

Public Comment Summary

Project:	NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT) State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Project HO-0020 Solving Access for N.C. 12 in Dare County (SAND) Plan
Subject:	HO-0020 Comment Summary for Public Meeting #1
Dates:	April 28, 2026 — Hatteras Village Civic Center, 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM April 29, 2026 — Rodanthe-Waves-Salvo Community Building, 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM April 30, 2026 — Jennette's Pier, 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM Comment period: April 28, 2026 – May 14, 2026
Locations:	Hatteras Village Civic Center; Rodanthe-Waves-Salvo Community Building; Jennette's Pier; online survey and publicinput.com project site

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), held the first round of public involvement for the Solving Access for N.C. 12 in Dare County (SAND) Plan in April 2026. Public engagement included three in-person public meetings, an online survey, project website, and a two-week public comment period. Notice of meetings was provided via local newspapers and a postcard mailer to area residents.

In-Person Public Meetings

NCDOT hosted three in-person public meetings during this initial public outreach period: April 28, 2026, at the Hatteras Village Civic Center; April 29, 2026, at the Rodanthe-Waves-Salvo Community Building; and April 30, 2026, at Jennette's Pier. Across the three meetings, a total of 139 attendees participated in the in-person outreach events.

Online Engagement

During the public comment period, the online survey garnered 2,042 views and 42 subscribers from 246 participants who provided 4,668 responses and 273 comments. Survey responses were primarily from Hatteras Island residents, with additional responses from mainland North Carolina, the northern Outer Banks, Ocracoke Island, and other locations.

Online Survey Results

The online survey asked respondents about their current use of N.C. 12, the effects of roadway closures, views on temporary maintenance measures, and priorities for long-term access solutions. Overall, responses emphasized that N.C. 12 functions as a critical access corridor for residents, visitors, businesses, emergency services, deliveries, medical trips, evacuation, and tourism-related travel. The most frequently identified concerns were reliable year-round access, storm-related closures, emergency and evacuation access, and the need for durable long-term solutions that reduce recurring disruption while accounting for the sensitive coastal environment.

Respondents reported substantial experience with N.C. 12 disruptions, with many indicating that they experience delays or closures multiple times per year. When closures occur, respondents most commonly reported delaying travel, canceling trips, staying home or working remotely, or relying on limited alternate options. Satisfaction with recent temporary measures (such as dune repairs and sandbags) was mixed but trended toward dissatisfaction, indicating that short-term responses alone do not provide adequate reliability. For long-term planning, respondents placed the greatest importance on year-round reliability, fewer storm-related closures, safety and emergency access, environmental protection, and maintaining the social and economic continuity of Hatteras Island communities. Support or strong support was broad across several solution concepts: long bridges in Pamlico Sound; on-island improvements; and nature-based solutions. (Because respondents rated each concept independently, these results should not be interpreted as ranked in a forced-choice preference ranking.)

Open-Ended Questions

Comments were reviewed and grouped by recurring themes. Because many of the long-form comments discussed multiple issues or solution types, the theme counts below total more than the number of individual written comments.

Table 1: Open-Ended Question #1

What is the most critically important issue to you when considering the future of N.C. 12?

Rank	Theme	Mentions	Percent
1	Reliable/Year-Round Access – Ensuring consistent, dependable access to homes, communities, and the mainland	78	27%
2	Long-Term/Permanent Solutions – Preference for permanent infrastructure vs. temporary fixes; stop spending money on sand movement	42	14%
3	Bridges/Elevated Roadways/Causeways – Support for building bridges, elevated highways, or causeways as solutions	33	11%
4	Environmental Protection/Wildlife Preservation – Protecting refuges, national parks, wildlife habitats, beaches, and natural shorelines	32	11%
5	Safety/Emergency Access – Importance of emergency services, medical access, evacuation routes, and overall safety	26	9%
6	Erosion/Overwash Concerns – Concerns about ocean overwash, beach erosion, sea-level rise, and storm damage	22	8%
7	Tourism/Economic Impact – Protecting the local tourism economy, visitor access, and business/livelihood sustainability	18	6%
8	Resident Needs Prioritization – Focus on full-time residents' needs, home access, and quality of life	17	6%
9	Cost/Fiscal Responsibility – Concerns about taxpayer burden, funding, affordability, and cost-effectiveness of solutions	12	4%
10	Natural Processes/Managed Retreat – Advocating to work with nature, allow natural island dynamics, or consider retreat strategies	11	4%
		291	100%

Table 2: Open-Ended Question #2

Please provide any additional comments you may have regarding N.C. 12 access, refuge and seashore use, or coastal resilience strategies.

