

**Aspects of Public Opinion
About
Cooperative Services Between
the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County**

by

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Observations, Summary, and Conclusions

The expectations of the public about municipal reform, as indicated in the Allegheny County 2001 (AC2001) Public Opinion Survey of 1991, seem higher than the apparent outcomes of the current city/county public service consolidation effort, as indicated by the senior administrators' retreat. The enunciated criteria to select and assess potential programs are too "inward looking" and incremental; the areas being considered are too mundane to capture the public's attention, the media's deep support, or the imagination of visionaries.

There is, of course, considerable value for public employees and the elected officials to struggle with these criteria and areas; as pragmatists they must propose do-able and credible ideas; they must start somewhere. Indeed, there are certainly some substantial benefits in these sorts of consolidated services; and the symbolic value of moving towards consolidation should not be minimized. But what is being discussed does not approach the expressed expectations of the general public as reflected in the AC2001 Survey.

The citizens of Allegheny County and the city of Pittsburgh care about their local governments; they know when they are getting value for their tax dollar and they have some ideas about what their tax dollars should be used to do.

While satisfaction with public services seems to be high, there is not much choice that people have and they have relatively little basis for establishing a standard of performance that is based on an alternative means of service delivery since most people in Allegheny County remain in the same municipality for relatively long periods of time. Furthermore, locally provided public services are monopolies. There is no choice.

When we see a particular group say they are more or less satisfied about a service than some other group, we pay special attention. That is why the dissatisfaction of minorities about law enforcement is important; that is why the high levels of satisfaction with public transportation of "captive" transit users are important; that is why the dissatisfaction of small town residents about not having recycling is important; that is why it is important to know that residents of fiscally sound municipalities are generally more satisfied with public services than those in the most fiscally stressed communities.

Given some of the initial suggestions that have been made by the senior staff members, it is not likely that many citizens are going to be very interested. To demonstrate the degree to which I believe the current status of the city/county service consolidation effort needs to be infused with other considerations, particularly those of the general citizenry, I have addressed three basic questions by invoking some findings from the AC2001 Survey.

1. *Would the residents of Allegheny County, as indicated by the AC2001 Public Opinion survey, give similar emphasis to these three types of criteria: ease of implementation, improving efficiency and reducing costs, and improving service delivery?*

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No. Yes. Maybe -- not exactly.

If the "ease of implementation" criterion concerns bureaucratic matters, the residents of Allegheny County know that improvements are difficult to make; but, in terms of service delivery, most don't care about who ends up delivering services as long as they are of the highest quality and the lowest price! The citizens expect worthwhile ideas to be implemented.

The senior administrators identified a criterion, "improving efficiency and reducing costs", that is important to relatively high proportions of non-city vs. city residents. If city residents support the proposals that meet this criterion and if these proposals work well, more non-city residents may become receptive to these sorts of ideas. This criterion is important.

Making warranted "improvements in public service delivery" may be a useful criterion to consider in selecting and assessing services; but there are generally high levels of public satisfaction with current services. Accordingly, it might be more precise to state this criterion as "maintaining public service delivery" with the understanding that, in places where delivery systems are dysfunctioning, improvements will be sought.

2. *Would the residents of Allegheny County, as indicated by the AC2001 Public Opinion survey, create a list of areas to be considered for city/county consolidation of services similar to the one produced by the senior administrators?*

No.

The administrators selected "non-controversial, do-able areas" by using the criteria. The top four areas (Purchasing, Police/Fire Training, Asphalt Plant, and G.I.S.) were followed by three additional areas that had relatively strong support from either the city or the county administrators: Tax Billing and Collection, Employee Health and Benefits, and Delinquent Tax Collection. All of these areas are internal to government operations.

There are two important points derived from the AC2001 findings about initiatives that would have public support. First, "government" activities (like those proposed for consolidation) were mentioned by very few respondents--indeed, those who did mention government challenged it by saying "no additional taxes"! The second point is that people were saying that they wanted to see outcomes from their tax dollars. These outcomes did not have to be immediate (i.e., education); they did have to focus on peoples', not government's, needs (i.e., education and health care); and they did have to serve the whole community (i.e., infrastructure and transportation).

More specifically, the analysis of the AC2001 survey inspired two questions about the proposal to consolidate city/county police training. First, there was evidence that city residents were relatively less satisfied with law enforcement services than other county residents. Maybe

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they would be more receptive to some types of consolidation. Secondly, members of the minority community tended to be less satisfied with law enforcement services. The questions that emerge about a joint training effort concern the degree to which a consolidated training program would address concerns about the quality of law enforcement personnel. Can police training improve cultural awareness? Can a joint city/county police training effort ensure that culturally aware training is promoted?

3. *What types of service consolidation between the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County might get the most public support, as indicated by the AC2001 Public Opinion survey?*

As the current effort to consolidate city\county services progresses, it will be very important to keep the public well informed about and, perhaps, involved in what is and is not being proposed. This suggestion is based on a finding from the AC2001 Survey: people who have knowledge of an effort to promote good government (as AC2001 was) tend to say they get value for their tax dollar.

The types of consolidation that citizens seem to support include programs that yield real value for their tax dollar, have performance based outcomes, target particular populations or types of municipalities, and redistribute resources within the County.

