

## **PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH DECEMBER 2015**

### **Objectives**

The Transportation Futures Task Force asked the consultant team to review existing public opinion research about how people perceive transportation problems, including funding issues. Cocker Fennessy presented recent PSRC 2040 polling data to the Task Force in March 2015 regarding the central Puget Sound public's views on transportation problems, funding needs, and transportation investment priorities.

Cocker Fennessy conducted original research in fall of 2015 on behalf of the Task Force to explore the following:

- The public's current understanding of the transportation funding situation/problem
  - Do people believe investments in transportation aren't keeping up with the needs of a growing region?
  - Do they believe there's a need to develop new funding sources?
- Why transportation/transit matters
  - Who benefits from better transportation?
  - Why is it important?
- Feelings about proposed funding sources, such as:
  - State tax on motor fuels
  - Carbon tax
  - Highway system tolling
  - Pay-per-mile charges
  - Road utility fee
- Reactions to different collection, distribution and decision-making scenarios
- Demographic and geographic differences in opinion

### **Methodology**

Cocker Fennessy conducted an online survey of Washington state voters fielded from November 30 to December 13, 2015. The Transportation Futures Task Force was not disclosed as the research sponsor, but participants were told the survey would focus on transportation issues. Employees of transportation agencies and out-of-state residents were ineligible to participate.

The data was analyzed to determine if there were any significant differences among respondents from Washington State, central Puget Sound region, and King County. The sample was made up of a stratified random sample via panels with total completes of (n) =1,000. The results have a 95% confidence level.

The sample also included quotas and weighting to ensure the following representative mix:

- Statewide (WA)
- Puget Sound (King, Snohomish, Pierce and Kitsap Counties)
- King County
- Puget Sound vs. rest of Washington state

## Findings

Eight key findings can be drawn from the survey responses:

1. The public believes that transportation is a serious/critical problem.
2. The need to upgrade and expand transportation infrastructure and services (throughout the state, in Puget Sound and including transit) is understood and people are willing to pay more to do so.
3. Funding transportation with gas tax revenue is not seen as a problem. Gas tax revenue viewed as keeping pace and restrictions on its use are not understood.
4. Communities/regions should be able to raise their own revenue and most prefer funds are returned to the region where collected. Those outside Puget Sound strongly prefer this region pay for/fix its own problems.
5. New revenue should be used for a wide variety of uses.
6. Few prefer tolling and pay-per-mile. However, there are significant “neutral/maybe” responses—particularly re: emissions fees.
7. Indexing the gas tax, a vehicle emissions fee and increases in gas tax or car tabs are all preferred to tolling and Pay-Per-Mile (PPM).
8. There’s support for a regional transportation authority setting rules and rates for PPM charges, tolls and fees.

## Analysis

The poll provided some very interesting and helpful information to better understand how the public views transportation problems and potential solutions. When it comes to defining the problem, the public sees transportation as a serious or critical problem.

There’s also a strong belief that transportation infrastructure and services need to be upgraded and expanded. These issues were tested in a few ways: in the state, in the Puget Sound area, and with or without transit mentioned in the definition. People see all of these areas as needs. In addition, they expressed that they are willing to pay more for needed improvements.

The one area where the public’s opinion diverged from the Task Force, however, concerns gas tax revenue. People believe the gas tax is keeping pace with transportation needs and they don’t appear to understand the restrictions (of use) placed on this revenue and the problems that result.

Tolling and Pay-Per-Mile fees were tested in several questions and there was not a lot of support for these new revenue sources. However, there were strong neutral responses – which presents an opportunity to educate people about the issue. The survey also asked about Vehicle Emissions fees. Again, there wasn’t strong support, but there was a very high neutral response.

Respondents also did not respond favorably to tolling and Pay-Per-Mile fees when tested against other revenue-raising alternatives. When presented with a list of ways to pay for transportation, people preferred indexing the gas tax to inflation or fuel economy, a vehicle emissions fee, increases in fuel taxes, and increases in vehicle license tab fees to tolling and PPM.

Finally – the public support the creation of a regional transportation authority that would set the rules and rates for PPM charges, tolls and fees as well as expenditures.

# TRANSPORTATION FUTURES

## Washington Voters Poll

Updated 2-12-16

# Methodology & Analysis

## Online survey of WA voters

- Stratified random sample via panels
- Total completes (n)=1,000
- Fielded November 30 to December 13, 2015
- Quotas and weighting to ensure representative mix

## Analysis presented includes:

- Statewide (WA)
- Puget Sound (King, Snohomish, Pierce and Kitsap Counties)
- King County
- Puget Sound vs. rest of WA

# Key Findings

1. Transportation is a serious/critical problem.
2. The need to upgrade and expand transportation infrastructure and services (throughout the state, in Puget Sound and including transit) is understood and people are willing to pay more to do so.
3. Funding transportation with gas tax revenue is not seen as a problem. Revenue viewed as keeping pace and restrictions on its use are not understood.

