

2004 American Community Survey

National Survey on Communities

**Conducted for Smart Growth America
and National Association of Realtors®**

October 2004

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Overview

As policy-makers and the public debate the different aspects of growth and development, Smart Growth America and the National Association of Realtors® asked Belden Russonello & Stewart to look at Americans' preferences for the type of communities they want to live in and the policies they support for creating those communities. The preferences and other opinions expressed in the survey suggest a direction for solving the conflicting pressures of the desire to develop and the wish to preserve communities.

BRS conducted a national random sample survey of 1,130 adults, age 18 and older from August 26 through September 6, 2004 using the Knowledge Networks Web-enabled panel. The Knowledge Networks sample is derived from a random digit dial (RDD) telephone methodology that represents all U.S. households with telephones. The margin of error for the survey is plus or minus 3.0 percentage points. The data have been weighted by race and age to match the U.S. population as represented in the U.S. Census.

The 2004 American Communities survey covers many opinions that Americans hold about where they live, where they would like to live, and the policies for getting there. The survey reveals three main points:

- 1) Americans favor smart growth communities with shorter commute times, sidewalks, and places to walk more than sprawling communities.
- 2) The length of their commute to work holds a dominant place in Americans' decisions about where to live. Americans place a high value on limiting their commute times and they are more likely to see improved public transportation and changing patterns of housing development as the solutions to longer commutes than increasing road capacities. This unambiguous finding suggests that, while public policies are going in one direction, public opinion is running down another path.
- 3) Americans want government and business to be investing in existing communities before putting resources into newer communities farther out from cities and older suburbs. The public's priorities for development include more housing for people with moderate and low incomes and slowing the rate of development of open space. Many Americans also express the desire for more places to walk or bike in their communities.

Findings

The report is broken down into the following sections:

The Dream: Americans' preferences for different types of development and aspects of community.

The Reality: The public's level of satisfaction with the choices they have currently.

Policies - getting from dream to reality: The public's support for specific policies to address the issues of how we live and where and how we develop.

The Dream

Americans want to live in convenient, inter-generational communities located in or near cities. For most, a dream community would be within a short commute from work and have sidewalks and places to walk.

Looking to the near future, potential homebuyers in the next three years are more likely to say they would like a smart growth community than a sprawl community.

1. Americans favor suburbs close to a city over farther out suburbs.

When asked where they would choose to live, a plurality of Americans would choose to live in a suburb close to a city (33%) or in a city (13%) and about a third (35%) would like to live in a rural community. Only 18% of the public say they want to live in suburbs that are farther out from a city.

Those who are in the market to buy a home are more likely to say they want to be in or near a city than farther away (15% city, 38% suburb close to a city, 19% farther out suburb, 27% rural). These potential homebuyers are likely to currently be living in a city (45%), to be members of Generation X plus (63%), to have children (46%) and to currently be renting (48%).

2. More Americans prefer a smart growth community over a sprawl community.

After hearing detailed descriptions of two communities, 55% of Americans select the smart growth community and 45% select the sprawl community.

Women (59%), African Americans (78%), and Hispanics (57%) are more likely to select the smart growth community, rather than the sprawl community. In particular, African Americans are more than three times more likely to choose the smart growth over the sprawl community (78% to 22%). Men (51% smart growth to 49% sprawl) and Caucasians (50% to 50%) are more mixed in their preferences.

Six in ten people (61%) who think they will buy a house in the next three years are more likely to look for a home in a smart growth community rather than a sprawl community (39%).

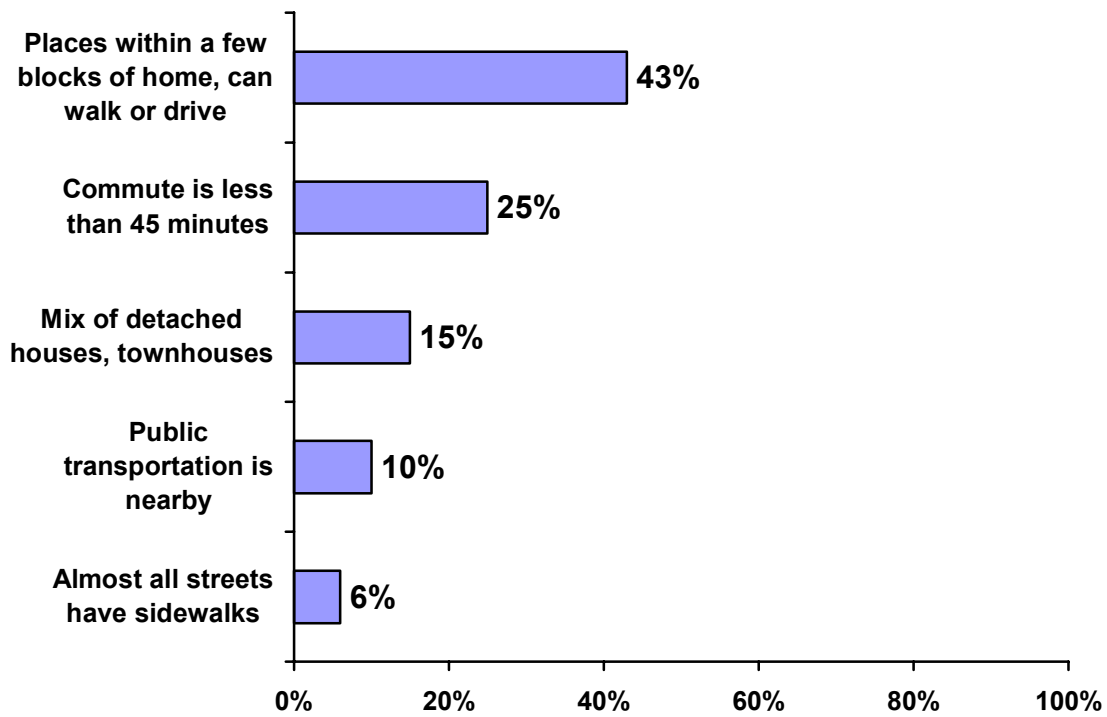
Regionally, residents of the Northeast (62%) are the most likely to select the smart growth community, while majorities of Midwesterners (56%) and Westerners (57%) also select the smart growth community. Residents in the South are split between the two types of communities (49% smart growth to 51% sprawl).

