



Market Research

An executive summary of the 511 survey, plus more information on 511, is available for downloading at www.itsa.org/511.html.

The New 511

Travel Information

Service



Market Research

Here's What

Consumers Want



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Here's What Consumers Want

In a growing number of cities and regions throughout the country, a single three-digit telephone number, 511, is providing travel information to commuters, vacationers, commercial vehicle operators and transit riders.

The travel reports delivered by telephone are the result of public transportation agencies working together and with private-sector partners to gather and share real-time information on road surface and weather conditions, accidents, road closures, work zones, public transportation scheduling and tourism.

The goal is to have 511 become as familiar and useful to the public as 411 and 911 are today. This will require more cities and regions to harness the partnerships that bring 511 to the public – and that is happening!

What is ITS America?

ITS America is the leading advocate for the deployment of advanced surface transportation technologies in the United States. The 12-year-old organization's members represent the public sector and private industry. They are engaged in all facets of technology including research and development, technical standards, public safety applications, consumer products and related information services such as 511. For more information, call 202-484-4847 or visit us online at www.itsa.org.

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The Survey

The Gallup Organization conducted the survey in late 2001 on behalf of the Intelligent Transportation Society of America. ITS America sponsored the survey to support the national deployment of 511 service.

The survey included telephone interviews with 920 people of driving age; telephone interviews with 131 commercial vehicle operators; written surveys from 42 additional long-haul commercial vehicle operators; and focus groups in Lincoln, Neb., Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

The following pages highlight some of the key results from the first national survey of the public's attitudes on 511.

Consumer Awareness

Almost all travelers are aware of traffic and transit reports thanks to updates on radio and television.

Slightly more than 50 percent of the respondents are aware of advanced traveler information systems that are more comprehensive than radio and television reports – with travelers in the western United States most familiar with them. Advanced traveler information systems are 10-digit telephone numbers and related Web sites that offer similar information to that provided by 511. There are over 300 such different numbers nationally.

About 10 percent of respondents surveyed have heard of 511.

As of February 2002, 511 service was in place in the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky region, Minnesota (wireless only), Nebraska, Utah, and along the I-81 corridor in Virginia. Another 16 states from Alaska to Florida are developing 511 systems. More are expected to follow.

Agencies can add custom taglines to the basic 511 logo to identify the availability of traffic and transit information.

Frequency of Use

Overall, 25 percent of the respondents said they would be most likely to use 511 weekly or daily; 29 percent said a few times a month; and 45 percent said a few times a year.

The highest likelihood of using 511 was among those making five or more long distance trips a year (63 percent).

Thirty-nine percent of commercial vehicle operators reported they would be extremely likely to use 511.

Fifty-eight percent of commuters said they would be at least somewhat likely to use the service.

Focus group participants said they would be most likely to use 511 if they were making longer trips or trips to unfamiliar areas.

Desired Features

Forty percent of those surveyed said weather-related and road surface condition information was the most critical element for 511 systems to provide.

Other desired features included accident or road incident reports (28 percent), construction updates for freeways and major roads (26 percent), and traffic congestion levels of area freeways (24 percent).

Regionally, the greatest need for weather-related information came from respondents in the Midwest, for accident or incident reports from respondents in the Northeast and for construction updates from respondents in the South.

Transit riders said information on delays was most critical (25 percent); followed by travel time estimates (23 percent); connection to live operators for trip planning (17 percent); and information on how crowded train cars or buses are (15 percent).

Respondents also said the following features were critical to include in 511: special events that could impact congestion or travel times (19 percent); congestion levels

Respondents want the data to be updated at least every 10 to 15 minutes.

on local roads (17 percent); and traffic congestion on major roads other than freeways (16 percent); average travel times along highways and major roads (11 percent); and average speed estimates along highways and major roads (9 percent).

Willingness to Pay

Although emerging national guidelines suggest that basic 511 service be available for the cost of a local call and that all 511 systems to date are free to the user, the survey did assess consumers' willingness to pay for these and premium services.

Most respondents preferred a per-use fee (74 percent) over a monthly fee (25 percent) – although 53 percent of those indicating they would use the 511 service on a daily or weekly basis said they would be more likely to choose a monthly fee to access the system as needed.

Bus (38 percent) and train (35 percent) riders would be more willing to pay for 511 service than would drivers of automobiles (26 percent). Commercial vehicle operators (48 percent) are most willing to pay for 511 services.

Those surveyed said they would be extremely likely to use and be willing to pay for information on best routes or location (59 percent); connections to roadside

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assistance (54 percent); and access to traffic and 100-percent accurate information in terms of location and type of delay regarding traffic and accidents (52 percent).

Respondents also said they would be extremely likely to use and willing to pay for accident information for their specific travel route (50 percent); information on cities or routes in other states/regions (42 percent); access to information in other cities (41 percent); traffic and accident information in real time (37 percent); tourist information (36 percent); and directions to nearby restaurants, gas stations and the like (34 percent).

Slightly more than half of those surveyed would be willing to listen to a short advertising message to have the call be free.

Other Considerations

The survey highlights the need to focus on content, consistency and cost.

Commercial vehicle operators, the group most willing to pay for 511 service, felt that consistency of service is a critical aspect of a national system. Consistency in features across 511 systems is recommended, but probably not necessary for initial deployment.

Touch-tone access is not as popular as voice-response technology, which is likely to be the standard interface to 511 in the future.

Focus groups said that roadside signage and other marketing efforts connected with a 511 service should avoid using the word "traveler." The focus groups explained that the word connotes a tourist or others unfamiliar with an area. Consumers are more comfortable with signage that uses the phrase "travel information."

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Agencies can add custom taglines to identify the availability of traffic and transit information.

Respondents wanted the data to be updated at least every 10 to 15 minutes.

Those surveyed said that if they used 511 and found the information to be inaccurate in their first few uses, they would be unlikely to give the service another chance. If 511 is deployed with only limited features (such as weather/road conditions) when users also want accident and congestion reporting and they find the service lacking, it may be difficult to get these users to try the system later once additional information is available.

ITS Technology and 511

511 is expected to become the most recognizable face of intelligent transportation systems (ITS) for the vast majority of the public.

ITS encompasses a broad range of technologies used to manage and control traffic and transportation systems. These technologies perform and support the data collection, information processing and communication that make 511 possible.

The ITS technologies behind 511 include voice recognition software, automatic vehicle location devices for transit fleets, road/weather information systems, and fiber optic communications networks.

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The 511 Deployment Coalition

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials in conjunction with the Intelligent Transportation Society of America, and the American Public Transit Association with support from the U.S. Department of Transportation, established the 511 Deployment Coalition.

The goal of the 511 Deployment Coalition is “the timely establishment of a national 511 traveler information service that is sustainable and provides value to users.” The intent is to implement 511 nationally using information sharing and a cooperative dialogue among national associations.

The 511 Deployment Coalition developed guidelines on 511 service content and consistency. These guidelines are based on extensive studies of existing telephone-based traveler information systems and the projected technological, political and economic environments in the near future. The guidelines are available at www.its.dot.gov/511/511.htm.

A general use logo is available from the coalition.

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