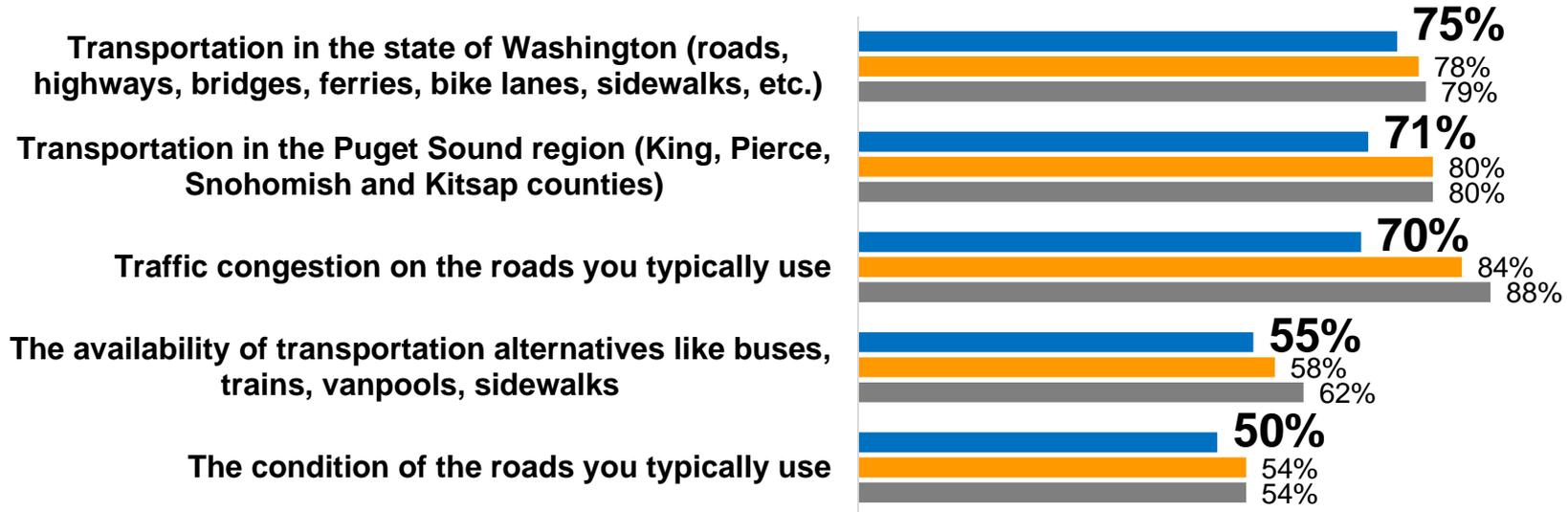
# Key Findings

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5. New revenue should be used for a wide variety of uses.
6. Few prefer tolling and pay-per-mile fees. However, there are significant “neutral/maybe” responses for several sources, particularly re: emissions fees.
7. Indexing the gas tax, a vehicle emissions fee and increases in gas tax or tabs are all preferred to tolling and Pay-Per-Mile (PPM).
8. There’s support for a regional transportation authority setting rules and rates for PPM charges, tolls and fees.

