

***SOUTH JERSEY'S VIEWS ON
SPRAWL, DEVELOPMENT AND
REGIONAL IDENTITY***

**A Report by the Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs,
Rutgers University-Camden**

The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation funded this report under its *Critical Issues Program*. Dr. Ted Goertzel (Rand Institute Faculty Fellow) and Dr. Richard Harris (Director of the Rand Institute) conducted the survey research and analysis for this study.

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Introduction

The report on *Sprawl, Development and Regional Identity* presented below is based primarily on a Spring 2001 survey of South Jerseyans, conducted with respect to their views on suburban sprawl, development/land use policies and regional identity. That survey included responses from 900 residents of the seven southernmost counties in New Jersey (Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem). These counties, based on a prior regional development study conducted by Rutgers-Camden's Forum for Policy Research, were divided among three sub-regions of South Jersey.¹ We replicated a number of survey questions from that study to draw some inferences about how opinions on development in southern New Jersey may have changed over time. In order to explore the extent to which South Jersey residents hold their own distinct views on these issues, we also replicated several questions from a statewide survey on sprawl and development that was produced for New Jersey Future. Finally our analysis draws in part on a pilot survey conducted by a Rutgers-Camden sociology class. That pilot differs slightly from the final survey instrument in the construction of some questions and helped to shape the final survey instrument, but is included because the respondents are highly skewed toward younger residents, thereby permitting some informed speculation about attitudinal differences that distinguish South Jersey's *genX* citizens.² Taken as a whole, the survey provides reliable, policy-relevant information on the importance of sprawl and development issues in South Jersey, on the quality of life preferences of South Jerseyans, and on the prospects for regional, smart growth initiatives.

¹ The Forum for Public Policy Research at Rutgers University-Camden conducted a similar survey in 1981 which identified three distinct sub-regions in southern New Jersey: a Suburban Region (Burlington, Camden and Gloucester); a Shore Region (Atlantic and Cape May); and a Down Jersey Region (Cumberland and Salem). To maintain the integrity of a longitudinal comparison, we replicated these sub-regions in a stratified random sample (300 randomized respondents in each of the three sub-regions).

² The pilot study was administered to 515 adult residents of Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester Counties. The sampling methods were less rigorous than the final survey (43% of the respondents were under 30 years old), but the results, reported separately, do provide insight into how the generation on the cusp of leadership views issues of sprawl and development.

These survey results are part of a broader project intended to inform and engage citizens as well as decision makers in South Jersey on sprawl and smart growth policy options. The other element in the project is a statistical, GIS-based projection of what South Jersey will look like in twenty years should present demographic and land use patterns trends continue. It is abundantly clear from our research as well as other studies that the people of our region are deeply concerned about the effects of sprawl – environmental degradation, traffic congestion, the decline of urban centers and older, inner ring suburbs, the decrease in farmland and open space, and the fiscal burdens imposed across all communities. It is equally clear, however, that this inchoate sense of dissatisfaction with sprawl and its various impacts cannot alter or abolish the powerful social, political and economic forces that continue to drive unplanned growth which, in a sense, is synonymous with the concept of “sprawl”. The indispensable first step to resisting these forces and organizing smart growth strategies is developing and disseminating an information base that will let South Jerseyans know that they share common concerns about sprawl and that will equip them with the knowledge and sense of connection to their fellow citizens necessary to participate effectively.³

More importantly, building this sense of connection is crucial if South Jersey communities, let alone the region as a whole, are to overcome the counterproductive, competitive impulses that drive the “ratables chase” and the almost unalloyed support for *home rule*. As the mercurial mathematician John Nash (*A Beautiful Mind*) has demonstrated, purely competitive interactions often produce results that create more losers than winners, whereas cooperative strategies can produce net social gains. While his Nobel Prize-winning work has been utilized most directly with respect to business competition, it is equally applicable to the rivalry for property taxes and the insistence on local control in all matters that pits South Jersey’s older towns and cities against its newer suburbs. The alternative to this destructive competition, as Nash and his disciples in the study of game theory have shown, is to build trust and cooperation through

³ Smart growth experiences that are cited as successful (e.g., Oregon, Chattanooga, Maryland) all included a significant public participation component.

communication and the dissemination of information.⁴ By providing a common base of reliable information on sprawl-inducing, competitive development and by creating forums for South Jerseyans to assess that information together, we maximize the opportunities to generate support for realistic smart growth policies.