Rank	Theme	Mentions	Percent
1	Reliable/Year-Round Access – Ensuring consistent, dependable access to homes, communities, and the mainland	24	18%
2	Long-Term/Permanent Solutions – Preference for permanent infrastructure vs. temporary fixes; stop spending	19	14%

	<i>money on sand movement</i>		
3	Environmental Protection/Wildlife Preservation – Protecting refuges, national parks, wildlife habitats, beaches, and natural shorelines	18	13%
4	Bridges/Elevated Roadways/Causeways – Support for building bridges, elevated highways, or causeways as solutions	16	12%
5	Natural Processes/Managed Retreat – Advocating to work with nature, allow natural island dynamics, or consider retreat strategies	13	10%
6	Erosion/Overwash Concerns – Concerns about ocean overwash, beach erosion, sea-level rise, and storm damage	12	9%
7	Resident Needs Prioritization – Focus on full-time residents' needs, home access, and quality of life	10	7%
8	Tourism/Economic Impact – Protecting the local tourism economy, visitor access, and business/livelihood sustainability	9	7%
9	Cost/Fiscal Responsibility – Concerns about taxpayer burden, funding, affordability, and cost-effectiveness of solutions	8	6%
10	Safety/Emergency Access – Importance of emergency services, medical access, evacuation routes, and overall safety	6	4%
		135	100%

Open-Ended Question #1 asked respondents to identify the most critically important issue when considering the future of N.C. 12, generating 128 responses that were categorized into 10 themes with a total of 291 theme mentions, as shown in Table 1. The top themes (Reliable/Year-Round Access, Long-Term/Permanent Solutions, and Bridges/Elevated Roadways/Causeways) collectively accounted for 52% of all mentions, indicating a clear consensus around access reliability and infrastructure solutions.

Open-Ended Question #2 invited optional additional comments as shown in Table 2. These comments were categorized using the same 10-theme framework as Question #1, yielding 135 theme mentions with an average of 2.1 themes per meaningful response. While the top two themes remained consistent (Reliable/Year-Round Access, Long-Term/Permanent Solutions, 32% combined), Environmental Protection and Natural Processes/Managed Retreat ranked higher in Question #2, suggesting that when given space for open-ended comments, respondents expressed strong interest in working with natural coastal dynamics. Safety/Emergency Access dropped from 5th (9%) to 10th (4%), indicating this concern was top-of-mind as a critical issue rather than a secondary topic. In addition, several sub-categories emerged in Open-Ended Question #2 that were not fully captured by the themes used in the tables. Other topics folded into the comments include study fatigue/urgency for action; long-term access for recreation; appreciation for NCDOT's maintenance efforts; and specific support for nature-based solutions such as living shorelines and oyster reefs.

Summary

Public input from the first engagement period indicates strong public concern about the reliability and resilience of NC 12 and broad support for screening multiple solution types. The dominant message is outcome-driven: respondents want reliable, year-round access that reduces closures and supports safety, emergency response, economic activity, and community continuity. Public comments also emphasize that long-term solutions should be developed with attention to environmental resources, natural barrier island processes, public access, and implementation feasibility.

NCDOT Response to Feedback

NCDOT thanks the residents, property owners, visitors, business owners, and community members who participated in the first round of public involvement for the SAND Plan. The input received through the in-person meetings, online survey, and comment period has been reviewed and is directly informing the study. We heard a clear message: N.C. 12 is a vital lifeline for daily travel, emergency and medical access, evacuation, deliveries, tourism, and the long-term continuity of Hatteras Island communities, and that the public wants durable, reliable, year-round access developed with care for the sensitive coastal environment.

The SAND Plan is currently in the planning phase, being advanced as a [Planning and Environment Linkages \(PEL\) study](#). At this stage, the focus is on defining the Purpose and Need, identifying potential solution types, and establishing the screening framework used to evaluate them. Because the study is early in this process, the responses below to specific concerns are necessarily broad; however, the priorities the public raised are being carried forward as core evaluation considerations.

NCDOT is committed to continued, two-way communication throughout the SAND Plan. As the study progresses and more information becomes available, additional opportunities for input will be provided. Responses to individual topics raised during this comment period are provided below.

NCDOT Responses to Individual Topics

Reliable Access / Keep NC 12 Open

- Public comments repeatedly identified NC 12 as a lifeline corridor for daily travel, emergency services, evacuation, medical access, deliveries, tourism, and community continuity. The SAND Plan Purpose and Need and alternatives screening process will continue to emphasize reliable daily and emergency access as a primary evaluation consideration.