# Overall, transportation is seen as a problem in the state and region

THOSE SELECTING “CRITICAL” OR “SERIOUS” PROBLEM

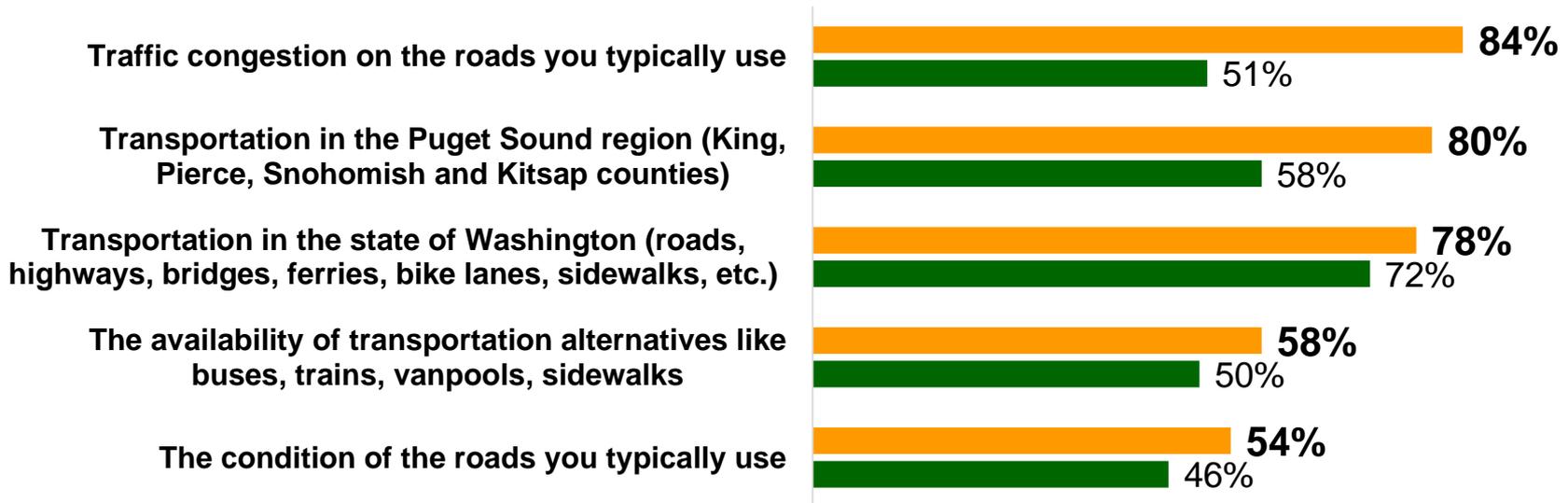
■ WA ■ PUGET SOUND ■ KING COUNTY



# Puget Sound respondents are more concerned about congestion

THOSE SELECTING “CRITICAL” OR “SERIOUS” PROBLEM

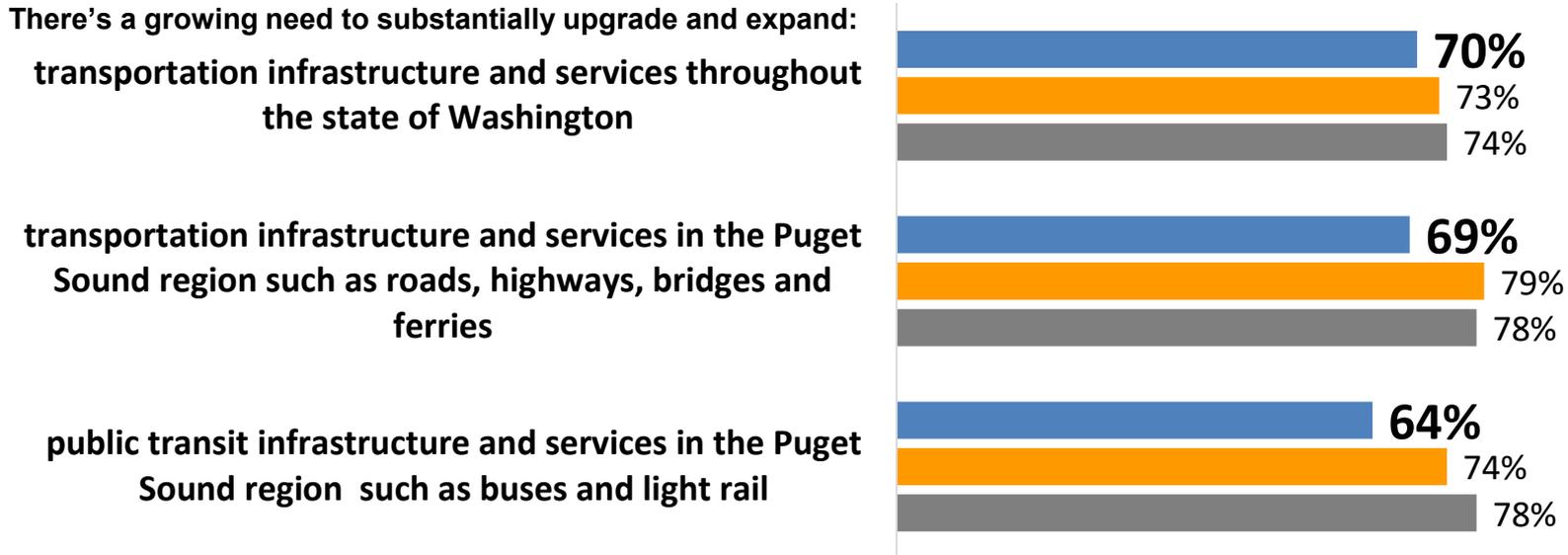
■ PUGET SOUND ■ REST OF STATE



# Overall agreement on need to upgrade and expand transportation and transit

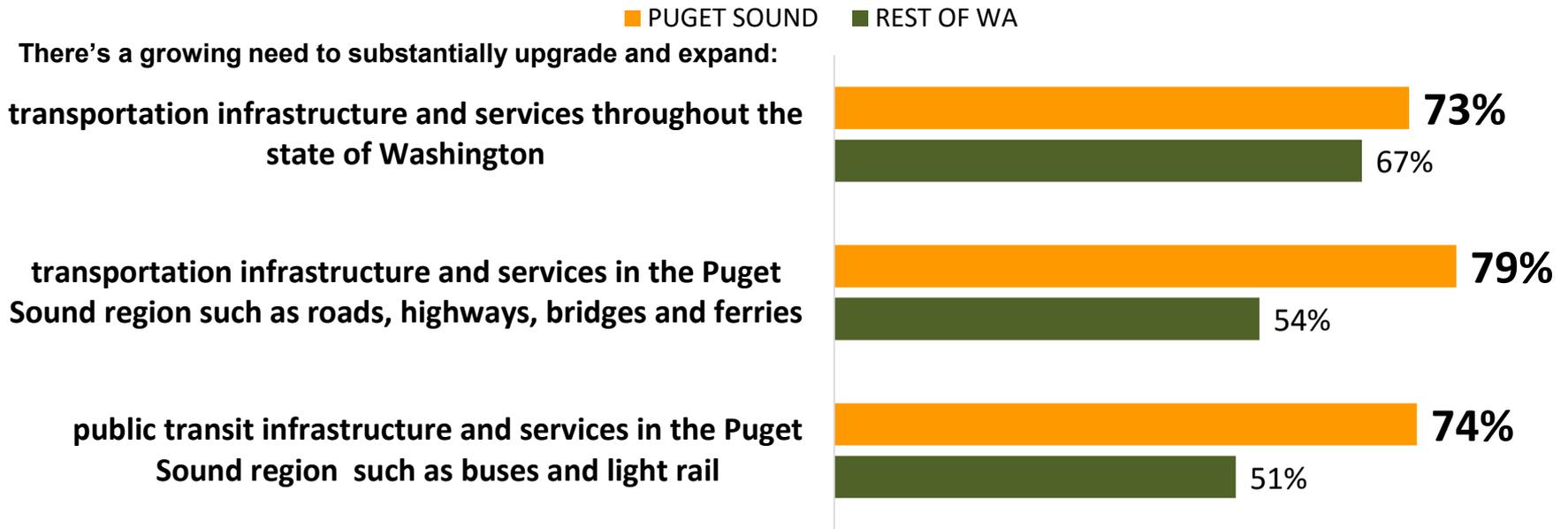
THOSE WHO "AGREE" OR "STRONGLY AGREE"

■ WA ■ PUGET SOUND ■ KING COUNTY



# Puget Sound respondents are more likely to agree with the needs listed below

THOSE WHO “AGREE” OR “STRONGLY AGREE”

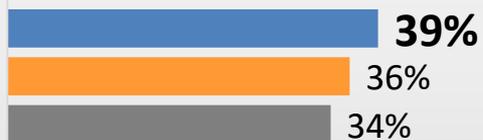


# Low levels of agreement on key facts about gas tax and sufficiency of current funding

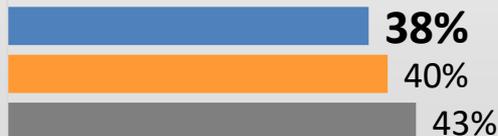
THOSE WHO “AGREE” OR “STRONGLY AGREE”

■ WA ■ PUGET SOUND ■ KING COUNTY

Under current Washington State law, funds raised through the gas tax may only be used for roads, highways, bridges and ferries and may not be used to fund public transit and other non-roadway uses.



Cars and trucks are becoming more fuel efficient, as a result the state gas tax is not keeping pace with the growing population's demands on the transportation system.



Currently, there is sufficient funding to meet the state's transportation needs (including public transit, roads, highways, bridges, bike paths, etc.)



# Those outside Puget Sound are more likely to strongly/agree with limits on the use of gas tax revenue

THOSE WHO “AGREE” OR “STRONGLY AGREE”

■ PUGET SOUND ■ REST OF WA

Under current Washington State law, funds raised through the gas tax may only be used for roads, highways, bridges and ferries and may not be used to fund public transit and other non-roadway uses.



