

MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS

2019 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The 2019 Menino Survey of Mayors details insights and perspectives shared by a representative sample of 119 mayors leading U.S. cities with populations of more than 75,000 residents. Now in its sixth year, the Menino Survey is based on interviews with mayors on their pressing challenges, priorities, and expectations for the future.

This year's Survey explores mayoral views on issues ranging from infrastructure and transportation priorities — including mobility and public safety — to the changing nature of work. The 2019 Survey also provides the first in-depth examination of mayors' reactions to and expectations for the Opportunity Zones program, a significant new federal initiative to stimulate urban development.

INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITIES

Infrastructure tops the list of mayoral priorities in the upcoming presidential election.

Water, wastewater, and stormwater are more of a priority relative to prior years, while road infrastructure and mass transit continue to be key needs.

- Forty-five percent of mayors believe infrastructure is the most significant issue related to cities that they hope gets discussed in the 2020 presidential election. This was the most popular response by 30 percentage points. Fifteen percent of mayors named housing affordability and 11 percent identified climate change. [Figure 2]
- Roads topped the list of mayors' infrastructure priorities with 66 percent citing roads as the area they would prioritize with new funds. Water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure (51%) and mass transit (43%), were the second and third most frequently cited respectively. While these findings are similar to those in the 2015 Survey, mayors were 10 percentage points more likely to underscore water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure in 2019 compared to 2015. [Figure 3]
- When mayors were asked to pick just one "big ticket" investment they would prioritize if given unrestricted funds, water, wastewater, and stormwater topped the list, followed by mass transit. Roads were third. [Figure 4]
- The refurbishment or construction of city facilities and buildings was the chief "small ticket" project named. Twenty-five percent of mayors wished they had the resources to invest in their

The Menino Survey was initiated in 2014 by the Boston University Initiative on Cities, co-founded by the late Mayor of Boston Tom Menino and Political Scientist Graham Wilson.

It continues in 2019 with the support of Citi Community Development and The Rockefeller Foundation.



Results and the full copy of the report, along with all the figures noted, are available at
www.surveyofmayors.com.

own facilities, citing examples such as a refurbished city hall, a new “public safety campus,” or community sports complex. This represents a 10 percentage point increase over 2015. [Figure 5]

- Nineteen percent of mayors would invest an unrestricted “small” grant in improving bicycle/pedestrian friendliness in their community. [Figure 5]

MOBILITY AND PUBLIC SAFETY

A significant proportion of mayors are concerned with the safety of cyclists and pedestrians in their communities, and have introduced a variety of design changes to improve it. Two-thirds of mayors report the addition of bicycle lanes to improve cyclist safety, while pedestrian upgrades include a more variable array of changes from improved sidewalks to traffic signalization.

- When it comes to public safety and mobility, nearly half of mayors believe travel is unsafe for cyclists in their community, and 40 percent believe it is unsafe for pedestrians. In contrast, fewer than 10 percent believe travel is unsafe for drivers or transit riders. [Figure 7]
- Nearly half of mayors believe travel in their cities is unsafe for persons with disabilities, a third worry about elderly residents, and a quarter worry about the safety of children. [Figure 7]
- Yet, mayors may not realize the extent to which vehicular speeds are a lever to promote safety. Seventy-seven percent of mayors believe speed limits in their community are generally set at the right level, 56 percent believe enforcement is adequate, and 52 percent reject the idea of stronger moving traffic violations. [Figures 9, 10, and 11]
- In order to improve pedestrian safety, mayors have implemented a wide variety of policy and design improvements. Many referenced specific infrastructure upgrades, including improved sidewalks (26%), curb cuts (14%), crosswalks (11%), and lighting (8%). Others have focused more generally on traffic calming (19%) or improved traffic signalization (18%). Some mayors referenced broader multi-modal efforts including Complete Streets (14%), Vision Zero (8%), a citywide master plan (7%), and Safe Routes to School (5%). [Figure 8]
- When it comes to cyclist safety, mayors have chiefly focused on improving bicycle lanes in roadways in their communities. Sixty-eight percent cited the addition of bicycle lanes as having the biggest impact on cyclist safety. Twenty percent have invested in greenways/trails that provide an alternative to roadway travel for those on bicycles. [Figure 17]
- The vast majority of mayors (82%) believe painted bicycle lanes are a safe option when physically separate bicycle lanes are too expensive. This may suggest mayors are not yet aware of the most recent evidence of the safety benefits of physically separating cyclists from cars and pedestrians via cycle tracks or cost-effective mechanisms such as delineator posts. [Figure 18]

CAR CULTURE

Mayors believe their cities are too dependent on cars and embrace some reallocation of the roadway, particularly toward bicycle and electric vehicle infrastructure. However, they do not support other policy changes that can reduce car usage, such as higher prices for parking or lower off-street parking requirements in new development.

- A majority of mayors (76%) believe their cities are too oriented toward cars, and 66 percent believe vehicles are the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in their communities. [Figures 5 and 19]
- Seventy-one percent of mayors believe cities should make their roads more accessible to bicycles, even if it means sacrificing driving lanes or parking. [Figure 16]
- Sixty percent of mayors believe their cities have the right amount of street parking, while 27 percent worry there is too little parking in their cities. [Figure 13]

- Seventy-five percent believe their residential street parking is priced correctly, including those who provide it for free. Over half believe their metered parking is priced at the right level, while a third believe they are presently underpricing. [Figure 12]
- Many cities require certain amounts of off-street parking in new developments. Half of mayors interviewed believe these “parking minimums” are set at the right level, while 30 percent believe they are too high. Mayors’ perspectives differed across regions; mayors of northeastern cities were more likely to believe their minimums were too high. [Figure 14]

CLIMATE CHANGE

A majority of mayors continue to believe cities should take action on climate change. However, they continue to be split along partisan lines. One area of greater potential agreement is with regard to electric vehicles.