Community A	Community B
There are only single family houses on one acre lots	There is a mix of single family detached houses, townhouses, apartments and condominiums on various sized lots
There are no sidewalks	Almost all the streets have sidewalks
Places such as shopping, restaurants, library, and a school are within a few miles of your home and you have to drive to most	Places such as shopping, restaurants, library, and a school are within a few blocks of your home and you can either walk or drive
There is enough parking when you drive to local stores, restaurants and other places	Parking is limited when you decide to drive to local stores, restaurants and other places
Your one-way commute is 45 minutes or over	Your one-way commute is less than 45 minutes
Public transportation, such as train, bus, and light rail, is distant or unavailable	Public transportation, such as train, bus, and light rail, is nearby

An examination of the reasons that Americans give for choosing one type of community over another reveals that smart growth choosers do so largely because of the convenience of being within walking distance to shops and restaurants and close to work. Those who prefer the sprawl community are motivated mostly by desire to live on larger lots.

A plurality (43%) of those who choose the smart growth community is most attracted to having shopping and restaurants near-by. A quarter is most attracted to a commute time under 45 minutes. A mix of housing types (15%), proximity to public transportation (10%) and the presence of sidewalks (6%) are the most attractive features for fewer of those who choose the smart growth community.

Attractions of the Smart Growth Community [of those choosing the smart growth community]

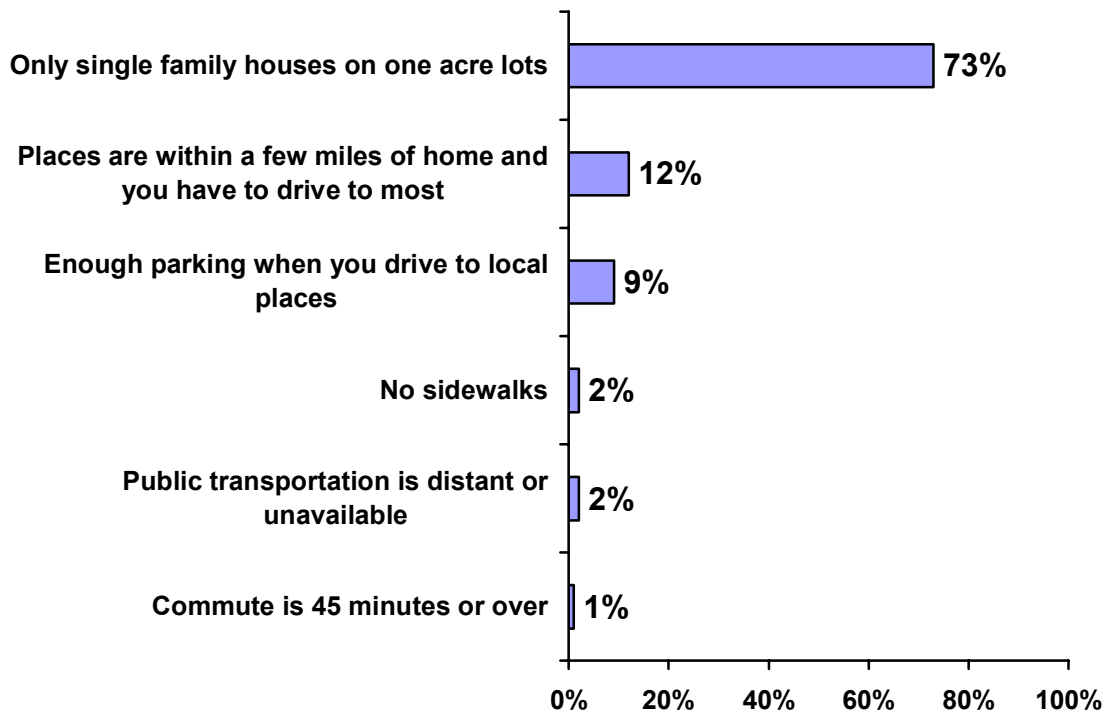


[Base is those choosing the smart growth community in Q7; N=623.] Q8. Look at the community you selected and choose the ONE most appealing characteristic of that community for you.

On the other hand, large houses on plots of at least an acre. Almost three-quarters (73%) of those who choose the sprawl community say large houses on large plots are the most appealing feature on the list.