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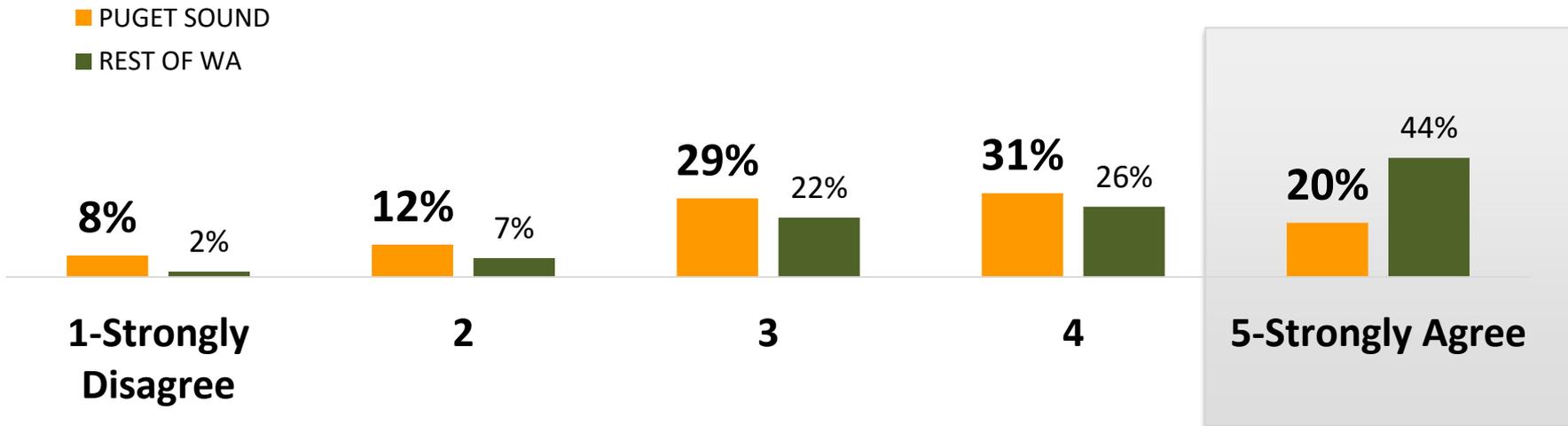


Currently, there is sufficient funding to meet the state's transportation needs (including public transit, roads, highways, bridges, bike paths, etc.)



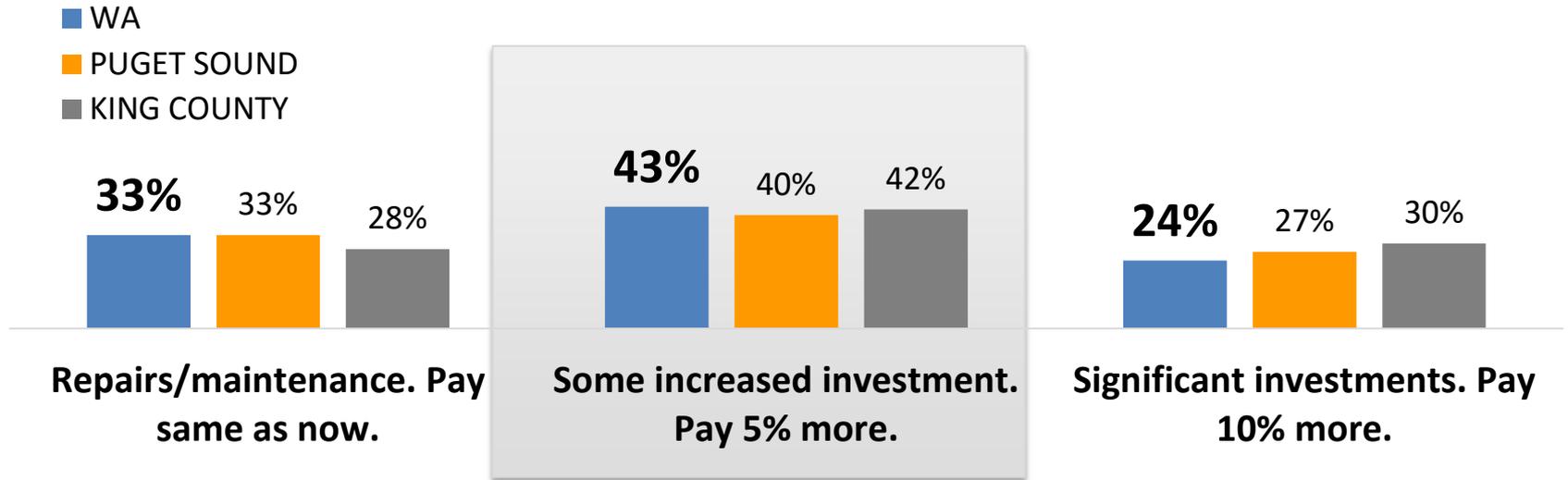
# Those outside Puget Sound are more likely to strongly agree the region should raise it's own revenue

*Allowing the Puget Sound region to raise their own revenues to fix their transportation and transit problems is better than taxing the whole state to pay for these improvements.*



# A relative majority is willing to pay 5% more for some increased transportation investments

*When it comes to funding transportation improvements and services in the state of Washington, which of the following would you prefer? (Select one.)*