Bridge / Elevated Roadway Solutions

- Many comments expressed support for long bridge, causeway, or elevated roadway concepts to bypass segments vulnerable to overwash, erosion, and flooding. These concepts will be considered alongside other feasible transportation solutions during alternatives development and screening. Survey support for long bridges and on-island improvements was similar; because respondents rated each concept independently, the results indicate broad support for multiple solution types rather than a single preferred alternative.

On-Island Road Improvements

- Comments also supported improvements to the existing corridor, including short bridges, elevated sections, and other roadway upgrades. The project team will evaluate on-island concepts in relation to reliability, feasibility, constructability, environmental effects, cost, maintenance needs, and consistency with long-term resilience objectives.

Temporary Fixes / Study Fatigue

- Several commenters expressed concern that recurring temporary measures and repeated studies do not provide a durable long-term solution. The PEL process is intended to build a streamlined path from planning into future NEPA review and project development while recognizing the need for both near-term actions and long-term resilience strategies.

Safety / Emergency / Evacuation Access

- Comments emphasized emergency response, evacuation, medical access, and safety during roadway closures. These concerns are reflected in the study's access and reliability needs and will be considered in evaluating how alternatives perform under future coastal conditions.

Environmental Protection / Natural Processes

- Comments reflected both support for protecting sensitive coastal resources and recognition that access needs must be addressed within this highly dynamic barrier island environment. The study will consider effects to Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, Cape Hatteras National Seashore, and natural coastal processes as part of alternatives screening and coordination with resource agencies.

Economic / Community Continuity

- Comments identified effects on tourism, local businesses, property values, deliveries, and community viability. The study team will continue to document how access reliability affects communities and economic activity and will consider these issues in the screening and PEL documentation process.

Ferry or Alternative Access Concepts

- Some comments proposed expanded ferry service or other alternative-access approaches, while others expressed concern that ferry reliance would not provide the same reliability as land-based access. The feasibility of these concepts will be documented and considered at a planning level for their ability to provide reliable access, maintain essential services, and support evacuation/emergency response needs.

Managed Retreat / Reduced Vehicle Access

- A subset of comments supported allowing natural barrier island processes to occur with reduced or relocated roadway/vehicle access in selected areas. Concepts of this nature (along with the No-Build Alternative) will be evaluated for feasibility, access reliability, emergency response, environmental effects, land management requirements, and consistency with project purpose and need.

Public Access / Recreation / Pier Access

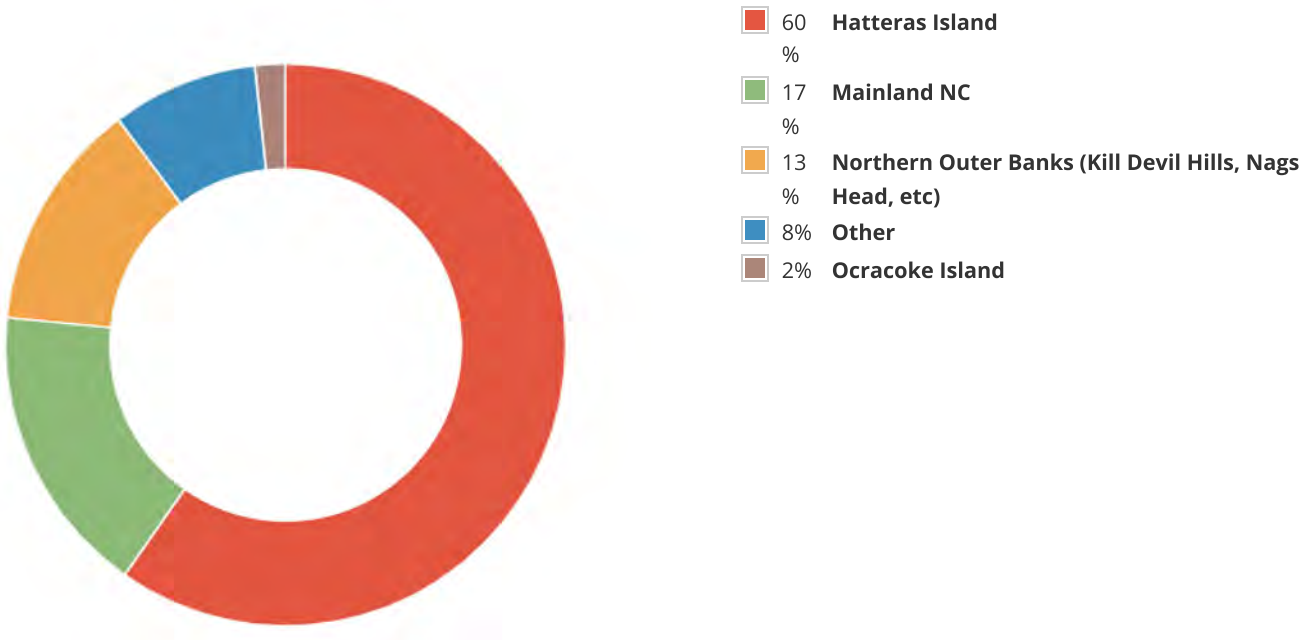
- Comments addressed continued access to beaches, refuge and seashore areas, fishing, recreation, visitor facilities, and the Bonner Bridge Fishing Pier. The study will continue to account for public access and recreation considerations, including how future transportation concepts could affect access to existing recreational resources.