Attractions of the Sprawl Community

[of those choosing the sprawl community]



[Base is those choosing the sprawl community in Q7; N=508.] Q8. Look at the community you selected and choose the ONE most appealing characteristic of that community for you.

3. Convenience vs. Sprawl: Desire for shorter commute times competes with wish for larger lots.

Throughout the survey, two characteristics of communities – convenience and space – compete with each other as Americans consider where and how they want to live.

Large majorities prioritize a short commute and places to walk when considering many aspects of a community. When the choice is narrowed specifically to a short commute versus a large lot size, Americans are sharply divided. But when the choice is between a large lot size and convenience to stores and restaurants, large majorities opt for a larger lot.

Priorities in deciding where to live:

A limited commute time is, for most Americans, an important factor in deciding where to live. Being within a 45-minute commute to work is rated highest among a list of fourteen priorities in thinking about where to live (79% “very” or “somewhat” important), followed by easy access to highways (75%) and having sidewalks and places to walk (72%).

A short commute is particularly important to people who plan to buy a home in the next three years (87%) and women and African Americans place high importance on sidewalks and places to walk (76% and 85%, respectively).

For some Americans the dream of homeownership includes a large piece of land and privacy. Majorities say living in a place that’s away from it all (60%) and having a home with an acre of land (57%) are important factors in deciding where to live. Conversely, “being in the center of it” all is much less important to Americans when they consider where to live, with just over a quarter (26%) saying this is important. Forty-two percent of Americans say living at the center of it all is “not very” important and 31% say it is “not at all” important.

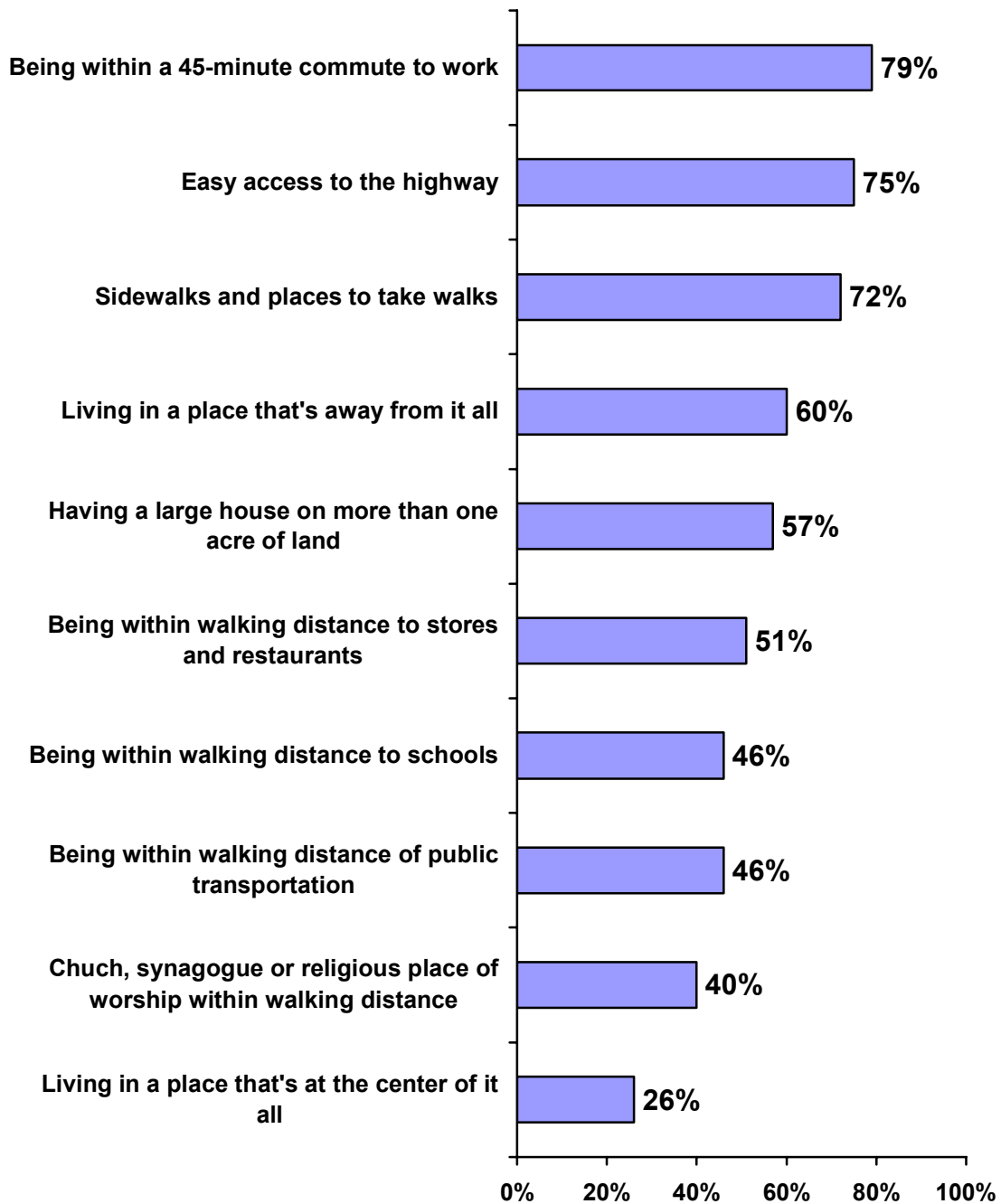
The next set of characteristics that Americans place high importance on when looking for a home includes walking to specific destinations in their communities. Half of Americans (51%) say being within walking distance to stores and restaurants is important when thinking about where to live. Nearly as many Americans place importance on being within walking distance to schools (46%) and public transportation (46%).