Value for Tax Dollars

Perhaps the most significant finding from the recent analysis of the AC2001 Survey is that respondents' assessments of the value they get for their taxes is directly related to their residential municipality's fiscal stress indicator, as defined by the Pennsylvania Economy League. The more favorable the fiscal indicator, the more likely it is that people feel they get value for their tax payments.

This finding is reinforced by AC2001 respondents' assessments of law enforcement and public education programs. Significantly higher proportions of respondents residing in municipalities that have been classified as "less" or "least stressed" by the Pennsylvania Economy League are satisfied with law enforcement services compared to respondents from the "most stressed" municipalities.

Performance Based Outcomes

Citizen perceptions regarding the public school system are also significant. They appear to be more strongly linked to student performance than to factors such as school district funding or student teacher ratios. Satisfaction with public schools and with citizen involvement in public education decisions are both directly tied to the performance of a school district's students in TELLS tests. Neither a school district's student teacher ratio, nor its total expenditures are

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significant in explaining respondents' opinions on these issues. People may be recognizing that a school district's financial circumstances and student performance may not be directly related.

Respondents' assessments of value for taxes and satisfactions (or dissatisfaction) with key public services (law enforcement and public education) is associated with the fiscal condition of the municipality and the performance of those providing the services. People appreciate value in public services. The efforts to define and to evaluate potential public service consolidations should stress this finding: people appreciate value in public services. They measure this in terms of the ways in which the service is performed.

Targeted Populations

Public transportation is a consolidated service in Allegheny County. This service is targeted on particular populations. Municipalities are mandated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to offer recycling services. In a sense this mandate controls the service that respondents in the AC2001 Survey were asked to assess.

The finding was that these programs were appreciated (public transportation) by the targeted population and desired (recycling) by those who lived in communities that were NOT mandated by the Commonwealth to perform the activity. The public's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with consolidated or controlled programs is real; knowing that this is true should be informative to the city/county consolidation effort.

Redistributive Efforts

Underpinning the efforts at city/county service consolidations is the notion that local governments should be well managed, democratic institutions with some visions of the future. They are not just publicly accountable businesses. The respondents to the AC2001 survey spoke clearly about these matters:

Clear majorities of County residents support concepts of reallocating locally raised resources from "haves" to "have-nots". People also expressed willingness to incur added expenses and to do some things differently for the good of the community. There was significant support from respondents for several ideas that will take time to show results; the notion of "pay now instead of paying later" was supported. There was also significant support for local and county governments to make investments and to take more aggressive developmental actions.

The Coordinating Committee should heed what the citizens have said; they are truly challenging their elected officials to make reforms. If a first step is the consolidation of some city and county services, that is fine; but these consolidations must lead to conspicuous reforms later.

About This Paper

David Young Miller, Ph.D. of the Pennsylvania Economy League, Inc. Western Division (PEL) asked that I prepare this briefing paper for the Coordinating Committee of the project to Develop Cooperative Services Between the City of Pittsburgh and the County of Allegheny.

He has asked that I base my observations on the public opinion survey that was completed under my direction in fall of 1991 for the Allegheny County Department of Planning as part of its Allegheny County 2001 project (AC2001) by the University Center for Social and Urban Research at the University of Pittsburgh.

The results of this survey, its analysis, and associated research methods are available in sections of three documents that are available from PEL:

The Citizens of Allegheny County are Ready for Some Changes! A Few Key Points and Some Observations from the ALLEGHENY COUNTY 2001 Public Opinion Survey by James P. DeAngelis [UCSUR February, 1992]

The Citizens of Allegheny County are Ready for Some Changes! An Analysis of Key Findings from the ALLEGHENY COUNTY 2001 Public Opinion Survey by James P. DeAngelis with James Woodwell and Steven Manners [UCSUR March, 1992]

ALLEGHENY 2001 A Report to the Citizens of Allegheny County [Allegheny County Department of Planning May, 1992]

The survey's design, administration, and analysis meet high academic and research standards for this sort of work. However, this survey contained no questions that explicitly invited respondents to comment on or to discuss aspects of the consolidation of services between the City of Pittsburgh and the County of Allegheny. There were, however, a number of questions that explored aspects of public service satisfaction and municipal consolidation. Accordingly, this briefing paper emphasizes findings from the AC2001 survey that can reasonably be associated with some city/county service consolidation opportunities and the criteria that might be used to evaluate the degrees to which these might have public support in the city and in the county.

Of course, it should go without saying, that when specific city/county consolidation ideas are ready for public discussion, elected officials would be wise to have the public's interest in and opinions of these changes tested before finalizing the details.

Headlines about the AC2001 Public Opinion Survey

When the AC2001 Public Opinion Survey was presented to the participants in the AC2001 process and later to the media, there was energetic discussion about its findings and the Principal Investigator's interpretations. Key people were skeptical. In the intervening sixteen months some of the initial skepticism about the survey has dissipated. There are probably as many explanations for the reduced skepticism as there were skeptics¹. One way to review the AC2001 public opinion survey's key findings and appreciate these findings' standing in the community is to consider the following excerpts from the editorial pages of Pittsburgh's newspapers in 1992:

...those taxpayers are having something to say now about their turf-guarding elected officials. Responding to a public opinion poll done for the county Planning Department, a large majority of residents supported the merging of communities if the consolidation meant no increase in the cost of public services.