- Seventy percent of mayors believe their cities should play a strong role in reducing the effects of climate change, even if it means sacrificing revenue or expending financial resources. These levels have remained consistent over the last two years. [Figures 20 and 22]
- Partisan divides endure with 25 percent of Republican mayors supporting climate action relative to 92 percent of Democratic mayors. [Figure 21]
- A majority of mayors (67%) support sacrificing parking to improve electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Seventy-eight percent of Democratic mayors support this shift compared to 40 percent of Republicans, although the latter were more likely to be neutral (33%). [Figures 15 and 23]

CHANGING NATURE OF WORK

Mayors expect high tech and health related jobs to grow, and believe retail and manufacturing jobs will become less common. They report a wide array of targeted workforce development initiatives; programs focused on youth and those with criminal records are the most common.

- Mayors expect high tech jobs and jobs in health care and medicine to experience significant growth in their communities in the next five years. Forty-eight percent cited high tech jobs, such as engineers and developers, while 29 percent cited health related roles, particularly those that serve the needs of an aging population. [Figure 24]
- Mayors expect retail (28%) and manufacturing (23%) jobs to become less common, and foresee a general loss of manual jobs to automation (16%). [Figure 25]
- Mayors are nevertheless focused on expanding opportunities for their residents and report a wide array of targeted workforce development initiatives; the most common existing programs target youth (79%), followed by programs that serve persons with criminal records (52%) and ethnic minorities (50%). [Figure 26]
- In contrast, a tiny fraction of mayors have workforce development programs targeted to people recovering from addiction (4%) or programs focused on older workers (7%). [Figure 26]
- Mayors have created a wide range of new senior roles within city hall, as they respond to the changing world around them and seek to address unmet needs. During their time in office, 18 percent have created a new role focused on economic and community development, 14 percent have created a role focused on strategy and innovation, and eight percent have created one dedicated to technology. Nine percent have created a senior leadership role dedicated to diversity and inclusion, and another nine percent to citizen engagement. [Figure 27]

OPPORTUNITY ZONES

Mayors generally believe the new federal Opportunity Zones program has targeted the right areas, nationally and in their own communities. They are taking the lead in organizing the community to take advantage of their tract designations and are confident in their ability to capitalize on the program.

Mayors believe dedicated senior staff and an Opportunity Zone Investment Prospectus will be key.

- Roughly three quarters of cities in the survey sample had eligible census tracts and two-thirds now have at least one designated opportunity zone with an average of six per city.
- Fifty-one percent of mayors believe the new Opportunity Zones program has effectively targeted areas of true economic need nationally. Twenty-nine percent are unsure, suggesting a large minority are unaware or not yet confident the program is working as intended. [Figure 28]
- Sixty-five percent of mayors say the tracts selected by their governor were either based on their own advice, or are comparable to what the mayor would have picked if they had the choice. [Figure 29]
- Mayors generally believe that designations were driven by a desire on the part of governors to spread them across the state, and were responsive to mayors' input. Their satisfaction with their own designations does not vary substantially by city size, partisanship of the mayor, or affluence of the community. [Figures 31-34]
- Mayors are generally not concerned that the program will lead to gentrification or residential displacement, including those leading more expensive cities, or that limited funds will ultimately be invested. More than half believe the program will have a large and positive impact on their local economy, with the greatest benefits conferred on outside investors and small businesses and residents currently located in the zones. [Figures 35, 36, and 39]
- The vast majority (75%) of mayors believe they have the capacity to maximize the benefits of their zones. Mayors believe the main mechanisms to maximize the benefits are: dedicated senior staff in city hall (54%) and an Opportunity Zone Investment Prospectus that outlines their community's priorities and specific opportunities and assets (50%). A third believe supplemental monetary incentives will also be important. [Figures 37 and 41]
- Eighty-one percent say the city is taking the lead in organizing the community to capitalize on the designations. Most (55%) have tasked their Economic Development Director, or a comparable role in that department, with the job. [Figures 40 and 42]
- When it comes to their own role, 43 percent of mayors believe their job is to serve as an advocate for their city and its zones, and promote them to investors. [Figure 43]

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Boston University Initiative on Cities

The Boston University Initiative on Cities (IOC) was co-founded in 2014 by the City of Boston's longest-serving mayor, Tom Menino, and BU Professor of Political Science, Graham Wilson. The IOC operates as a cross-university research initiative bridging the divide between urban scholarly research and local governance, both domestically and internationally. It seeks to understand and advance the transformative urban leadership strategies and policies necessary to support cities as dynamic centers of inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. To fulfill this mission, the IOC leads the only scientifically-rigorous survey of American mayors, convenes multi-stakeholder conferences on pressing urban issues, and supports early-stage urban research in the social, natural, computational, political, and health sciences. The Initiative also provides fellowship opportunities that embed BU graduate students in mayors' offices in the U.S. and abroad, and leads executive leadership programs on urban governance and power.