African Americans and Hispanics place a higher priority than Caucasians on being within walking distances of stores (African Americans 68%; Hispanics 63%; Caucasians 45%) and schools (70%; 62%; 40%) and public transportation (77%; 67%; 38%).

Americans who live in the Northeast place higher importance on being within walking distance of stores and restaurants (58%) and public transportation (56%) than do Americans in other parts of the country.

Factors in Deciding Where To Live

[% saying "very" or "somewhat" important]



Q10. In deciding where to live, indicate how important each of the following would be to you: very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important? a. Being within walking distance of public transportation. b. Being within walking distance to schools. c. Being within walking distance to stores and restaurants. d. Sidewalks and places to take walks. f. Having a large house on more than one acre of land. g. Being within a 45-minute commute to work. h. Easy access to the highway. l. Church, synagogue or religious place of worship within walking distance. m. Living in a place that's away from it all. n. Living in a place that's at the center of it all.

Commute time versus lot size:

Two questions in the survey look specifically at the trade-offs people make when choosing where to live. When we look at the trade-offs of living in houses built far apart and having the ability to walk to stores and places of interest, we find that large majorities of all Americans would select a community with houses built farther apart even if they have to drive to stores and restaurants (70% versus 30%).

However, Americans are less likely to want to trade a shorter commute for a larger lot size. Fifty-one percent would choose a large lot with a commute of 45 minutes or more and 48% would opt for smaller houses with a shorter commute time.

Women (51%), African Americans (59%), and people who may buy a house in the near future (52%) are more likely to opt for the community with a shorter commute and houses closer together whereas men (55%) and Caucasians (54%) are more likely to want the large lot size even if it means a longer commute.

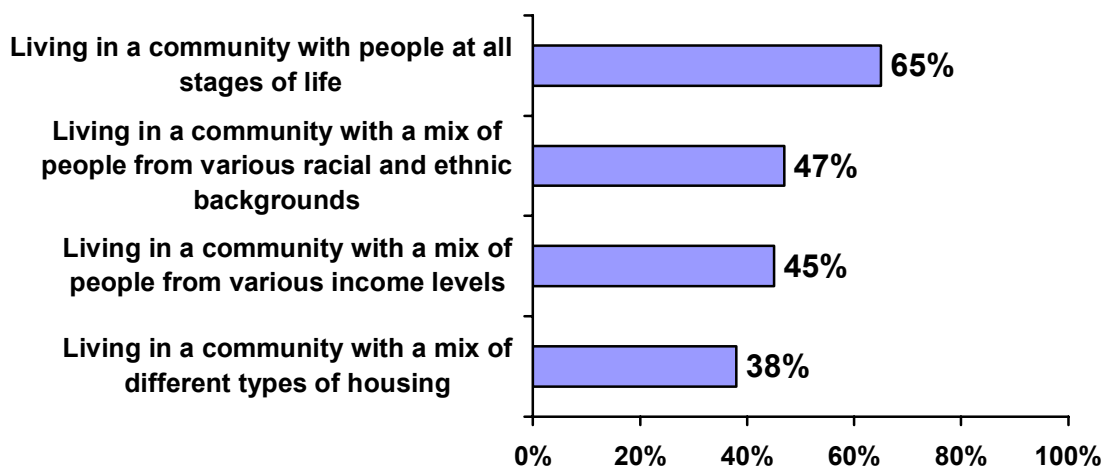
4. Americans want to live in inter-generational communities.

Two-thirds (65%) of Americans want to live in communities that have people at different stages of life – single adults, families with children, and older people.

Also of importance to close to half of Americans (47%) is the racial and ethnic diversity of a place. Diversity of incomes is important to 45%, and four in ten (38%) say a mix of housing types is important in deciding where to live.

Importance of Community Diversity in Deciding Where To Live

[% saying “very” or “somewhat” important]



Q10. In deciding where to live, indicate how important each of the following would be to you: very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important? e. Living in a community with a mix of different types of housing – single family detached houses, townhouses, apartments, and condominiums. i. Living in a community with a mix of people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. j. Living in a community with a mix of people from various income levels. k. Living in a community with people at all stages of life – single adults, families with children and older people.

Women and African Americans are more likely than men and Caucasians to place importance on living in an intergenerational community (women 70% to men 58%; African Americans 74% to Caucasian 63%).

Minorities, more so than Caucasians, consider community diversity an important aspect in a community. Three-quarters (74%) of African Americans and 64% of Hispanics consider living in a community that has a mix of ethnic and racial backgrounds important compared to 41% of Caucasians. Similar differences in importance surround the diversity of incomes (African Americans 63%; Hispanics 51%; Caucasians 40%) and the diversity of housing type (53%; 49%; 35%).

Regionally, Northeasterners, more so than residents elsewhere, place importance on living in communities with a mix of generations (70%) and income levels (54%).

The Reality

Americans express general satisfaction with their current communities. Most Americans (70%) say the last time they moved they found the type of community they were looking for, but three in ten (30%) say they had to settle for a second or third choice.