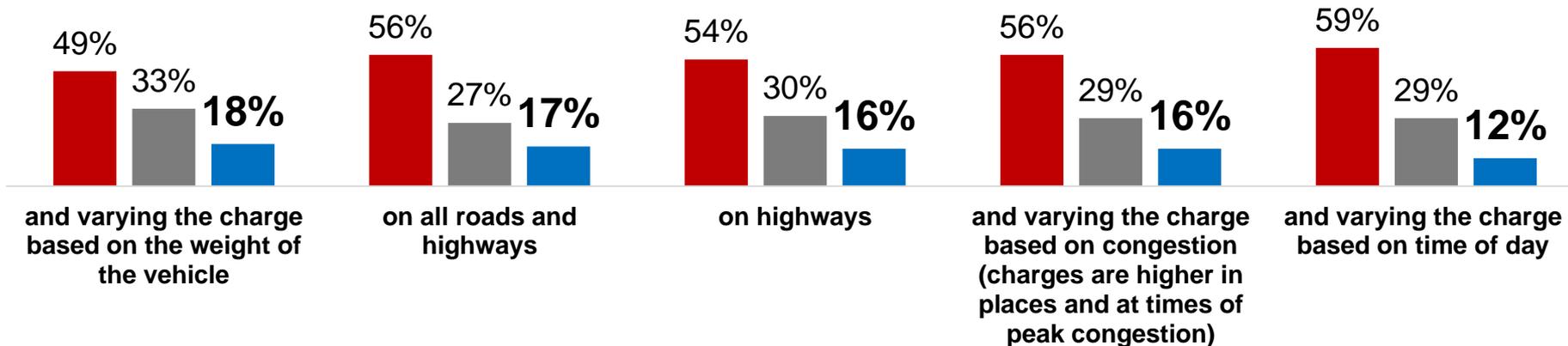


# Most Washingtonians are opposed to charges on miles driven

ALL RESPONDENTS (WA)

Should charging people for the number of miles they drive be considered for replacing or supplementing the gas tax?

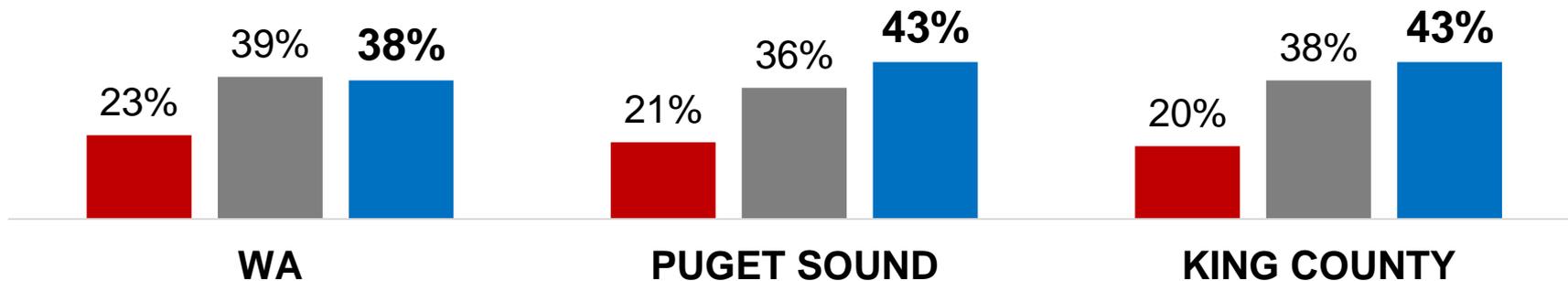
■ No ■ Maybe ■ Yes



# 38-43% favor using new revenue for a wide range of transportation uses

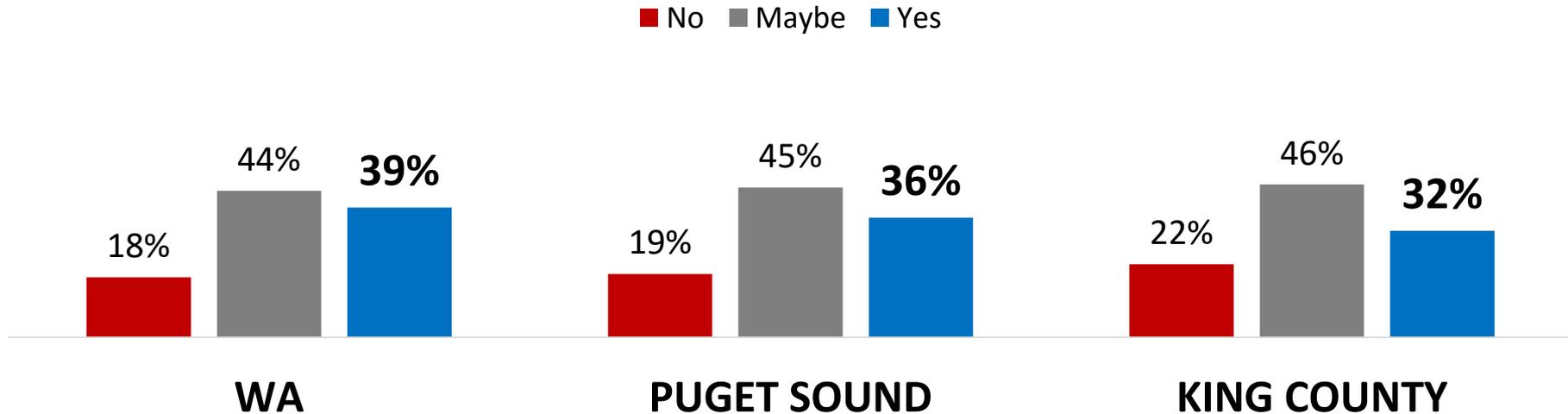
Should new transportation revenues be used for a wide range of transportation including transit, ferries, walking and bicycle improvements?