One final important point to make at the outset is that when analyzing the phenomenon of sprawl in South Jersey (or elsewhere for that matter) we must distinguish carefully between economic forces that, left unchecked, promote sprawl and operation of an efficient market. There is a tendency to conflate the two by reasoning that if smart growth means regulation and regulation, in turn, means government intervention intended by planning advocates and environmental activists to “trump” the market, then smart growth is inherently and *ipso facto* an anti-market policy. This logic is flawed. A more persuasive economic analysis would view sprawl itself as evidence of a “market failure” insofar as it increases *externalities* and decreases *public goods*, thereby producing inefficient and sub-optimal economic outcomes.⁵ While such “market failures” cannot alone justify any particular anti-sprawl policy, they do provide a strong *prima facie* case for government intervention. Just as importantly, they shift the debate on sprawl from a market versus government dispute to a consideration of the benefits versus costs of alternative smart growth policies, including ones that are designed to restore efficient markets and informed economic decision-making. This conceptual shift in the terms of debate can have a salutary effect on public policy by allowing decision makers to escape the zero-sum ideological contests between “growth” and “conservation” or “property rights” and “regulation” that so often characterize discussions of sprawl and smart growth. There is no reason that smart growth proponents should automatically cede the high ground of economics and efficient markets.

⁴ In the movie *A Beautiful Mind*, as in his Nobel Prize-winning analysis, Nash demonstrates mathematically that without trust and communication, the classic competitive game, *Prisoner's Dilemma*, inevitably produces in sub-optimal results for all competitors. This analysis, used to understand the dynamics of arms races and economic competition fits the problem of sprawl in South Jersey as well.

⁵ **Externalities** refer to costs of an economic transaction that affect the welfare of third parties, external to the transaction. In the context of sprawl, the price paid in traffic problems, air pollution and addition infrastructure costs associated with unplanned growth would fit this category. **Public goods** refer to collective benefits that would increase the welfare of society, but cannot be provided by the market because they are non-divisible and non-transferable. In the context of sprawl, the value of open space or clean air would fit this category.

Sprawl as an Issue in South Jersey

Sprawl in South Jersey is not a new issue. Indeed several studies of sprawl/smart growth acknowledge the importance of southern New Jersey. However, there is no systematic analysis that focuses on sprawl as a regional issue in South Jersey. The Pennsylvania Economy League and its Center for Metropolitan Policy have published an important study titled *Flight or Fight* that purports to examine sprawl in the Delaware Valley. While the study takes note of the Jersey side of the Delaware River, the focus is clearly on Philadelphia's Pennsylvania suburbs.⁶ The watchdog and policy analysis organization, New Jersey Future, has examined sprawl as a policy issue statewide, but the analysis and cases they concentrate on are in northern and central Jersey. Similarly, a major study of development from Rutgers University's Bloustein School of Public Policy looks at smart growth issues across the state, but its focus is also of the seven southern counties. The emphases in these studies all reflect political realities that have relegated South Jersey to a secondary role. As many observers have noted, though, South Jersey is a critical region in both because of its environmentally sensitive natural resources and because there is still a chance to arrest sprawl before North Jersey and Philadelphia-style development overwhelms the quality of life that attracts people to South Jersey.

Relative to the rest of the state, South Jersey still has a good deal of open space and farmland. The region has been identified, therefore, as a critical focus for efforts at arresting suburban sprawl. At a fall 1999 *Summit on the Future of South Jersey* co-sponsored by the *Courier-Post* and the Senator Walter Rand Institute at Rutgers University-Camden, sprawl and unplanned development emerged as one of the key challenges facing the region. That summit was followed in the spring of 2000 by a conference focused specifically on *Sprawl and Land Use*. That second conference, held in Gloucester County's Washington Township (dubbed by conference organizers as "ground-zero" for sprawl in the region), attracted over one hundred citizens and