Sizeable segments of Americans, however, find their current communities lacking in important aspects, such as the amount of housing for moderate and low income families, public transportation, and places to walk and bike.

1. A sizable complaint: We need more housing for low and moderate income families, public transportation, and places to walk.

In a series of questions, people rated their own communities. While the public is generally satisfied with their communities, sizable segments find them lacking in important areas. Half of Americans (49%) thinks there is too little housing for people with low incomes in their communities. And, four in ten (39%) think there is too little housing for people of moderate incomes in their communities.

At least four in ten would also like to see more public transportation within walking distance (46% “too little”), more places to bike (46%), more shops or restaurants within walking distance (42%), more places to walk or exercise for fun (40%) in their communities.

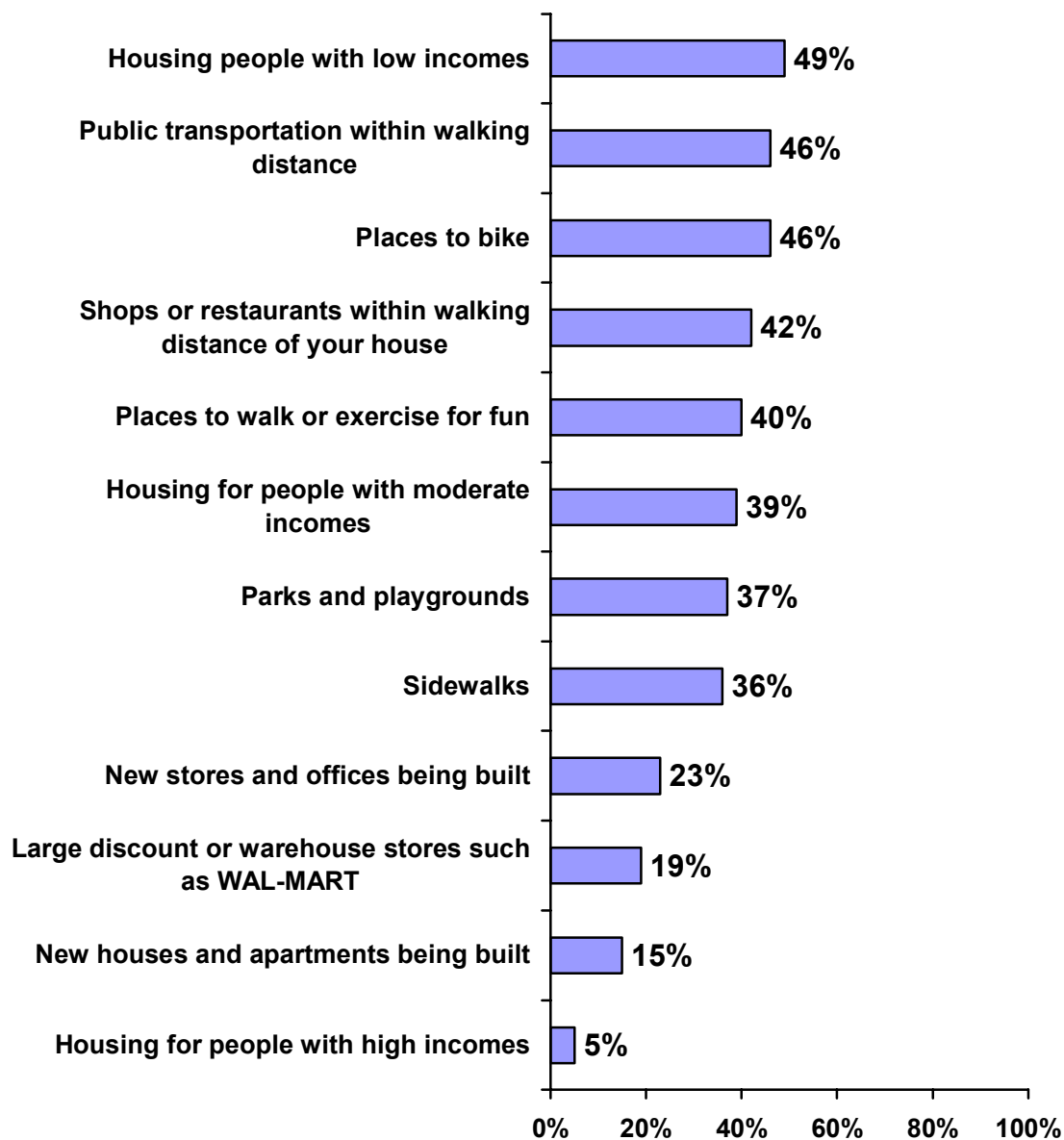
African Americans are among the most critical of their communities with large majorities saying there is too little housing for people with low (80%) and moderate (66%) incomes, places to bike (67%) and walk (57%), and parks and playgrounds (56%) and shops or restaurants to walk to (53%).

Residents of the Midwest, South Atlantic, and Deep South want more public transportation (50% Midwest; 51% South Atlantic; 53% Deep South) and shops or restaurants within walking distance of their homes (47%; 49%; 49%).

Residents of the South are also more likely to be looking for more sidewalks (52% South Atlantic; 46% Deep South), parks and playgrounds (44%; 47%), and places to walk (48%; 50%) and bike (53%; 59%).