■ No   ■ Maybe   ■ Yes



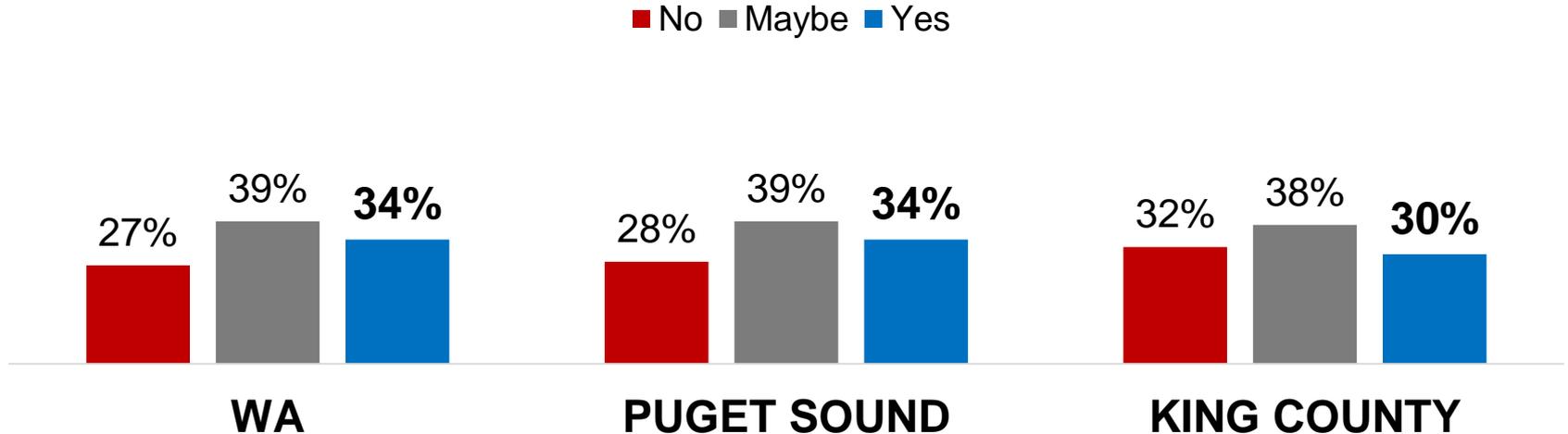
# About 1/3 support returning revenues to the jurisdiction in which they are collected

Should new transportation revenues be returned to the jurisdiction in which they are collected and spent according to local decisions?



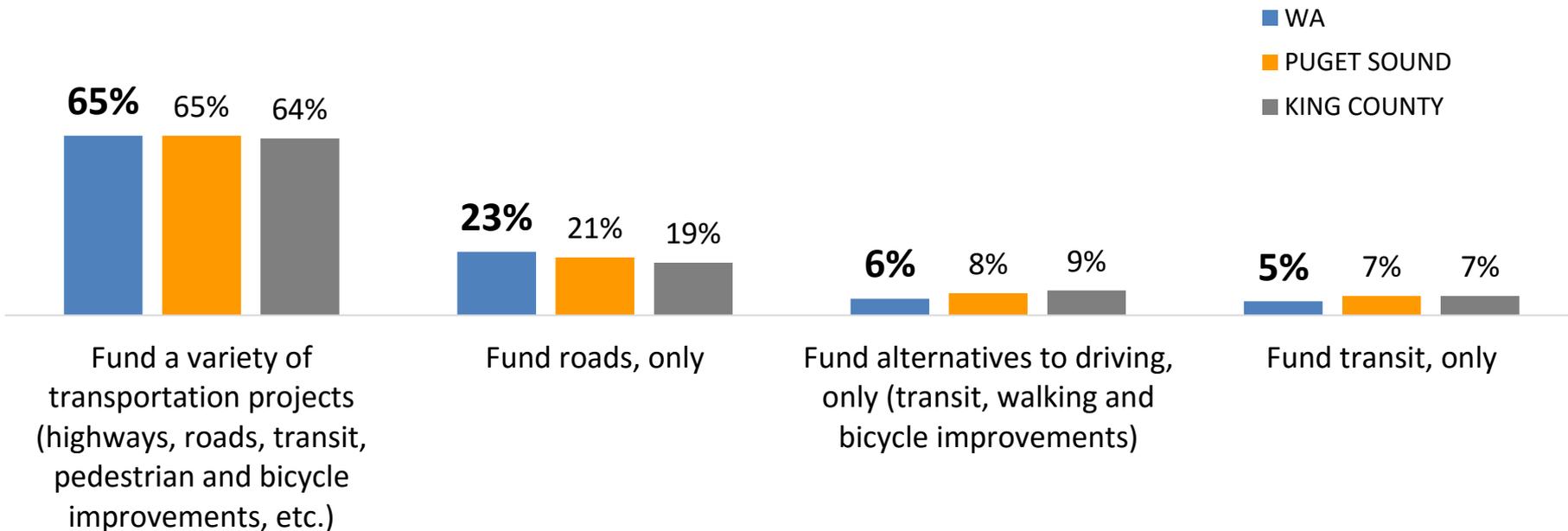
# About 1/3 say new revenues should only be used for roads, bridges and highways

Should new transportation revenues only be used for roads, bridges and highways



# A strong majority (65%) prefer new funds be used for a variety of transportation projects

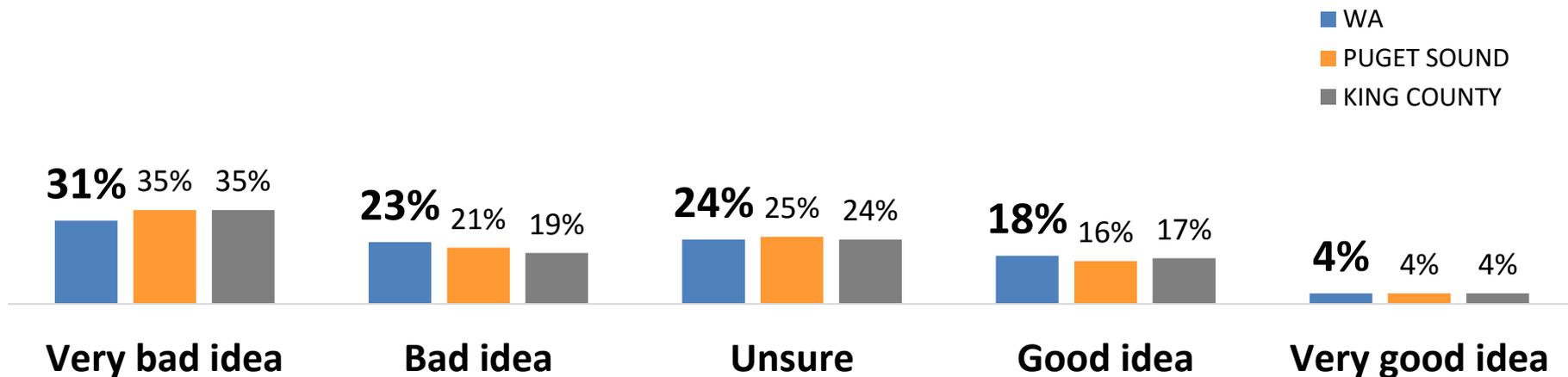
*If additional state funds were available for transportation, the new funds should be used to...?*



# More than half think system-wide tolling is a bad or very bad idea

Currently, a few roads and bridges in Washington State have tolling (the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, SR 167, I-405 and SR 520). One way to fund transportation in the future is to charge tolls on all of the lanes of major urban highways (I-5, I-90, I-405, SR 167, SR 520, etc.). This revenue source could replace or complement existing transportation fees and taxes, like the gas tax. Funding transportation through tolls would allow money raised to be used for a wider variety of transportation investments, including transit.