⁶ I met with the Director of the Pennsylvania Economy League about collaborating of smart growth and incorporating serious consideration of South Jersey issues. He candidly noted that his funding comes from Harrisburg and he was therefore obligated to devote most of his attention to PS issues.

stakeholders.⁷ In addition, a white paper prepared for the Dodge Foundation clearly singled out “the seven southernmost counties “ of New Jersey as a focal point for smart growth initiatives.⁸

As we consider the issue of sprawl in South Jersey, it is important to keep in mind the complexity of the region. In the popular mind, and even in policy discussions, South Jersey exists as convenient shorthand for that part of the state that lies outside of the greater New York metropolitan area or below Trenton. While this usage has a certain reality in state politics and Philadelphia-based media coverage, it does not do justice to the positive identity of the region. Neither does it recognize important sub-regional differences within South Jersey that must be acknowledged in any effort to build a regional consensus on controlling sprawl. In truth there are three South Jerseys:

1. **The Suburban Philadelphia** sub-region covering primarily Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester counties. This sub-region is the wealthiest, most populous and most densely developed. It offers easy commutes to the Philadelphia and Wilmington areas as well as ready access to the major highways connecting the Boston-Washington corridor. It does include, however, a large portion of the Pine Barrens and some coastal areas in eastern Burlington, the largest county in the state.
2. **The Shore** sub-region covering Atlantic and Cape May Counties. Much of this sub-region remains farmland or undeveloped, including the Wharton State Forest, the Jersey shoreline, wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas. It also includes a rapidly developing area around the string of shore communities that stretches from Atlantic City south to Cape May. This growth is spurred by the casino and tourism industry concentrated around Atlantic City.

⁷ The roundtable discussion at the *Conference on Sprawl and Land Use* clearly illustrated two things: (1) there is great concern about sprawl in South Jersey, especially with respect to lifestyle changes brought about by suburban tract development in formerly rural areas; (2) the current state of policy discourse pits environmentalists and state planners against real estate developers and their political supporters in an ideological debate seriously lacking in citizen participation.

⁸ Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation White Paper #1, *Sprawl*, prepared by Robert T. Perry, Program Officer, [version 3-2-00].

3. **The Down Jersey** sub-region covering Cumberland and Salem counties encompasses substantial farmland intermingled with older manufacturing/commercial centers such as Vineland and Bridgeton. It is also a sub-region in which sprawl-like development is mushrooming along major transportation corridors (Interstate 295 and Routes 55 and 322). Recent newspaper articles have chronicled the emergence of shopping and commercial development sprouting up on the heels of residential expansion. Finally, this region is experiencing an curious demographic inversion: as the farmland that used to have a high Latino agricultural worker population converts to residential tract development, that population is migrating into older urban centers and the newer suburbs bring an influx of white middle and upper middle class residents.

While each of these sub-regions is experiencing the development pressures of unplanned growth, each has its own particular ecological, economic and social character. Thus the manifestations of sprawl in each reflect different set of problems, and call for a different set of policy recommendations. Not surprisingly our survey elucidates many of these sub-regional differences in the opinions of residents on key issues.

At the same time, however, it is clear that one problem, fragmented governance, underlies many sprawl-related issues. Smart growth policies that could address sprawl issues require coordinated planning; and there is no effective mechanism for coordination among the seven counties and 167 municipalities in southern New Jersey. Even at the county level, coordination ultimately runs afoul of the strong home rule tradition. The State Plan does provide a sound conceptual framework for smart growth, but as many commentators have observed, the State Plan provides little in the way of enforcement and implementation tools. In addition, the Office of State Planning (OSP), located in the Department of Community Affairs (OCA) held no authority over other state agencies, most notably the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), whose cooperation was essential given their broad policy impacts on development patterns. Recognizing this problem, Governor

McGreevey has abolished OSP and formed a new Smart Growth Coordinating Council within the Governor's Office in order to achieve real coordination among key state agencies, especially DCA, DEP, and DOT on smart growth. Subsequently, an Office of Smart Growth was created in the Department of Community Affairs to manage smart growth initiatives. As hopeful as these developments may be, it will be some time before we can judge its impact. In the meantime, effective smart growth will still require engagement and cooperation at the county and local level where actual planning, zoning and development decisions are made. Our survey results indicate that residents in South Jersey recognize this core problem as a reason why their lifestyle/quality-of-life preferences are at odds with the development patterns that typify the region.