...Surprisingly, nearly half --47%--said they would support consolidation even if there were increased costs while only 48 percent said additional costs would result in their opposition.

... the Pitt professor who coordinated the poll, viewed that finding as indicative of taxpayer support for 'concepts that their leaders are hesitant, or maybe even resistant, to propose.'

*We view it as the people telling those leaders that turf battles are too expensive to wage and the only way small communities can achieve economic stability is by becoming larger towns through mergers with other small communities.**

Merging the Taxpayers The Pittsburgh Press on February 22, 1992

**You wonder why they call it leadership. That's the conclusion one might reach after reading the results of a random survey of 812 Allegheny County residents. What comes through in statistic after statistic is majority citizen support for concepts that many elected leaders in the Pittsburgh area are reluctant or unwilling to consider.*

Like municipal mergers.

Like new ways of delivering public services.

Like distributing locally raised education funds so that children in low-income areas have equal access to resources.

...What the team learned was that Allegheny County citizens, by and large, are more open minded about new ways of doing things than the people they elect. Is anyone surprised?

Sixty-two percent, for instance, supported municipal mergers so long as they don't increase costs. But county officials continue to dump on that idea as unworkable and undesirable because "the people" don't want it.

...We can only hope that the politicians ... will present a blueprint for action, once their work is through, that will encourage truly progressive solutions to the region's problems. And that our leaders, like the citizens in this survey, will be open to trying them.

When Followers Lead Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on February 24, 1992

¹ Among my favorites is the recognition that Ross Perot's Presidential Campaign was "for real". He captured American's skepticism about government just as Harris Wofford had captured Pennsylvanian's concerns about health care. I believe that the findings of the AC2001 Public Opinion Survey reflected some of these same, deeply rooted sentiments that have now been accepted as prevailing wisdom.

Structure of This Report

Rather than writing a summary of the AC2001 survey findings, this report is structured to respond to three questions that are derived from the current process that is being overseen by the Coordinating Committee.

The senior administrators of the city of Pittsburgh and the county of Allegheny participated in a retreat on June 11, 1993 that resulted in "criteria to identify the most promising areas" of city/county consolidation and the listing of those areas². In essence the two leading types of criteria are best characterized as "ease of implementation" and "improving efficiency and reducing costs". "Improving service delivery" followed these two criteria. A question might be:

Would the residents of Allegheny County, as indicated by the AC2001 Public Opinion survey, give similar emphasis to these three types of criteria?

The administrators selected "non-controversial, do-able areas" by using the criteria and by discussing various suggested areas in mixed, city/county groups and in homogeneous city and county groups. The top four areas (Purchasing, Police/Fire Training, Asphalt Plant, and G.I.S.) were followed by three additional areas that had relatively strong support from either the city or the county administrators: Tax Billing and Collection, Employee Health and Benefits, and Delinquent Tax Collection. A question might be:

Would the residents of Allegheny County, as indicated by the AC2001 Public Opinion survey, create a similar list of areas to be considered for city - county consolidation of services?

Since reasonable people might expect senior administrators who are told to find ways of consolidating their services to identify those services that are "do-able", it might be useful to consider at some appropriate time what outside experts, like ComPAC's participants, might recommend. It might also be useful to know what the citizens of the Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh might like to see done.

What types of service consolidation between the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County might get the most public support, as indicated by the AC2001 Public Opinion survey?

These three questions are the structuring elements of this paper. They will be reviewed in each of the following sections.

² A PEL draft of the outcomes of the senior administrators' retreat was shared with the author. It was received on June 18, 1993 and marked "confidential".

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1. *Would the residents of Allegheny County, as indicated by the AC2001 Public Opinion survey, give similar emphasis to these three types of criteria:*

*ease of implementation,
improving efficiency and reducing costs, and
improving service delivery?*

No. Yes. Maybe – not exactly.

The residents have made some very clear and emphatic points that may be relevant to some of the principles they would like to see operative in local government. These principles might be translated into criteria that could be used in selecting and assessing areas for city/county service consolidation.

Ease of Implementation

First, "ease of implementation" is a criterion that Allegheny County residents would not be surprised to hear at the top of senior administrators' lists. After all, 90% of the AC2001 respondents were agreed that government officials and/or the system within which these people functioned were to blame for not making improvements when improvements were warranted:

31 % of respondents believe that elected officials do not make improvements when there is dissatisfaction with services, BUT that they do face difficulties in making these improvements: Politicians are to blame, but so is "The System" in which they function!

Another 25 % say that officials do not make improvement, and that they do not face difficulties in making these improvements: Politicians are fully to blame!

Another 25 % believe that elected officials do make improvements and that they do face difficulties in making these improvements: Politicians are trying to do the right thing, but face difficulties!

10 % of the respondents believe officials do make improvements, and that they do not face difficulties: Politicians do what they are expected to do, without difficulties!

It follows that Allegheny County residents would expect "improvements" to be difficult to make. The evidence from the AC2001 survey that seems to address "ease of implementation" as the top criterion of the senior administrators is the response to this question.

