0	+1.0	+0.3	-0.6

MESSAGE PERFORMANCE: Self-Identified Liberals and Moderates

		Matters to me	Credible	Worth Sharing	Improve communitie s and life	Making Wealthy Pay	Ride for free	Mobilization - Take Action	Mobilization - Vote Support	Mobilization - Ballot Support
Opposition Message + Future Message	Very Liberal	65.3	63.7	60.2	+6.8	+2.8	+2.3	-1.8	+2.9	+4.3
	Moderate Liberal	61.3	63.2	60.2	+6.8	+3.2	+2.3	-1.2	+2.9	+3.2
	Moderate	59.5	63.1	60.3	+6.7	+3.3	+2.3	-1.0	+2.8	+2.7
Opposition Message + Thriving Communities	Very Liberal	70.6	66.9	65.2	+5.1	+3.0	+2.8	+0.1	-0.5	+1.3
Message	Moderate Liberal	66.1	66.4	64.8	+5.1	+3.5	+2.8	+0.2	+0.3	+0.3
	Moderate	64.5	66.4	64.5	+5.0	+3.6	+2.8	+0.1	+0.7	+0.0
Opposition Message + Imagine+Freedom	Very Liberal	65.8	64.5	62.3	+4.3	+0.8	+6.0	+0.0	+0.3	+0.6
Message	Moderate Liberal	62.6	64.1	62.0	+4.3	+0.9	+6.0	+0.2	+0.4	+0.8
	Moderate	61.2	63.9	61.8	+4.2	+0.9	+6.0	+0.1	+0.2	+0.7

MESSAGE PERFORMANCE: Democrats and Independents

			Matters to me	Credible	Worth Sharing	Improve communitie s and life	Making Wealthy Pay	Ride for free	Mobilization - Take Action	Mobilization - Vote Support	Mobilization - Ballot Support
64	Opposition Message + Future Message	Registered Democrat	66.1	65.1	62.4	+6.8	+3.0	+2.3	-1.9	+3.4	+3.8
		Registered No Party /	61.5	62.8	58.7	+6.7	+3.2	+2.2	-0.4	+3.2	+2.9
ħΔ	Opposition Message + Thriving Communities	Registered Democrat	71.0	68.8	67.1	+5.1	+3.2	+2.8	+0.2	+0.2	+0.3
	Message	Registered No Party /	67.3	65.7	63.3	+5.0	+3.5	+2.7	+0.2	+0.8	+0.5
64	Opposition Message + Imagine+Freedom	Registered Democrat	66.5	66.2	64.4	+4.3	+0.8	+5.9	+0.5	+0.2	+0.8
	Message	Registered No Party /	62.9	63.2	60.6	+4.2	+0.9	+5.9	+0.2	+0.5	+1.0

MESSAGE PERFORMANCE: KEY RESULTS BY TARGET METRO AREA

		Improve communitie s and life (Detroit Metro)	Improve communitie s and life (Greater Houston)	Improve communitie s and life (Buffalo NY)	Improve communitie s and life (Sacrament o CA)	Improve communitie s and life (Greater DC)	Improve communitie s and life (NYC Metro)	Improve communitie s and life (LA Metro)
Opposition Message + Future Message	Overall	+6.8	+6.7	+6.9	+6.6	+7.2	+7.3	+7.0
Opposition Message + Thriving Communities	Overall	+5.1	+5.0	+5.1	+5.0	+5.4	+5.5	+5.3
Opposition Message + Imagine+Freedom	Overall	+4.3	+4.2	+4.3	+4.1	+4.5	+4.6	+4.4
		Making Wealthy Pay (Detroit Metro)	Making Wealthy Pay (Greater Houston)	Making Wealthy Pay (Buffalo NY)	Making Wealthy Pay (Sacrament o CA)	Making Wealthy Pay (Greater DC)	Making Wealthy Pay (NYC Metro)	Making Wealthy Pay (LA Metro)
Opposition Message + Future Message	Overall	Wealthy Pay (Detroit	Wealthy Pay (Greater	Wealthy Pay	Wealthy Pay (Sacrament	Wealthy Pay (Greater	Wealthy Pay	Wealthy Pay
	Overall Overall	Wealthy Pay (Detroit Metro)	Wealthy Pay (Greater Houston)	Wealthy Pay (Buffalo NY)	Wealthy Pay (Sacrament o CA)	Wealthy Pay (Greater DC)	Wealthy Pay (NYC Metro)	Wealthy Pay (LA Metro)