Solving Access for N.C. 12 in Dare County (SAND)

Project Engagement

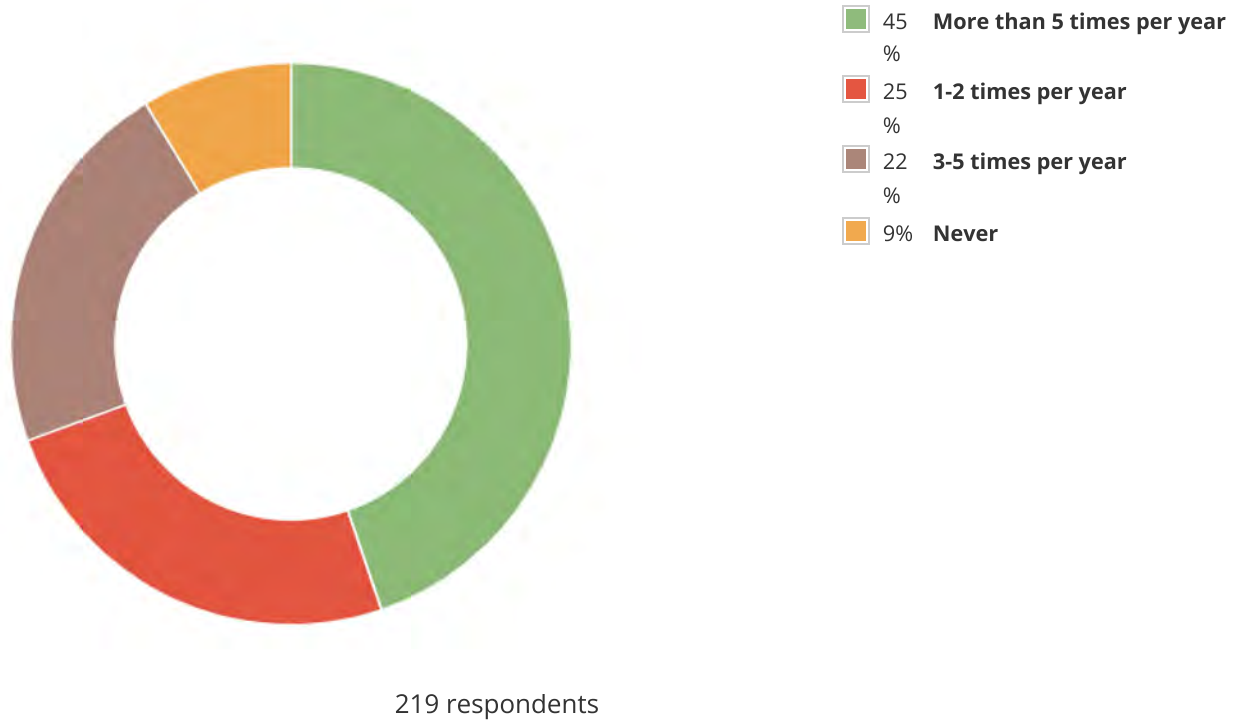
VIEWS	PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	COMMENTS	SUBSCRIBERS
2,480	247	4,668	274	48

1. Where are you primarily located?



226 respondents

2. How often do you personally experience delays or closures on N.C. 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe due to inclement weather and related events (overwash, flooding, erosion, sand blocking the road, etc)?



3. When N.C. 12 is closed or restricted, which impacts are most significant to you? (Select up to three)

57%	Emergency access	112 ✓
40%	Evacuation/Storm Preparedness	78 ✓
38%	Deliveries or daily needs/supplies	75 ✓
37%	Tourism or business revenue	73 ✓
36%	Medical appointments	70 ✓
25%	Work or school travel	49 ✓
14%	Other	27 ✓
13%	Ferry reliance	25 ✓