If South Jersey's understanding of the connection between sprawl and fragmented governance is strong and sophisticated, the same cannot be said of its views on the nexus between the disappearance of open space and the decline of urban centers. One of the characteristics of South Jersey that sets it apart from the rest of the state is its relative abundance of open space and farmland. Clearly two of the hallmarks of unplanned development are the gobbling up of farmland and the unrelenting pressure on open space by suburban tract development. What defines this pattern of development as sprawl, however, is the simultaneous exodus of citizens and commerce from cities and older towns to outlying suburbs. As the decline of agriculture induces farmers to view their land as an individual retirement account that can be cashed in with developers, the market for the new suburban homes is not found in a huge influx of new residents, but rather redistribution outward from the region's established communities. Thus, the simultaneous declines in farmland, open space and urban centers are all of a piece. As our survey indicates, however, South Jerseyans generally do not "connect the dots" on these issues. Without a serious public education effort in the region, South Jerseyans will continue to think of urban revitalization and preserving open space/farmland as distinct public problems when they are in fact two sides of the same policy coin.

South Jersey: Sprawl, Development and Regional Identity

South Jersey v. Statewide Opinion

Taking a first cut at the way South Jerseyans view the issues of sprawl and development, we asked them a set of six questions that New Jersey Future had administered statewide. These questions asked respondents to rank a policy problem of concern in New Jersey as: *very important*; *somewhat important*; *not very important*; or *not important at all*. The policy problems were: reducing property taxes; preserving open space; lowering crime rates; lowering insurance rates; reducing traffic congestion; preserving farmland (See questions 7-12 in Appendix A).

Significantly, South Jersey diverges from the rest of the state on preserving open space and on preserving farmland, two critical markers issues in gauging the importance of sprawl as a concern. On the question of preserving open space, 94% or more of residents in each southern sub-region of the state consistently ranked this problem *very* or *somewhat important* compared to 81% of residents statewide. Only 61% statewide thought this issue was *very important*, compared to 72% in the shore and suburban sub-regions and 65% in Down Jersey. On the question of preserving farmland, 95% or more South Jerseyans ranked the problem *very* or *somewhat important* compared to 90% statewide. However, 75% of residents in the Shore and Suburban sub-regions and 71% in Down Jersey rated the issue as *very important* compared to only 64% across the state.⁹ On all other issues in this portion of the survey, the percent responses for South Jersey were either very close to the rest of the state or showed at least one sub-region aligning with the rest of the state.

These responses indicate that in South Jersey the problem of sprawl is seen as most serious among residents of the shore and suburban sub-regions. This result is predictable based on the fact that it is in these areas that open space and farmland are disappearing at

⁹ In assessing the lower percentage of Down Jersey residents rating farmland preservation as very important, it appears that the greater visibility of tract and commercial development supplanting farms explains the higher degree of concern among the Suburban and Shore residents.

the most rapid rate and tract development is most visible. It is important to note, however, that these are the areas that encompass the Pine Barrens and Wharton State Forest, thereby increasing the likelihood that residents will be attuned to the threat that sprawl posed to these natural resources. Down Jersey, by contrast, has not yet experienced the full effect of suburban sprawl, and this fact is reflected in its somewhat lower level of concern (albeit still above levels statewide). As tract development creeps further south along the Route 55 and Interstate 295 transportation corridors, though, and as the urban problems of Bridgeton and Vineland intensify, we should expect public opinion in the Down Jersey sub-region to more closely reflect that of the other two sub-regions. Another possible explanation for the sub-regional difference is the higher income and education attainment levels among shore and suburban residents; both of these variables correlate highly with political engagement, attention to national policy issues, and environmentalism, all factors that feed into a concern with sprawl.