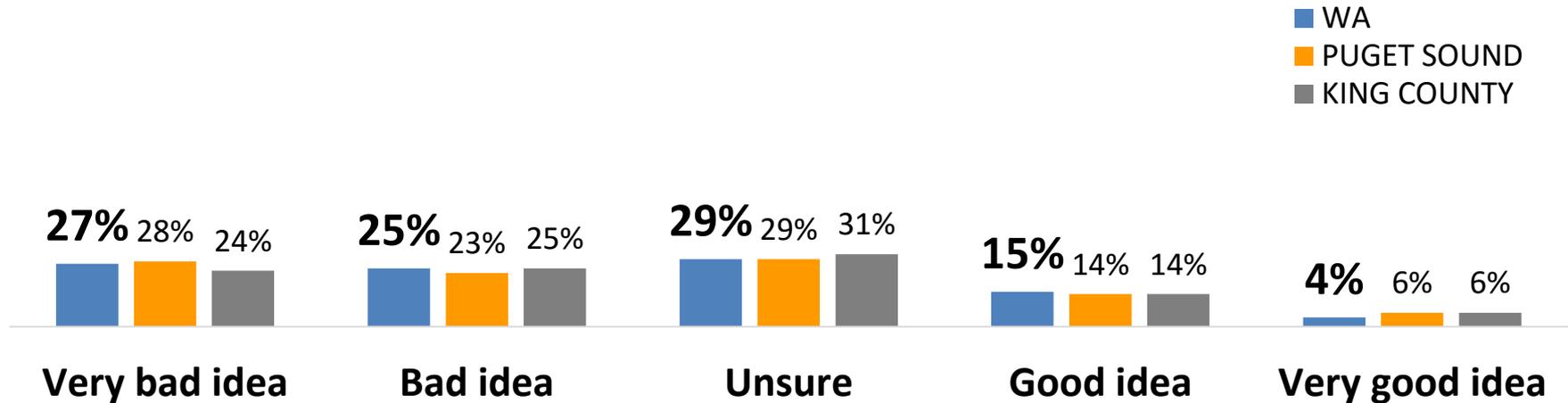
*Does this seem like a good or bad idea?*



# 52% think PPM fees are a bad/very bad idea

Another idea for funding transportation is to establish a Pay-Per-Mile fee. This is a fee that would be charged based on the number of miles a person drives and the funds raised could be used for a wider variety of transportation investments, including transit.

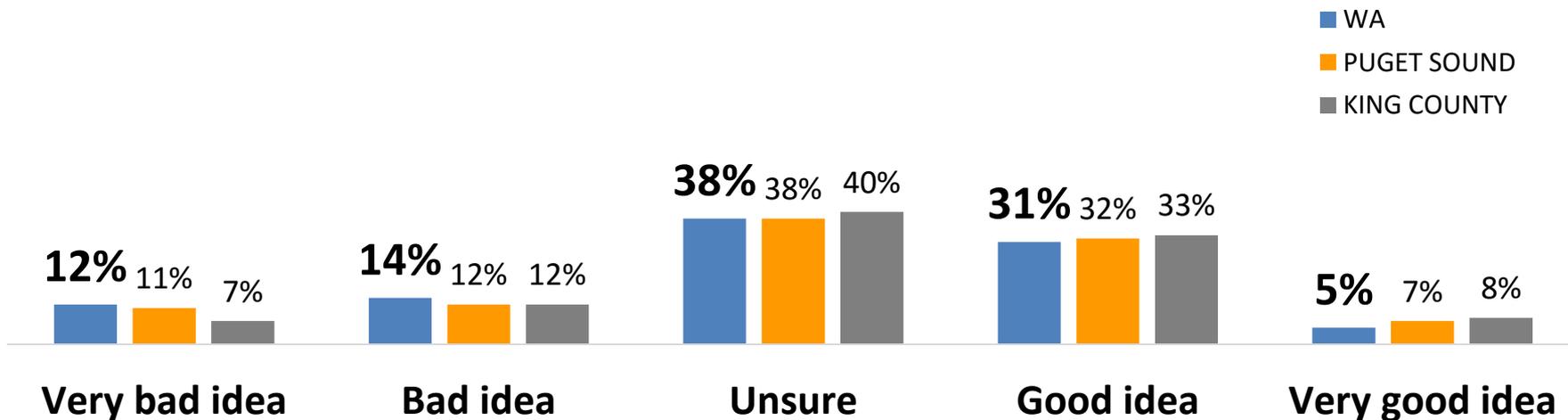
*Does this seem like a good or bad idea?*