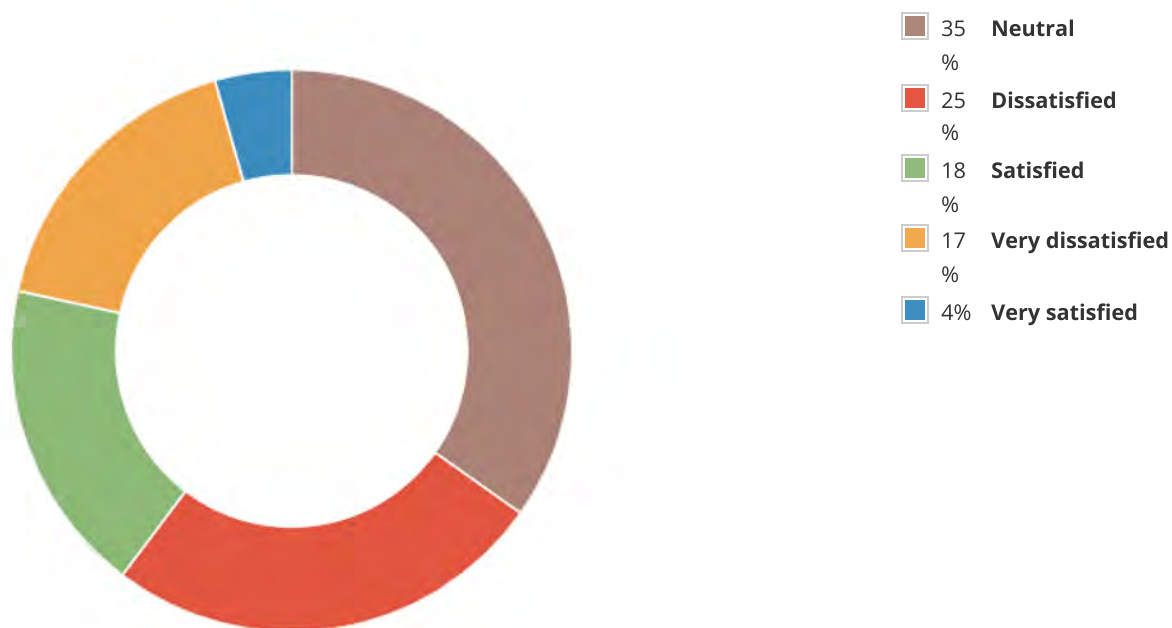
197 Respondents

4. When N.C. 12 is closed, what do you typically do? (select all that apply)

68%	Delay travel	134 ✓
62%	Cancel trips entirely	122 ✓
32%	Work remotely/stay home	63 ✓
13%	Detour (if available)	25 ✓
8%	Use ferry	16 ✓
8%	Other	16 ✓

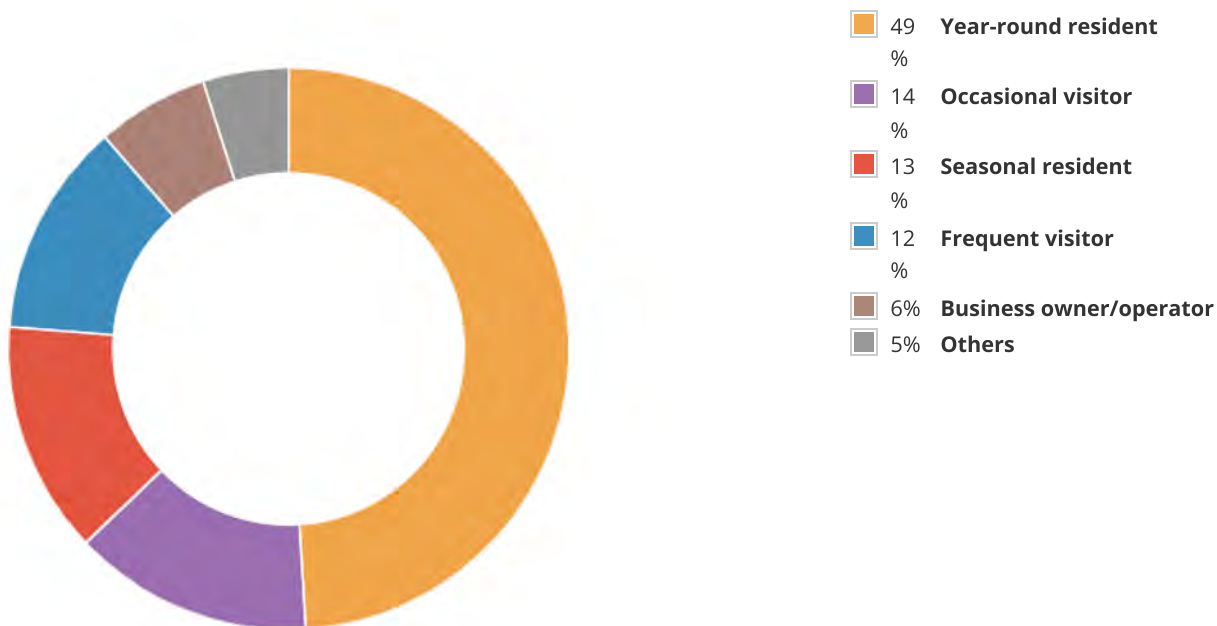
198 Respondents

5. How satisfied are you with recent temporary measures (such as dune repairs or sandbags) to maintain access along N.C. 12 ?