If public services are of the highest quality AND are provided at the lowest price, do you care who provides them?

76 % of respondents answered "no", they did not care. Twenty one percent said they did care, and 3 % said they did not know or had no opinion.

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So, if the "ease of implementation" criterion concerns bureaucratic matters, the residents of Allegheny County know that improvements are difficult to make; but, in terms of service delivery, most don't care about who ends up delivering services as long as they are of the highest quality and the lowest price! The citizens expect worthwhile ideas to be implemented.

Improving Efficiency and Reducing Costs

The concepts of improving efficiency and reducing costs were explored in the AC2001 survey by testing the idea of merging municipalities; two related questions were posed:

How strongly would you support or oppose the idea of merging your municipality and neighboring municipalities with the understanding that: current public services will continue to be provided without increased costs to you.

and

How strongly would you support or oppose the idea of merging your municipality and neighboring municipalities with the understanding that: better public services will be provided at a slightly higher, but fair cost to you.

By analyzing the responses to both of these propositions about consolidation, several important findings can be made. There are some statistically significant differences between respondents who are residents of the city of Pittsburgh³ and those who are not.

First, about 40% of all the respondents claim they would support consolidation regardless of the increased services or taxes. These are the "hard core" supporters of municipal consolidation; they do not constitute a majority of all Allegheny County residents. However, 51% of the city residents (compared to 36% of the residents of other municipalities) support this position.

An additional 19% of all the respondents supported the concept of municipal consolidation "if the current public services will continue to be provided without increased costs". These respondents changed their opinion when they were told that "better public services will be provided at a slightly higher, but fair cost". In other words nearly a fifth of the respondents claim to support municipal consolidation with current levels of public services and no increased costs. There was no difference in this proportion between city and non-city residents.

Together these two groups constitute a majority: 59% of all respondents which breaks out as 70% of city and 55% of non-city residents.

Twenty seven percent of all respondents oppose the concept of municipal merger under either of the two circumstances that were posed. They are "hard core" opponents of municipal consolidation; they constitute

³ In the original analysis of the AC2001 data we did not report statistically significant differences between city and non-city residents. For this paper I have reviewed those differences and am reporting those that are relevant.

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a minority of Allegheny County residents. There was a difference between city and non-city residents in this regard; 14% of the city compared to 32% of the non-city residents opposed the concept of municipal merger under either of the two circumstances that were posed.

About 10% of the respondents express uncertainty or no opinions about at least one of the two proposed concepts. They are essentially undecided on this matter. There were only slight differences in the proportions of city and non-city residents on this matter.

Finally, about 3% of the respondents claim that they would support municipal consolidation if it included better services at a reasonable price but would oppose it if services and costs to them remained the same. There were no differences in the proportions of city and non-city residents on this matter.

While a fifth of Allegheny County residents were very sensitive to the idea of paying more for "improved" services, the key finding of pertinence to the city/county consolidation question is that significantly higher proportions of city residents were supporting the concept of consolidation than was true of non-city residents.

The senior administrators identified a criterion, "improving efficiency and reducing costs", that is important to relatively high proportions of non-city vs. city residents. If city residents support the proposals that meet this criterion and if these proposals work well, more non-city residents may become receptive to these sorts of ideas. This criterion is important.

Improving Service Delivery

Improving public service delivery is a criterion that should be based on at least two types of considerations. First, one might consider the relative standard that is applied to service delivery in Allegheny County and the city of Pittsburgh compared to other places. Second, one might consider residents' perceptions of services as expressed by the degree of their satisfaction with a tested set of public services. It is this latter approach that has been used in the AC2001 survey by posing this question:

On balance, using this same scale [very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neutral or have no opinion, satisfied, or very satisfied], how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way ALL PUBLIC services are provided?

A very high proportion (approximately 72%) of respondents are satisfied with public services in general. While statistically significant associations have been found between respondents' residential locations and their views on this matter, it is clear that over two-thirds of the respondents in each of the four areas within the county⁴ that were tested indicate satisfaction with services in general.

⁴ The four areas within the county are Pittsburgh (71% satisfied), Eastern suburbs and Mon Valley (68%), Northern suburbs (69%), and Southern and Western suburbs (84%).

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Making warranted "improvements in public service delivery" may be a useful criterion to consider in selecting and assessing services; but there are generally high levels of public satisfaction with current services. Accordingly, it might be more precise to state this criterion as "maintaining public service delivery" with the understanding that, in places where delivery systems are dysfunctioning, improvements will be sought.

2. *Would the residents of Allegheny County, as indicated by the AC2001 Public Opinion survey, create a similar list of areas to be considered for city -- county consolidation of services?*

No.

Routine Management

The administrators selected "non-controversial, do-able areas" by using the criteria. The top four areas (Purchasing, Police/Fire Training, Asphalt Plant, and G.I.S.) were followed by three additional areas that had relatively strong support from either the city or the county administrators: Tax Billing and Collection, Employee Health and Benefits, and Delinquent Tax Collection.