Intra-regional differences notwithstanding, preserving open space and farmland are more salient issues in South Jersey than in the rest of the state. We see this not only in comparison with New Jersey Future survey questions, but also in responses to our request that our respondents identify an example of something that has been done to combat sprawl: of the 352 respondents who could identify such an example, 295 described an action or policy that was intended to preserve open space or farmlands. Significantly, the majority of our respondents believe that the State Plan and state policy have been *somewhat* or *very effective* in preserving open space and quality of life in South Jersey: 62% of the Shore; 52% of the Suburban; and 62% of the Down Jersey sub-regions, respectively.¹⁰ **It is obvious from this and subsequent questions in the survey, though, that respondents see preservation of open space and farmlands as distinct problems, unconnected to the broader question of sprawling development that includes the redistribution of population from urban centers to redeveloped**

¹⁰ In question # 20, the lower percent of suburban residents (52% compared to over 60% in the other two sub-regions) who believe the State Plan has been effective is attributable to the greater degree of population and housing density and the obvious “progress” of development on the edges of the Pine Barrens in this sub-region.

farmland. As long as this “disconnect” remains, it will be difficult to formulate a comprehensive and coherent policy response to the problem of sprawl in South Jersey.

South Jersey’s Views on Community Development

When we asked South Jerseyans about their views on community development, the “disconnect” between their desires for open space and farmland preservation, on the one hand, and their lifestyle preferences, on the other, clearly surfaced. For example, when asked if they would favor a community where homes were around a town center or a typical suburban one where single family homes were situated on 1/3 acre lots, substantial percentages expressed a preference for the suburban alternative: 45% for the Shore; 42% for Down Jersey; and 47% for the Suburban area. While smart growth advocates will be heartened by the fact that majorities in each sub-region preferred the town center option, these responses indicate a robust market for sprawling suburban communities. Mathematically, it seems clear that many of the same respondents who feel strongly about open space and farmland preservation must also prefer a style of community development that minimizes the prospects for preservation.¹¹ The most plausible explanation for this anomaly is that many of those living in newer suburban developments want large homes with plenty of property surrounding open space, but also dislike the negative externalities of sprawl. The survey suggests that they see sprawl as a distinctly environmental issue, unrelated to housing and commercial development patterns or urban decline. This view may well be nurtured by the approach of both politicians and the media that segregates open space initiatives from other anti-sprawl policies such as transportation or urban revitalization. Politically, open space is an “apple pie and motherhood” issue in New Jersey, whereas the other dimensions of sprawl accentuate economic and racial cleavages in society.

It is also clear that southern New Jersey’s citizens do not prefer communities with compact development characterized by apartments or townhouses. Even those who favor

¹¹ Note that majorities of over 90% in each sub-region favor preservation of open space & farmland, while over 40% in each desire large single-family homes on substantial plots of land.

the idea of living in a town center apparently like the idea of single-family dwellings. This is the view expressed by 54% in the Shore, 61% in Down Jersey and 58% in the Suburban regions, respectively. It is likely that residents in the Shore sub-region are slightly less opposed to apartments and townhouses because that style of development (especially rental properties) is more common in many of their communities. These answers provide further evidence of an inconsistency between a preference for combating sprawl and uneasiness with more compact forms of community development.

One of the most consistent arguments about sprawl in South Jersey is that it is linked directly to our system of property taxes and the so-called “ratables chase” that presumably fuels unplanned development. Accordingly, we explored the region’s views on this question, and the differences in results by sub-region are especially revealing. When asked if they believed that commercial and residential development would stabilize or reduce local property taxes, the sub-regional responses divide on a continuum that correlates directly with their stage of development: only 41% of the most developed region, the Suburban Zone, believe that additional development would have a favorable impact on property taxes; 52% hold this view in the Shore Zone; but 60% in the Down Jersey Zone believe new development will ease property tax burdens. From one perspective, this suggests that the fiscal pressures for sprawl increase as we move to the regions with the most farmland and open space available. From another standpoint, however, these results also suggest that as we move in the opposite direction on the continuum, toward the more populous and developed zones, the public may be more amenable to anti-sprawl measures since they are less inclined to see development as a fiscal panacea. When we directly posed the alternatives of restricting commercial development to preserve community character and seeking new businesses to abate property tax burdens on residents we found that both the Shore and Suburban Zones opted for restriction in almost equal percentages, 62% and 59% % respectively, while only 44% of the Down Jersey Zone favored restriction. **The responses to questions about property tax and development indicate that the least developed areas of South**