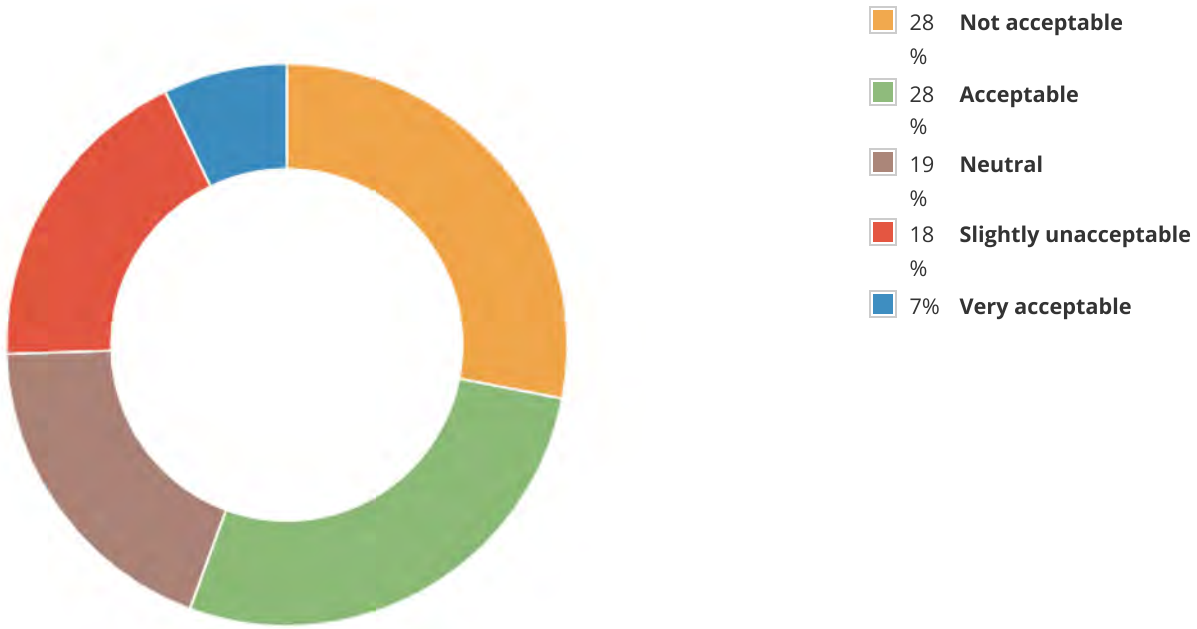
204 respondents

6. Which best describes how you use N.C. 12? (select all that apply)



202 respondents

7. Over the next *five* years,how acceptable would it be to continue using temporary solutions that may involve occasional lane closures, until permanent fixes are in place?