Of these suggestions the only one on which AC2001 respondents' views might shed some light was police training. None of the other "areas" were specifically mentioned in the AC2001 survey. Since most of these "areas" concern the routine management of government, it is worth noting what respondents said when invited to respond to this question:

If you knew that any ADDITIONAL taxes you would pay to local and county governments in the next ten years would ONLY be used for a purpose of YOUR choosing, on what sort of service, program, or project would you like your added taxes to be spent?

<u>Purposes</u>	<u>Percent of Respondents</u>
Education & Training	29%
Health & Human Services	17
Infrastructure & Transportation	14
Environmental Conservation/ Recreation	11
Job & Economic Development	9
Justice & Safety	6
Government/No taxes	5
Other	8

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Education was mentioned by more people than was any other response. People in this category generally mentioned that funding should go to improve the schools, to provide better education, and to have better teachers. Thirty percent of the respondents in this category had mentioned "economic and job development" earlier in the interview when asked to name the single change they would like to see made by 2001. The second most popular category was health and human services. Concern about medical coverage and programs for the elderly were prominent. Infrastructure and transportation was the third most mentioned response category, with road maintenance as the greatest concern.

There are two important points derived from the AC2001 findings about initiatives that would have public support. First, "government" activities (like those proposed for consolidation) were mentioned by very few respondents—indeed, those who did mention government challenged it by saying "no additional taxes"! The second point is that people were saying that they wanted to see outcomes from their tax dollars. These outcomes did not have to be immediate (i.e., education); they did have to focus on peoples', not government's, needs (i.e., education and health care); and they did have to serve the whole community (i.e., infrastructure and transportation).

Another interpretation of this finding could be that, by making some "do-able" consolidations, funds would become available for the kinds of visible human and community programs for which people express support. However, based on what AC2001 respondents seem to have said, the "do-able" service consolidations that are being given priority by the senior administrators would not be on the citizens' list of services to be consolidated.

Joint Police Training

The suggestion of creating a joint city/county police training program may have merit. In terms of the public's opinion about law enforcement, however, there may be some aspects of this joint program that should be carefully scrutinized. There are two aspects that warrant scrutiny: the public support for improving law enforcement services in the city and the nature of the training that would be emphasized in a joint city/county training effort.

There was general satisfaction among the respondents with law enforcement. Fifty six percent reported being satisfied, with an additional 9% very satisfied. Twenty two percent said they were dissatisfied, and another 3% were very dissatisfied. Nine percent said they had no opinion or did not know. Statistically significant associations exist between respondents' residential locations and their assessments of law enforcement services.

Relatively high proportions of respondents from North of the Allegheny & Ohio Rivers express satisfaction with and neutrality or no opinion about law enforcement, 73% and 11% respectively. Seventy seven percent of South Hills & West Suburban respondents express satisfaction with law enforcement services. Only 59% of respondents from the East Suburbs and Mon Valley said they are satisfied; 54% of those living in the city of Pittsburgh were satisfied.

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Lower proportions of Pittsburgh residents are satisfied with law enforcement services than residents of other municipalities. And there is one other statistically significant demographic factor that is associated with these assessments—a respondent's ethnicity.

A statistically significant proportion of non white respondents reported being dissatisfied with Law Enforcement compared to the proportion of white respondents, 42 % versus 23 %.

This racial factor, combined with a similar finding with regard to Emergency Medical Services, reinforces the prevailing wisdom that blacks do not feel that they are being treated as well by these systems as whites do⁵.

This analysis of the AC2001 survey inspired two questions about the proposal to consolidate city/county police training. First, there was evidence that city residents were relatively less satisfied with law enforcement services than other county residents. Maybe they would be more receptive to some types of consolidation. Secondly, members of the minority community tended to be less satisfied with law enforcement services. The questions that emerge about a joint training effort concern the degree to which a consolidated training program would address concerns about the quality of law enforcement personnel. Can police training improve cultural awareness? Can a joint city/county police training effort ensure that culturally aware training is promoted?

3. *What types of service consolidation between the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County might get the most public support, as indicated by the AC2001 Public Opinion survey?*

In the background paper that PEL provided to the senior administrators before their recent retreat some structures were suggested as guides to the discussions. Most noteworthy among these were the "benefits of cooperation" (financial, programmatic, organizational, and symbolic) and the "forms of cooperation" (full integration of services, specialized services, shared support services, and shared purchasing of supplies and services). These suggestions were apparently discussed at the retreat; the participating senior administrators created their own suggestions of criteria (ways of assessing "benefits") and areas (specific "forms of cooperation").

In the prior two sections of this paper I have discussed how the residents of Allegheny County might react to the senior administrators' criteria and areas. In this section I address what types of service consolidations the residents might support. The types of consolidation that

⁵ That statistically significant associations have emerged is especially noteworthy since non-white respondents constitute only 13% of all respondents.

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citizens seem to support include programs that yield real value for their tax dollar, have performance based outcomes, target particular populations or types of municipalities, and redistribute resources within the County.

Value for Tax Dollars

The key findings on which I rely concern taxpayers' sense of the value they receive from their tax payments. Respondents to the AC2001 survey were invited to answer the following question; the responses set an important context for understanding how people felt about public services:

The taxes that I currently pay to LOCAL AND COUNTY GOVERNMENTS (not to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or the Federal governments) are used to provide services that I appreciate; that is, I feel that I get value for my tax dollar.