		Ride for free (Detroit Metro)	Ride for free (Greater Houston)	Ride for free (Buffalo NY)	Ride for free (Sacrament o CA)	Ride for free (Greater DC)	Ride for free (NYC Metro)	Ride for free (LA Metro)
Opposition Message + Future Message	Overall	+2.2	+2.3	+2.1	+2.3	+2.2	+2.3	+2.2
Opposition Message + Thriving Communities	Overall	+2.7	+2.8	+2.6	+2.8	+2.7	+2.8	+2.7
Opposition Message + Imagine+Freedom	Overall	+5.8	+6.0	+5.6	+5.9	+5.8	+6.0	+5.9

		Mobilization - Vote Support (Detroit Metro)	Mobilization - Vote Support (Greater Houston)	Mobilization - Vote Support (Buffalo NY)	Mobilization - Vote Support (Sacrament o CA)	Mobilization - Vote Support (Greater DC)	Mobilization - Vote Support (NYC Metro)	Mobilization - Vote Support (LA Metro)
Opposition Message + Future Message	Overall	+2.2	+3.2	+2.2	+4.8	+2.4	+5.7	+5.8
Opposition Message + Thriving Communities	Overall	+2.0	-1.0	+1.9	-1.1	+2.5	+1.3	-2.2
Opposition Message + Imagine+Freedom	Overall	+0.3	-2.4	+1.5	-2.1	-1.6	+1.5	-1.3

		Mobilization - Take Action (Detroit Metro)	Mobilization - Take Action (Greater Houston)	Mobilization - Take Action (Buffalo NY)	Mobilization - Take Action (Sacrament o CA)	Mobilization - Take Action (Greater DC)	Mobilization - Take Action (NYC Metro)	Mobiliza - Take Action (Metro)								
Opposition Message + Future Message	Overall	-4.1	+0.9	-3.0	-0.7	-4.9	+2.0	+6.	1							
Opposition Message + Thriving Communities	Overall	+0.0	+0.4	-0.3	+0.5	-1.7	+0.5	+0.	7	Mobilization - Ballot	Mobilization - Ballot	Mobilization - Ballot	Mobilization - Ballot	Mobilization - Ballot	Mobilization - Ballot	Mobilization - Ballot
Opposition Message + Imagine+Freedom	Overall	-1.1	-0.2	+0.4	-0.8	-2.3	+1.6	+2.4	4	Support (Detroit Metro)	Support (Greater Houston)	Support (Buffalo NY)	Support (Sacrament o CA)	Support (Greater DC)	Support (NYC Metro)	Support (LA Metro)
							osition Messa re Message	ge +	Overall	+2.2	+6.9	-0.8	+6.6	+5.4	+4.1	+7.3
							osition Messa ring Communi		Overall	+1.9	-1.5	-0.3	-1.7	-0.2	-3.0	-4.6
80% confidence	e interval						osition Messa ine+Freedom		Overall	+0.4	-0.5	+1.5	+0.0	-0.4	+1.8	+0.3

MESSAGE PERFORMANCE: MOVING PEOPLE ON FARES OVERALL AND BY IDEOLOGY

		Everyone pay the same	Some should get reduced	Ride for free			Everyone pay the same	Some should get reduced fare	Ride for free
			fare		Opposition Message + Thriving Communities	Very Liberal	-3.0	-0.8	+2.8
Opposition Message + Future Message	Overall	-1.4	-0.8	+2.3	Message	Moderate Liberal	-3.0	-0.8	+2.8
Opposition Message +	Overall	-3.0	-0.8	+2.8		Moderate	-3.0	-0.8	+2.8
Thriving Communities						Moderate Conservative	-3.0	-0.8	+2.8
Opposition Message + Imagine+Freedom	Overall	-1.1	-5.2	+5.9		Very Conservative	-2.9	-0.8	+2.7

80% confidence

interval

			Everyone pay the same	Some should get reduced fare	Ride for free			Everyone pay the same	Some should get reduced fare	Ride for free
	Opposition Message + Future Message	Very Liberal	-1.4	-0.8	+2.3	Opposition Message + Imagine+Freedom Message	Very Liberal	-1.1	-5.2	+6.0
•		Moderate Liberal	-1.4	-0.8	+2.3		Moderate Liberal	-1.1	-5.2	+6.0
		Moderate	-1.4	-0.8	+2.3		Moderate	-1.1	-5.2	+6.0
		Moderate Conservative	-1.4	-0.8	+2.3		Moderate Conservative	-1.1	-5.2	+5.9
		Very Conservative	-1.3	-0.8	+2.2		Very Conservative	-1.0	-5.2	+5.7