What Communities Lack

[% saying "too little"]

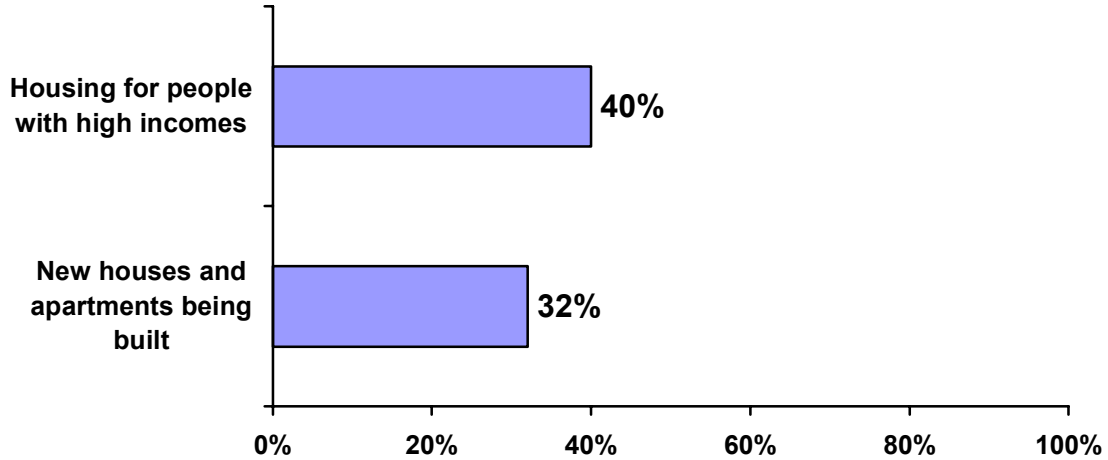


Q3. Do you think there is too much, too little, or the right amount of each of the following in the area close to where you live? a. Shops or restaurants within walking distance of your house. b. Sidewalks. c. Public transportation within walking distance. d. Parks and playgrounds. e. Places to walk or exercise for fun. f. Places to bike. g. Housing for people with low incomes. h. Housing for people with moderate incomes. i. Housing for people with high incomes. j. New stores and offices being built. k. New houses and apartments being built. l. Large discount or warehouse stores such as WAL-MART.

The public does feel there is an over abundance of some things in their communities. Four in ten think there is too much housing for people with high incomes and a third (32%) thinks there are too many new houses and apartments being built.

What Communities Have in Abundance

[% saying "too much"]



Q3. Do you think there is too much, too little, or the right amount of each of the following in the area close to where you live? i. Housing for people with high incomes. k. New houses and apartments being built.

Policy Priorities

In setting priorities for their states, more Americans want their state governments to improve existing communities including cities and older suburbs rather than give incentives to developers to build in the countryside. They complain that there is too much housing being built for high income families and not enough for families of moderate and low income.

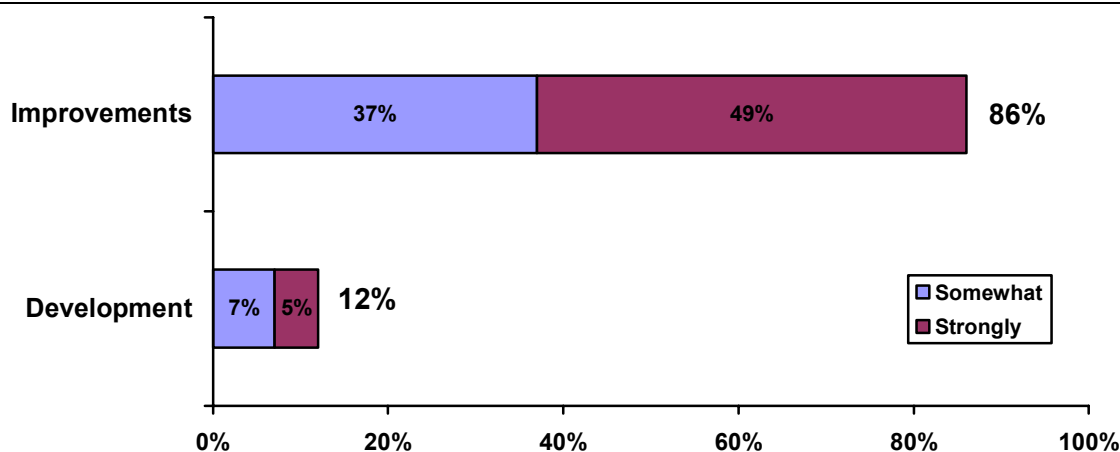
Americans also do not feel they have a voice in important development decisions that they see being driven too often by private developers.

1. Public to policy makers: Improve existing areas before development moves to the countryside.

Nearly nine in ten Americans (86%) want their states to fund improvements in existing communities over incentives for new development in the countryside (12%), with a majority (49%) saying they strongly prefer funding for improvements in existing communities.

While large majorities of all demographic groups favor improvements in existing communities, registered voters (89%) and African Americans (94%) are more likely than non-registered voters (77%) and Caucasians (87%) to favor funding improvements in existing communities over new development.

Improvements in Existing Communities v. New Development



Q16. Which of the following two should receive funding priority from the state government: Improvements in existing communities or incentives for new development in the countryside? Is that strongly or somewhat?