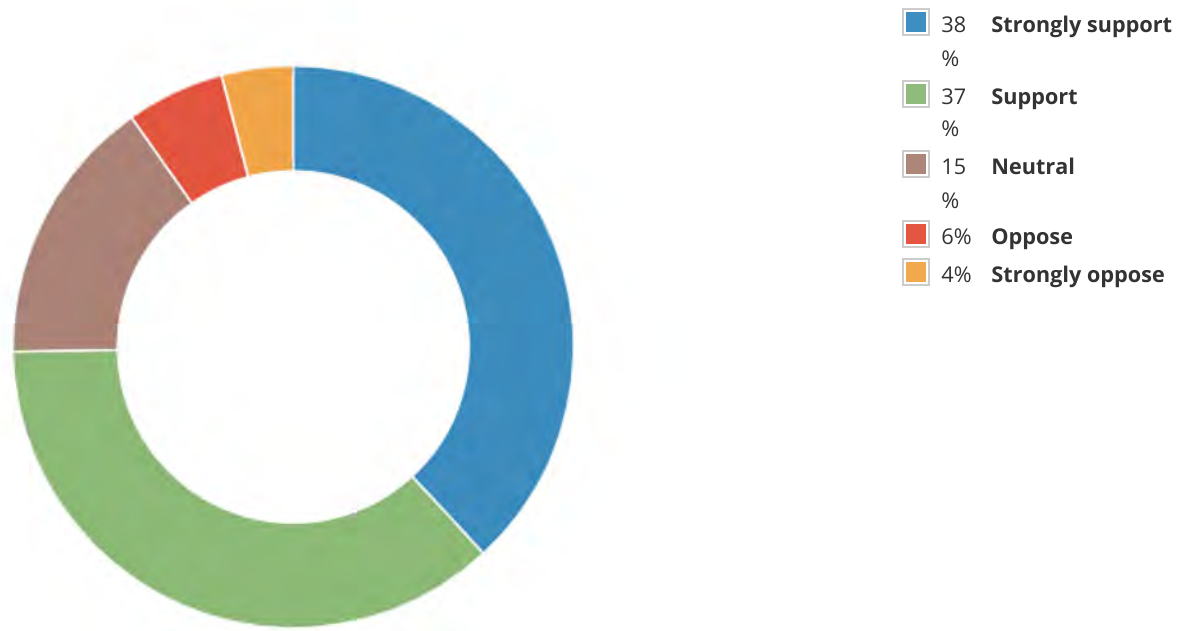
196 respondents

8. Which long-term outcomes are most important to you? (Rank your top three)

88%	Year-round reliability	Rank: 1.44	152 ✓
51%	Environmental protection	Rank: 2.43	88 ✓
67%	Fewer storm closures	Rank: 2.44	116 ✓
47%	Speed of implementation	Rank: 2.55	80 ✓
40%	Lower long-term costs	Rank: 2.96	68 ✓
27%	Scenic/visitor experience	Rank: 3.54	46 ✓

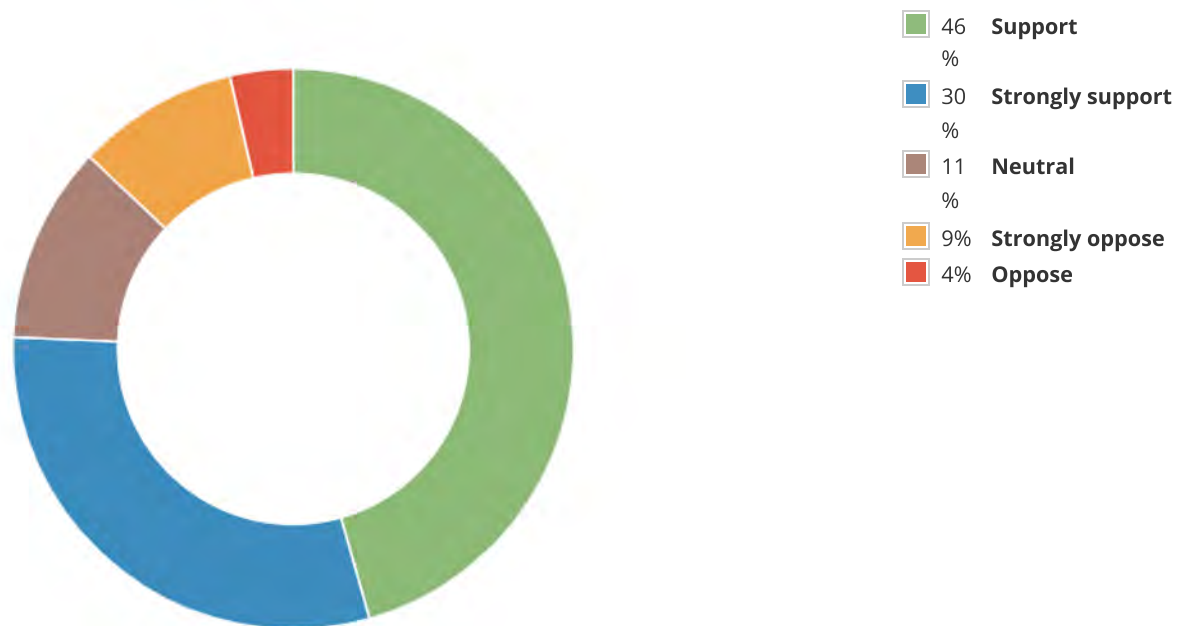
172 Respondents

9. How supportive are you of using long bridges in Pamlico Sound to bypass sections of N.C. 12 that are vulnerable to damage?