# Many are unsure of whether a vehicle emissions fee is a good or bad idea

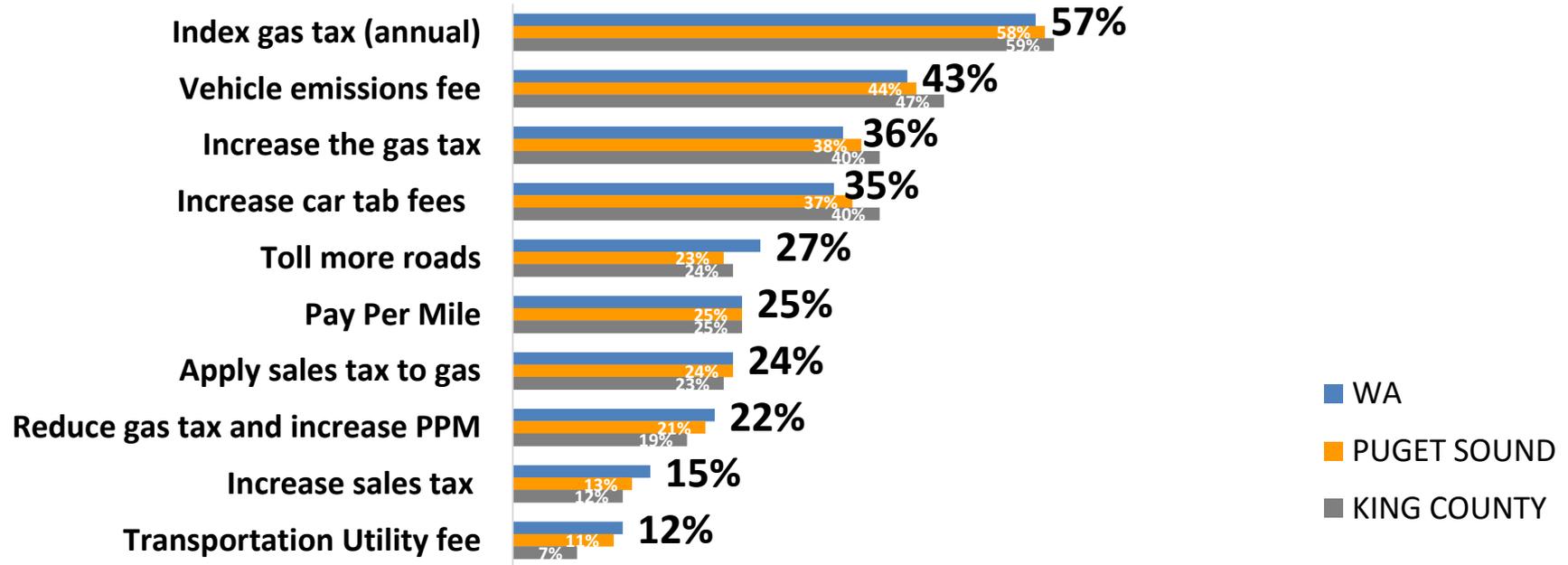
Another idea for funding transportation is a Vehicle Emissions Fee. This is where a fee is charged for vehicle emissions from burning motor fuels.

*Does this seem like a good or bad idea?*



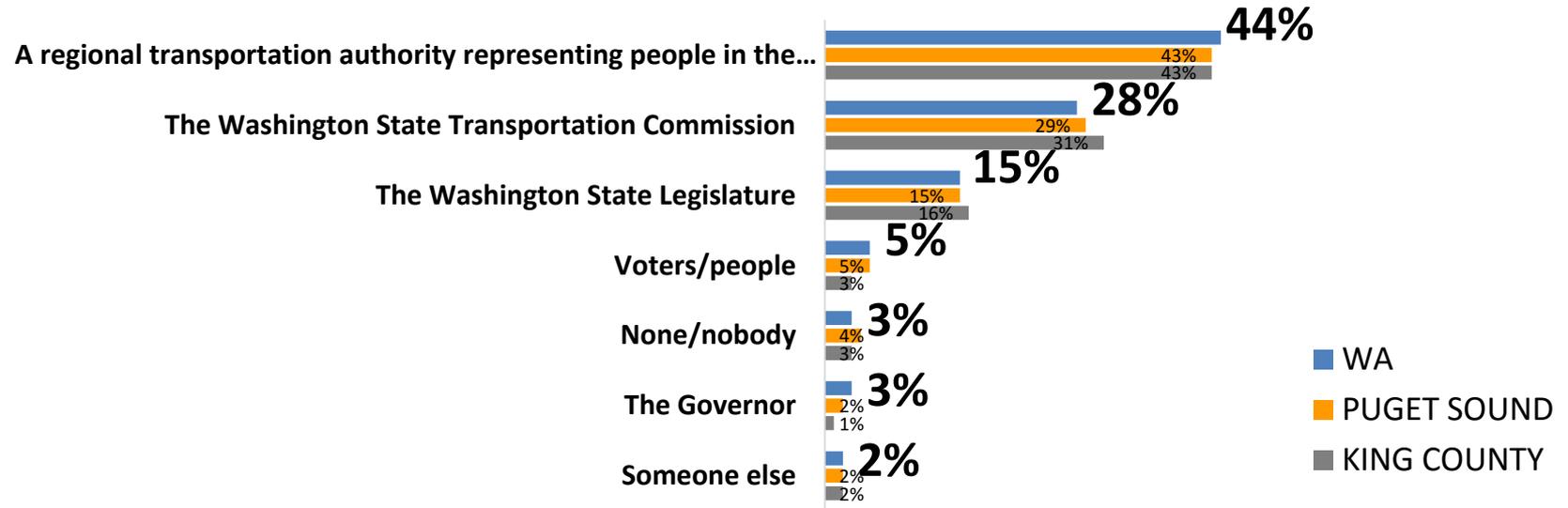
# A majority support indexing the gas tax to inflation

Using the list below, please rank the three best ways to fund investments in transportation. In each case, assume the money collected would be spent only for transportation purposes. [Those ranking each in top 3]



# More than 4 in 10 believe a regional authority should set rules and rates for PPM, tolls and fees

*Who should set the rules and rates for pay-per-mile charges, tolls and fees in Washington state?*



# Key Findings (Summary)

## Problem Definition

1. Transportation is a serious/critical problem.
2. The need to upgrade and expand transportation is understood and people are willing to pay more to do so.
3. Funding via gas tax is not seen as a problem.

## Solutions

4. Communities/regions should raise their own revenue. Funds should return to the region where collected. Puget Sound should pay for/fix its own problems.
5. New revenue should be used for a wide variety of uses.
6. Few prefer tolling and pay-per-mile but many are undecided.
7. Indexing the gas tax, a vehicle emissions fee and increases in gas tax/tabs preferred to tolling and PPM.
8. Support for a regional transportation authority.

# TRANSPORTATION FUTURES

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Updated 2-12-16