In a series of questions, the public places higher priority on a number of smart growth policies than on developing sprawl communities.

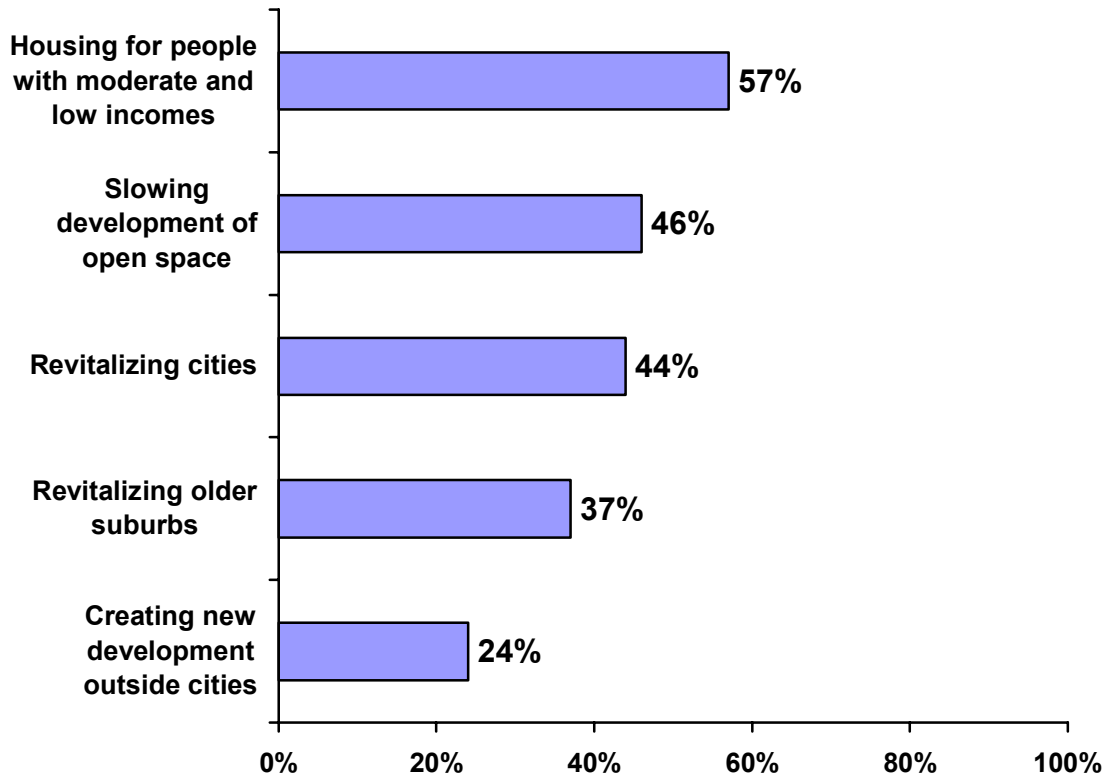
- A majority (57%) of Americans considers the smart growth goal of having housing for moderate and low income people to be a high priority for their state governments.
- More than four in ten place a high priority on slowing the rate of development of open space (46%) and revitalizing cities (44%).
- Thirty-seven percent consider revitalizing older suburbs a high priority.
- Only 24% of Americans think creating new development outside of cities should be a high priority for their state government to address.

African Americans (76%) and Hispanics (65%) place a high priority on having housing for people with moderate and low incomes and African Americans prioritize revitalizing cities (64%) and older suburbs (58%).

Regionally, residents of the South Atlantic place a high priority on slowing the rate at which open space is being developed (57%) and residents of the Northeast are particularly concerned about revitalizing cities (54%).

Priorities

[% saying "extremely high" or "high" priority]



2. Here are some issues [state] will be facing over the next few years. For each one please indicate how much of a priority it should be for your state to address: Should it be an extremely high priority, a high priority, a middle priority, a low priority, or an extremely low priority for your state government? f. Slowing the rate at which open space is being developed. g. Revitalizing older suburbs. h. Revitalizing cities. j. Creating new development outside the cities. k. Having housing for people with moderate and low incomes.