Jersey can be expected to experience the strongest fiscally related pressure for sprawl-type growth patterns.¹²

The final question related to community development explored South Jerseyans' views on housing patterns. When asked if they would favor affordable housing in their own communities for those with limited income, significant majorities in each sub-region expressed a preference for this policy: 59% in the Shore Zone; 63% in the Down Jersey Zone; and 67% in the Suburban Zone. Proponents of smart growth and anti-sprawl policies should welcome this set of responses since one of the most serious negative consequences of suburban sprawl is the concentration of poverty, especially poorer racial minorities in older urban centers and inner ring communities. Smart growth calls for mixed income housing, both by attracting middle and upper income residents back to older communities and by requiring mixed income development in newer suburban settings. One caveat to this positive response to affordable housing should be that it seems inconsistent with the observable resistance to affordable housing efforts since the *Mt. Laurel* decisions in New Jersey. Rather than comply directly with affordable housing requirements in their own communities, many South Jersey towns have been able to offload their requirements to older, more impoverished communities. As encouraging as this survey appears, it would probably be advisable to probe this public opinion more carefully before concluding that there is broad support. In particular, our survey question was so broad that it may have masked potential adverse responses. Had we inquired about the "poor" instead of "those with limited income" which often implies retirees on social security, or had we referred specifically families in urban centers seeking suburban homes, the responses may well have been less encouraging.

¹² It is interesting to note that the Shore Zone aligns more closely with the Suburban Zone when we asked directly about the connection between commercial development and preserving the character of communities, while the Shore Zone responses to commercial and residential development as a palliative for property tax fell equidistant between the other two zones. These responses suggest that Shore communities are especially sensitive to preserving their character, a view probably related to the importance of tourism in that sub-region.

Policy Preferences on Development in South Jersey

Turning to specific questions about development policy in South Jersey, undoubtedly the most startling finding in this survey is the strong preference expressed for shifting zoning and planning authority from the local level to the county level. In each sub-region an overwhelming majority supported greater centralization of zoning and planning decisions: 71% in the Shore Zone; 76% in the Down Jersey Zone; and 74% in the Suburban Zone. It is possible that these percentages are somewhat inflated because the specific question asked if respondents would favor centralization to “coordinate development **and preserve open space and farmland** (emphasis added).” By placing the question in the context of these highly visible and well-received policy objectives, we may have received a higher than expected positive response. **Nevertheless, the uniformly high percentages (over 70% in every sub-region) strongly suggest that the home rule tradition, widely portrayed as the basis of unplanned growth, may not be as unassailable as is ordinarily assumed.** One possible explanation for the inconsistency between the finding of a strong public preference for a more centralized planning process and the usual assumption of a strong home rule tradition may be that entrenched interests that have benefited from the current process may be the sources of resistance to county-level planning and zoning while the broader citizenry reflected in our survey is frustrated with this process and therefore more amenable to reform. Clearly this unusual finding will require further investigation, but it does imply that there is an untapped reservoir of public support for a more coordinated development process in South Jersey.

In addition to our question about the planning process, we inquired about South Jerseyans’ preferences on specific policies associated with smart growth. Four specific questions replicated those administered in a 1981 Rutgers-Camden survey of South Jersey, and give us a measure of how specific views have shifted over time.¹³

¹³ It is important to note that responses to this survey were collected when New Jersey was still forecasting significant budget surpluses. Therefore, responses to our questions about willingness to spend public money in pursuit of specific smart growth policies may not reflect responses we would get in the current state budget environment. However, it is also likely that without looming budget deficits, willingness to pay questions may elicit truer responses about policy preference.