Respondents were strongly divided in their answers to this question. Only 3% had no opinion or did not know. Forty six percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 51% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

It is very important to note that a third of those respondents who did not feel they were getting value for their tax dollar expressed strong opinions; 15% of all respondents said they "strongly disagreed" with the statement, 31% said they "disagreed". Only 2.5% of all the respondents said they "strongly agreed" with the statement.

Public Awareness

There was only one statistically significant factor associated with people's response to this question at the time we did the initial analysis--familiarity with AC2001.

Respondents who were aware of AC2001 were more likely than others to feel they were getting value for their tax dollar. Sixty eight percent of those familiar with, versus 48% of those unfamiliar or not remembering AC2001, agreed that they get value for their tax dollars. Thirty two percent of the respondents who were familiar, and 44% of those unfamiliar with AC2001 disagreed, had no opinion, or said they did not know.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that information, such as Our Future Our Choice⁶ or The Big Picture, about what is (or could be) done with locally raised revenues may be influencing resident's views of their local and county tax payments' value.

⁶ This was a tabloid newspaper that was delivered to every Allegheny County household. In addition to containing some of the preliminary ideas that were generated in the AC2001 process, it advertised the forthcoming WQED program, The Big Picture, and the town meetings that were to be conducted.

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As the current effort to consolidate city\county services progresses, it will be very important to keep the public well informed about and, perhaps, involved in what is and is not being proposed. This suggestion is based on a finding from the AC2001 Survey: people who have knowledge of an effort to promote good government (as AC2001 was) tend to say they get value for their tax dollar.

Performance Based Outcomes

Through the continuing analysis of the AC2001 public opinion survey it is becoming apparent that respondents were very interested in the value they believed they were getting for their tax dollars and from their government institutions. The respondents suggest that performance is valued. This is illustrated through the following analyses of the value people report getting for their tax dollars and the degrees of satisfaction with law enforcement and public education.

As part of preparing this paper an analysis of selected responses to the AC2001 public opinion survey has been done based on grouping the residential locations of survey respondents into four groups of Allegheny County municipalities, based on The Pennsylvania Economy League's Fiscal Stress Indicators for 1991:

"... relative municipal fiscal stress (is) based upon tax capacity, tax yield, and tax effort. Stress is not to be confused with distress. Stress is defined by the League as a condition wherein high rates of property taxation result in relatively low tax yield when compared with all other communities in the County. Distress is a condition wherein a municipality has elected or been required to pursue a particular course of action to deal with its fiscal stress. Although mutually exclusive, the League has found that, in Allegheny County, those communities that have sought assistance through Act 47, the Municipal Financial Recovery Act, have also been the most fiscally stressed as measured by this rating system.

... the League ranked all communities in the county based on the three measures and divided the communities into four groups or quartiles."⁷

These four groups of communities were used in the analysis of the AC2001 Public Opinion Survey.

⁷ Allegheny County: Municipal Property Tax Profiles 1992 Pennsylvania Economy League, Inc. Western Division.

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Value for Taxes

Perhaps the most significant finding of this analysis is that respondents' assessments of the value they get for their taxes is directly related to their residential municipality's fiscal indicator. The more favorable the fiscal indicator, the more likely it is that people feel they get value for their tax payments.

<u>Residence located a municipality that is</u>	<u>Percent saying they get value for tax dollar.</u>
Most Stressed	44.2%
More Stressed	45.5%
Less Stressed	50.1%
Least Stressed	64.6%

Residing in a well managed, less financially stressed community influences people's opinions not only of government but also of public service delivery. Law enforcement and public school services are important examples for several reasons. First, law enforcement and public schools are the most visible local government (school district) services; law enforcement is a key indicator of a local government's service delivery capability; public schools actively involve the community in their activities. Second, law enforcement and school district services are often candidates for municipal (school district) service consolidations.

Law Enforcement

Significantly higher proportions of respondents residing in municipalities that have been classified as "less" or "least stressed" by the Pennsylvania Economy League are satisfied with law enforcement services compared to respondents from the "most stressed" municipalities.

Over 75% of the respondents from "less" or "least stressed" municipalities are satisfied with law enforcement compared to 51% of the respondents from the "most stressed" municipalities.

Supporting this finding is the fact that respondents living in Townships and Boroughs are more likely to be satisfied with Law Enforcement than are those living in Cities. Significantly high proportions, 34%, of respondents who reside in Allegheny County's three cities (including Pittsburgh) express dissatisfaction with and neutrality or no opinion about law enforcement. Conversely, high proportions of respondents who reside in Boroughs and Townships report satisfaction, 70% and 72% respectively.

Furthermore, respondents residing in municipalities experiencing growth in the number of households between 1980 and 1990 were more likely to be satisfied with law enforcement than those living in declining municipalities. Seventy three percent of those in growing municipalities, and 58% of those in non-growth municipalities were satisfied. Expanding tax bases allow the maintenance, and sometimes the improvement of, public services such as law enforcement.

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Public Schools

Significantly higher proportions of respondents residing in municipalities that have been classified as "less" or "least stressed" by the Pennsylvania Economy League are satisfied with public school services compared to respondents from the "most stressed" municipalities.