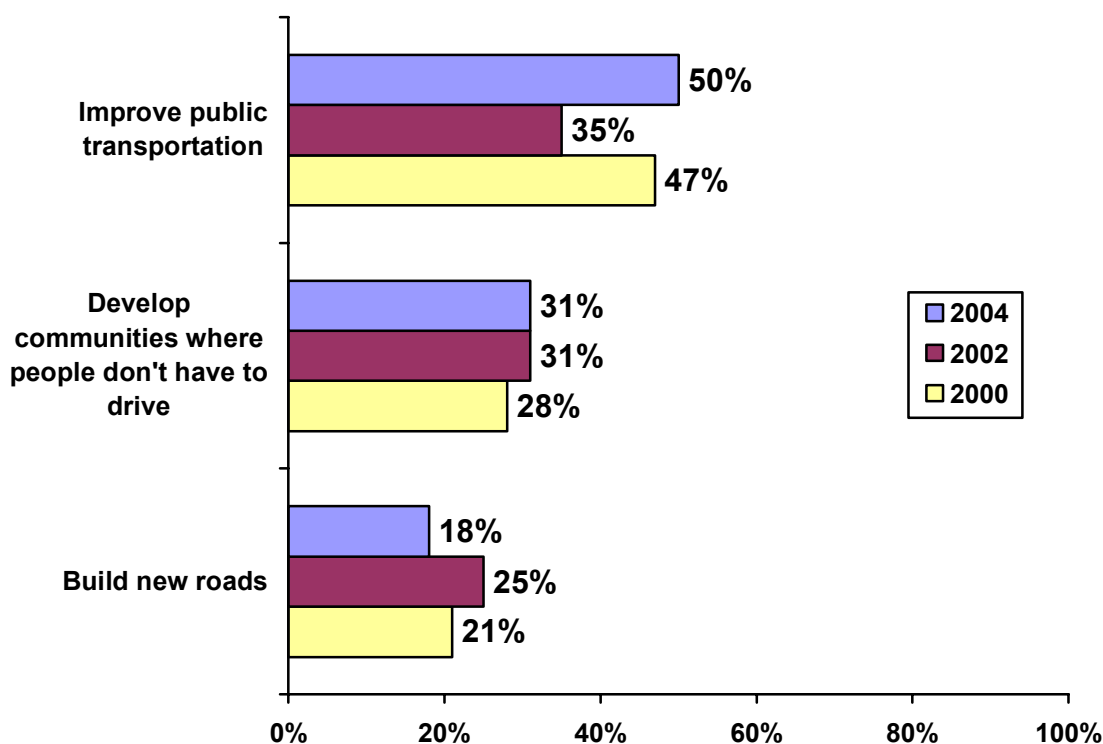
2. Public to policy makers: Public transportation not roads is answer to traffic problems.

As commute times and traffic congestion continue to increase across the country, Americans believe the answer to traffic lies in improved public transportation and changes in patterns of housing development more than in building new roads.

Half of Americans (50%) choose improving public transportation when given three options to solve long-term traffic problems in their states. A third of the public (31%) believes the best answer is developing communities where people do not have to drive long distances, and less than two in ten (18%) believe the answer is building new roads.

Consistently over the past four years, improving public transportation and developing communities where people do not have to drive long distances have been more popular than building new roads.

Answers to Traffic Problems



Q15. Which of the following proposals is the best long term solution to reducing traffic in your state: Build new roads; Improve public transportation such as trains, buses, and light rail; Develop communities where people do not have to drive long distances to work or shop?

APPENDIX: Detailed Methodology

The Belden Russonello & Stewart survey of national adults, conducted for Smart Growth America and the National Association of Realtors®, interviewed 1,130 American adults ages 18 and older. The interviews took place from August 26 to September 6, 2004, using the Knowledge Networks Web-enabled panel.

The Knowledge Networks sample is derived from a random digit dial (RDD) telephone methodology that represents all U.S. households with telephones. The company employs a complex sample stratification design that incorporates the known probabilities of selection associated with geographical location, the number of phone lines, and whether or not the phone number is listed. Persons in selected households are invited by telephone to participate in the web-enabled panel. Those who agree to participate are sent an Internet appliance and receive an Internet service connection provided by Knowledge Networks. In some cases, people who already have computers and Internet service are permitted to participate using their own equipment. These panelists receive unique log-in information for accessing surveys online.

The margin of sampling error for the entire sample is plus or minus 3.0 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. The margin of error is larger for subgroups of the population.

Data Analysis

The demographic characteristics of the sample, obtained via the selection methods described above, were matched to U.S. Census data from 2000. The data collected have been weighted statistically to bring age and race into their proper proportions for American adults ages 18 and older. The table on the next page shows the demographic composition of the survey respondents.

The following are the regional breaks used in the study:

Northeast	South Atlantic	Deep South	Midwest	West
Connecticut	Delaware	Alabama	Illinois	Alaska
Maine	District of Columbia	Arkansas	Indiana	Arizona
Massachusetts	Florida	Kentucky	Iowa	California
New Hampshire	Georgia	Louisiana	Kansas	Colorado
New Jersey	Maryland	Mississippi	Michigan	Hawaii
New York	Virginia	Oklahoma	Minnesota	Idaho
Pennsylvania	North Carolina	Tennessee	Missouri	Montana
Rhode Island	South Carolina	Texas	Nebraska	Nevada
Vermont	West Virginia		North Dakota	New Mexico
			Ohio	Oregon
			South Dakota	Utah
			Wisconsin	Washington
				Wyoming

Composition Table of Survey Respondents

	Unweighted number	Unweighted percent	Weighted percent
Men	537	48%	46%
Women	593	52	54
18-39	378	33%	41%
40-58	437	39	34
59+	315	28	24
White	888	79%	72%
Black	92	8	11
Hispanic	110	10	11
Other	40	4	6
Parents (kids<18)	323	29%	31%
<HS/HS	535	47%	46%
Some college	333	29	31
College graduate+	262	23	24
<\$25K	316	28%	29%
\$25K-\$49K	402	36	36
\$50K-\$74K	263	23	23
\$75K+	149	13	12
City	365	32%	35%
Suburb near city	338	30	30
Farther out suburb	129	11	10
Rural	282	25	23
Northeast	225	20%	19%
Midwest	274	24	24
South Atlantic	197	17	17
Deep South	186	16	17
West	248	22	23
Homeowner	781	69%	65%
Renter	293	26	29
Buy home in next 3 years	290	26%	28%