Transportation policy has long been a focal point for opponents of sprawl and unplanned development, the argument being that suburban sprawl has been nurtured by public policies that promote inexpensive gasoline prices (adjusted for inflation, they are close to their lowest level in two decades) and highway construction.¹⁴ Accordingly, we investigated the views of South Jersey residents regarding both public transportation options and highway construction. Our findings point to a divided citizenry on these issues. When asked if they would support a commuter rail line that would pass through their community, respondents essentially split down the middle: 50% supporting it in the Shore Zone; 54% in the Down Jersey Zone; and 44% in the Suburban Zone.¹⁵ When considered along with the high cost of such projects, this roughly 50/50 support level helps explain why proposals for new light rail options have difficulty gaining political traction, all the more so in times of budgetary constraint: It is a political axiom that it is easier to mobilize opposition to a proposal than support for it.

Turning to questions that replicated those posed in 1981, we inquired more generally about support for “improving public transportation,” asking if they would favor spending “less money,” “the same,” or “more money” on “improving public transportation”. We found that South Jerseyans were less supportive of this policy in 2001 than in 1981: Those willing to spend more money dropped from 76% to 51% in the Shore Zone; 77% to 57% in the Down Jersey Zone; and 64% to 54% in the Suburban Zone. The 2001 results basically corroborate the 50/50 responses to our question about commuter rail service above. Conversely, those willing to spend less money essentially doubled from 2% to 11%, 3% to 11% and 5% to 10% respectively in the three sub-regional zones. As attractive as public transportation and transit-based development options are in combating sprawl, there is clearly not strong backing for these policies in South Jersey. However, the substantial number of citizens who would be supportive

¹⁴ A particular target of criticism is the matching fund formula of the federal highway trust fund that serves as an inducement for labor and construction firms as well as state and local governments to support road expansion that is one of the pillars of sprawl.

¹⁵ We decided to pose this question in terms of respondents’ own communities to induce them to consider many of the NIMBY-type objections ordinarily raised to such projects.

could provide a basis for creative transportation policy options that addressed or mitigated concerns of those who might object to more public transportation.¹⁶

We also approached the question of transportation policy preferences from the standpoint of highway spending. As in 1981, we asked South Jerseyans if they would favor spending less, the same or more on improving the region's highway system. An interesting sub-regional difference emerged in the responses to this question, as both the Shore and Down Jersey Zones recorded decreases in the percentages willing to spend more on highways, drops of 53% to 47% and 60% to 50% respectively. Between 1981 and 2001 the Suburban Zone, however, registered an increase from 40% to 48% in those willing to spend more on highways. These changes suggest that in 1981 the Shore Zone and especially the Down Jersey Zone perceived a need to build and improve roadways to handle development, whereas the subsequent twenty years saw substantial highway investments in those regions, including the completion of Route 55, a major north/south corridor in the Down Jersey Zone. In the Suburban Zone the shift from 40% to 48 % wanting more highway expenditures reflect the fact that in 1981, commensurate with its level of development, the Suburban Zone had access to several interstate highways as well as major state roads, but the explosive suburban growth in this region began to create severe traffic congestion.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, residents see a need for more road improvements to accommodate the increase in residential and commercial traffic that accompanies sprawl. **About half of our respondents favor both greater expenditures on highways and on public transportation, a result that falls short of the level of support needed to overcome the inertia of postwar state and federal transportation policies that promote highways over railways or bus lines.**

¹⁶ One problem with public transportation that should be assessed is the extent to which those living in newer suburbs oppose public transportation because they fear it would connect their towns with older, impoverished communities that they sought to escape.

¹⁷ A good illustration of sprawl dramatically increasing suburban development and traffic congestion between 1981 and 2001 can be seen along the Route 73 corridor that connects eastern Cherry Hill and Voorhees Townships in Camden County with Evesham and Mt. Laurel Townships in Burlington County. A similar phenomenon is readily apparent in Washington Township, along the Black Horse Pike in Gloucester County.