Over 56% of the respondents from "least stressed" municipalities are satisfied with public schools compared to 39% of the respondents from the "most stressed" municipalities.

Using some of the data available from PEPS PC - Pennsylvania School District Database³, responses to education related questions in the AC2001 survey have been analyzed by the respondent's school district to determine what factors may or may not affect a respondents' perceptions and priorities with regard to education.

The key finding⁴ was that "citizen perceptions regarding the public school system appear to be more strongly linked to performance than to factors such as school district funding or student teacher ratios. Satisfaction with public schools and with citizen involvement in public education decisions are both directly tied to the performance of a school district's students in TELLS tests. Neither a school district's student teacher ratio, nor its total expenditures are significant in explaining respondents' opinions on these issues."

Respondents' assessments of value for taxes and satisfactions (or dissatisfaction) with key public services (law enforcement and public education) is associated with the fiscal condition of the municipality and the performance of those providing the services. People appreciate value in public services. The efforts to define and to evaluate potential public service consolidations should stress this finding: people appreciate value in public services. They measure this in terms of the ways in which the service is performed.

Targeted Populations

Certain public services must be targeted on particular populations. As proposals for consolidating city and county services are considered, it would seem useful to know how people

³ The PEPS PC Pennsylvania school district database was developed from data provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to the Pennsylvania Educational Policy Studies Project at the University of Pittsburgh. Variables are derived from 1989-1990. In consultation with Dr. Bill Cooley, PEPS PC was used to group Allegheny County's School districts by 11 characteristics.

⁴ DeAngelis, James P. and Woodwell, James; Briefing Paper: Public Education An Analysis of Findings Related to Public Education from The Allegheny County 2001 Public Opinion Survey UCSUR, April, 1992. PEL has copies of this paper.

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view being the targets of county wide or state mandated services. Public transportation is a consolidated service in Allegheny County. This service is targeted on particular populations. Municipalities are mandated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to offer recycling services. In a sense this mandate controls the service that respondents in the AC2001 Survey were asked to assess.

Public Transportation

In the case of public transportation respondents to the AC2001 survey demonstrated that "targeted" populations appreciate the value of the service they are receiving. This service is a county wide service that serves the more densely developed parts of the county and particularly the city of Pittsburgh.

General satisfaction with public transportation was reported; almost half (49%) of all respondents said they were satisfied, and another 8% answered that they were very satisfied with public transportation. Eighteen percent said they were dissatisfied, 5% very dissatisfied, and 22% reported having no opinion or not knowing.

A number of respondent characteristics explain the differences between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. A statistically significant proportion of respondents from households with annual incomes below \$30,000 (the approximate median income of all respondents) reported being satisfied with public transportation services compared to the proportion of respondents from more affluent households. Reinforcing this finding is the fact that relatively high proportions of respondents from lower income households (compared to higher income households) rate public transportation higher than they rate public services in general.

Statistically significant relationships have also been found in terms of respondents' residential locations. There are two elements to this finding: geographic location and the type of municipal government.

Statistically significant proportions of Pittsburgh respondents (31%) rate public transportation services higher than they rate public services in general. This is also true for respondents who reside in the East Suburbs or the Mon Valley, with 32% reporting greater satisfaction with public transportation than with services in general. Respondents from North of the Allegheny & Ohio Rivers AND from the South Hills and West suburbs tend to rate public transportation service below their ratings of public services in general, 29% and 33% respectively.

Reinforcing this finding is the fact that significantly high proportions of respondents who reside in Allegheny County's three cities (including Pittsburgh) express satisfaction with public transportation services, while high proportions of respondents who reside in Boroughs report satisfaction and neutrality or no knowledge with public transportation services, and high proportions of respondents living in Townships report dissatisfaction and neutrality or no knowledge with public transportation services.

These findings coincide with what we might expect to find if satisfaction were a function of the level or quality of service that was being provided. Public transportation service is being appreciated by those at whom the service is targeted. People from households with below

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median incomes, are more concentrated in higher density areas (i.e., our cities) and have higher tendencies to use the public transportation system. They have expressed the highest frequencies of satisfaction.

Recycling

In the case of recycling, it is a very popular program, about which relatively high proportions of people who live in non-Commonwealth mandated municipalities seem to be dissatisfied with their recycling.

Sixty one percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with recycling, and an additional 11% said they were very satisfied. Eight percent said they were neutral or had no opinion, 14% said they were dissatisfied, and 2% reported being very dissatisfied.

There were certain characteristics of these respondents that were statistically significant in explaining these opinions. Significantly higher proportions of respondents with higher levels of formal education (college degrees and more) reported being dissatisfied with recycling programs as compared to respondents with less formal educations. While this could suggest that a higher standard may be applied by more formally educated respondents, essentially equal proportions of the best educated respondents rated recycling services as better and worse than all public services.

Statistically significant relationships have also been found in terms of respondents' residential locations. Statistically significant proportions of respondents who reside in municipalities with more than 10,000 people report satisfaction with these services (78%) compared to the proportions of respondents from municipalities with 10,000 or fewer residents (58%). Likewise, greater proportions of respondents who reside in municipalities with less than 5,000 people (compared to respondents from larger municipalities) rate recycling services lower than they rate public services in general, 14% versus 34%.