Another major element of anti-sprawl, smart growth policy is the redirection of investment dollars from suburban development to urban and older suburban redevelopment. In 1981, huge majorities in each of our sub-regions supported redevelopment. 73% of the Shore Zone, 67% of the Down Jersey and 57% of the Suburban Zone were willing to spend more money on this policy. By 2001, however, these percentages had dropped to 52%, 49% and 51% respectively. More importantly, those favoring lower expenditures on urban redevelopment rose across the board, from 6% to 16% in the Shore Zone, 9% to 17% in the Down Jersey Zone, and 11% to 14% in Suburban Zone. Much as with preferences on transportation policy, South Jersey has a substantial constituency for urban revitalization, but not one powerful enough on its own to drive major urban redevelopment, particularly in light of state budgetary constraints. The recent enactment of a major investment (approximately \$174,000,000) in Camden reflects a unique set of circumstances and should not be taken as indicative of strong support for such revitalization measures.¹⁸

As our earlier survey analysis indicates, for many in New Jersey, as elsewhere, promoting smart growth and combating sprawl means preserving open space and farmland. The last two decades have witnessed strong and increasing support for such policies in South Jersey. In 1981 57% in the Shore Zone, 47% in the Down Jersey Zone and 58% in the Suburban Zone were willing to spend more money on “improving protection of the environment.” In 2001 66% in the Shore Zone, 62% in the Down Jersey Zone and 69% in the Suburban Zone wanted higher spending on open space and farmland preservation.¹⁹ It is worth pointing out that these high percentages supporting increased spending in this area are reported after Governor Christine Todd Whitman’s landmark commitment to spend one billion dollars on open space and farmland preservation. There

¹⁸ In the case of Camden, state legislators and the Governor’s office were animated mostly by the long-term implication of the City’s structural deficit for unending expansion of special state aid. Moreover, the strong individual engagement of Senator Wayne Bryant and the *quid pro quo* of a state takeover of government functions in exchange for the 174 million dollars make this a model that is unlikely to be replicated.

¹⁹ In the 1981 survey, open space and farmland preservation were explored in a different style of question; respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the proposition that the State should take steps to preserve both. Over 90% in each sub-region thought so. Because open space & farmland preservation are such critical issues in South Jersey we decided to use these in our 2001 exploration of willingness to pay questions.

was, moreover, no discernable change in the percentage of South Jerseyans who wanted to spend less on this issue: The Shore Zone changed from 9% to 6%; in the Down Jersey Zone remained constant at 6% advocating reduced spending; and the Suburban Zone declined from 8% to 6%. The major shift was from those who favored spending the same amount on open space to those who thought more public investment in this area was needed. Clearly, this is an issue that resonates strongly in southern New Jersey.

Regional Identity in South Jersey

The final topic we explored with South Jerseyans was their view of southern New Jersey as a distinctive region. The differences already noted between South Jersey and the rest of the state on the importance of key policy issues strongly suggests that our respondents see their region as distinct. When asked how likely they would be to identify themselves as being “from South Jersey” to someone from elsewhere, uniformly high percentages reported that they would be *very likely* to do so: 74% in the Shore Zone; 79% in the Down Jersey Zone; and 76% in the Suburban Zone. In each zone, 10% reported that they would be *somewhat likely* to do so. Taking a slightly different tack, we asked directly if they would *strongly agree*, *somewhat agree*, *somewhat disagree* or *strongly disagree* that South Jersey had its own distinct identity. Over 80% in each zone stated that they *strongly* or *somewhat agreed* with this statement. 65% *strongly agreed* in the Shore Zone, 67% in the Down Jersey Zone, and 56% in the Suburban Zone. **The apparent breadth and depth of conviction as well as pride in a distinct regional identity among South Jerseyans is significant because sprawl is a regional issue requiring regional approaches to its amelioration.** A strong sense of regional identity is a necessary, albeit not a sufficient, condition for sound smart growth policy.

Prospects for Smart Growth in South Jersey

The results of our survey should be both encouraging and sobering to proponents of smart growth in South Jersey.

It is tragically ironic that, as our survey suggests, South Jerseyans view open space and farmland as defining characteristics of the entire region's identity, yet we have not developed a sound understanding of the relationship between urban decline and suburban development that fuels the disappearance of these resources. Until this connection is made, public policy will be self-contradictory: we will be pleased and reassured at efforts to preserve open space and farmland while policies for highways, mortgages, education and sewerage combine with market preferences among home buyers to increase development pressures on the very land uses we want to preserve.