It should also be noted that a greater proportion of respondents from municipalities with population under 10,000 expressed neutrality or no opinion than did those from larger municipalities, 21% versus 9%.

Neutrality or dissatisfaction with recycling in small municipalities is most likely due to a current absence of recycling programs in the smaller municipalities. In other words people either have no experience with recycling or say they want it when they do not have it.

The point about these programs is that they were appreciated (public transportation) by the targeted population and desired (recycling) by those who lived in communities that were NOT mandated by the Commonwealth to perform the activity. The public's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with consolidated or controlled programs is real; knowing that this is true should be informative to the city/county consolidation effort.

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Redistributive Efforts

Underpinning the efforts at city/county service consolidations is the notion that local governments should be well managed, democratic institutions with some visions of the future. They are not just publicly accountable businesses. The respondents to the AC2001 survey spoke clearly about these matters. The Coordinating Committee and elected officials should heed what the citizens have said; they are truly challenging their elected officials to make reforms.

Clear majorities of County residents support concepts of reallocating locally raised resources from "haves" to "have-nots". For example,

the idea of allocating education funds so that "kids from low income areas have EQUAL access to resources" was supported by 78% of the respondents.

Almost two thirds of the respondents support the idea of sharing tax revenues that are collected in growth areas throughout the county.

And 80% of the respondents support the idea of making investments in older communities as distinguished from new, growing communities.

People also expressed willingness to incur added expenses and to do some things differently for the good of the community. For example,

respondents were asked about their support for environmental compliance: *"In order to comply with various laws for cleaner air, cleaner water, and the disposal of hazardous and toxic wastes, we will have to face higher costs of living."*

Sixty eight percent of all respondents agree or strongly agreed with this premise; they perceive that compliance will require "higher costs of living".

Another example is that seventy four percent of the respondents said they'd be willing to abandon the use of the automobile one day a week -- if it would improve the environment;

and 90% indicated their willingness to do more household trash separation and recycling.

There was significant support from respondents for several ideas that will take time to show results; the notion of "pay now instead of paying later" was supported.

Helping to pay for preventive measures for "at risk" people was supported by 72% of the respondents.

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Having alternatives to jail such as supervised jobs or mandatory treatment for drug users was supported by 62% of the respondents.

An alternative to traditional secondary education, apprenticeships, was supported by 84% of the respondents.

There was also significant support for local and county governments to make investments and to take more aggressive developmental actions.

Seventy six percent of all respondents agreed with the idea that "local and county governments should buy land to protect it from development and preserve it for future generations."

Seventy three percent of all respondents agreed with reclaiming our rivers and their banks " for NEW TYPES of planned development such as housing, recreation, transportation, etc..."

Almost three quarters of the respondents support the idea of having projects with impacts outside of the municipality in which they are located approved by BOTH municipal and county governments.

The idea of having residential and commercial development "pay its own way" was supported by two thirds of the respondents; this concept, which is associated with "impact fees", would increase the price of real estate development in locations on the urban fringe and possibly increase the opportunities for revitalization in already developed areas.

Taken together these supported actions, if implemented, could constrain development's suburban sprawl and create incentives for the re-investment in older communities that are in need of revitalization. As consideration is being given to consolidating city and county services, some of these ideas should also be considered as longer term objectives.

Observations

The expectations of the public about municipal reform, as indicated in the AC2001 survey, seem higher than the apparent outcomes of the current city/county public service consolidation effort, as indicated by the senior administrators' retreat. The enunciated criteria to select and assess potential programs are too "inward looking" and incremental; the areas being considered are too mundane (management oriented) to capture the public's attention, the media's deep support, or the imagination of visionaries.

There is, of course, considerable value for public employees and the elected officials to struggle with these criteria and areas; as pragmatists they must propose do-able and credible ideas; they must start somewhere. Indeed, there are certainly some substantial benefits in these sorts of consolidated services; and the symbolic value of moving towards consolidation should not be minimized. But what is being discussed does not approach the expressed expectations of the general public as reflected in the AC2001 Public Opinion Survey.

The citizens of Allegheny County and the city of Pittsburgh care about their local governments; they know when they are getting value for their tax dollar and they have some ideas about what their tax dollars should be used to do.

While satisfaction with public services seems to be high, there is not much choice that people have and they have relatively little basis for establishing a standard of performance that is based on an alternative means of service delivery since most people in Allegheny County remain in the same place for long periods of time. Furthermore, locally provided public services are monopolies. There is no choice.

When we see a particular group say they are more or less satisfied about a service than some other group, we pay special attention. That is why the dissatisfaction of minorities about law enforcement is important; that is why the high levels of satisfaction with public transportation of "captive" transit users are important; that is why the dissatisfaction of small town residents about not having recycling is important; that is why it is important to know that residents of fiscally sound municipalities are generally more satisfied with public services than those in the most fiscally stressed communities.

Given some of the initial suggestions that have been made by the senior staff members, it is not likely that many citizens are going to be very interested; my guess is that there will be public apathy about city/county consolidation.

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