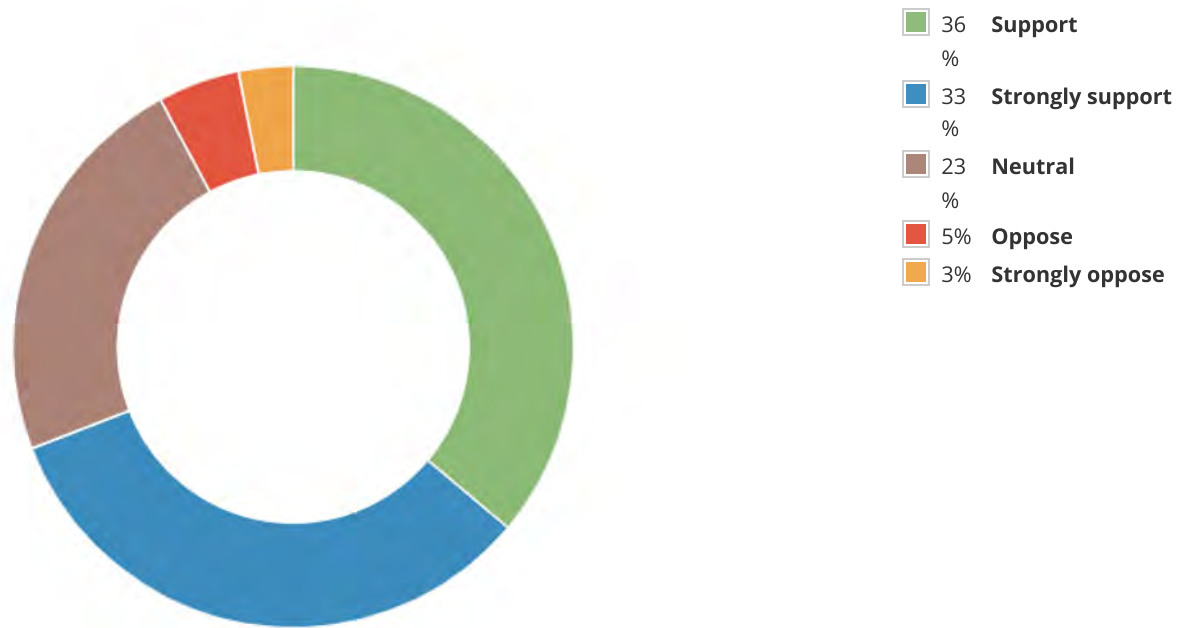
194 respondents

10. How supportive are you of improving existing "on-island" roadways that could include new short bridge sections?



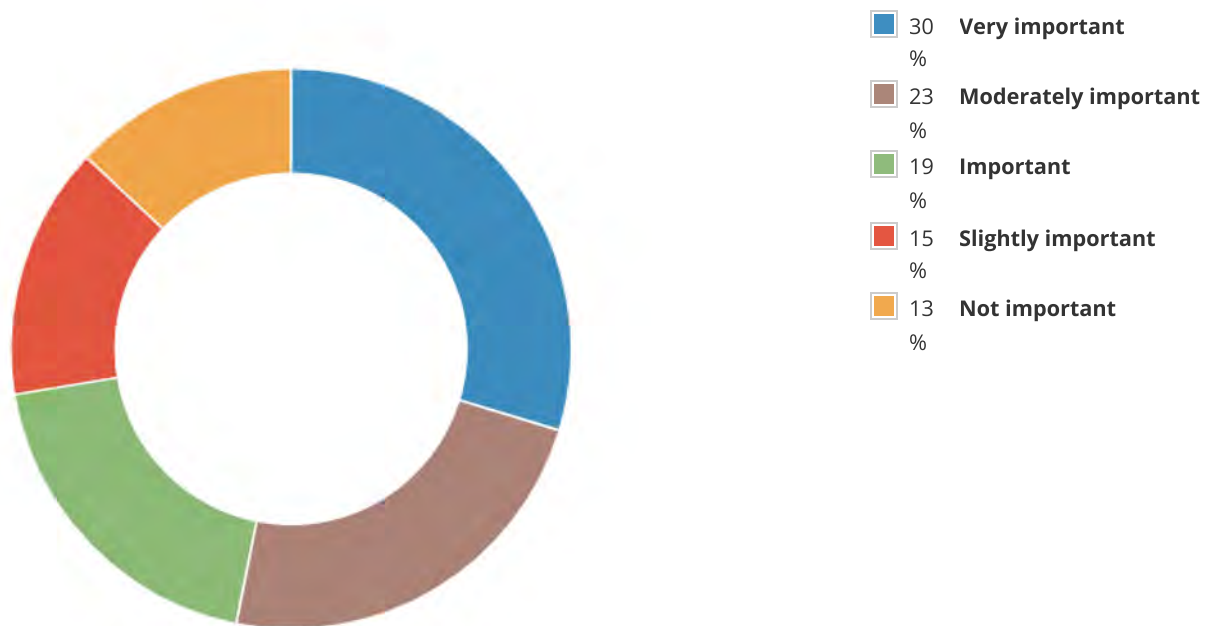
193 respondents

11. How supportive are you of using nature-based solutions such as dunes, marshes, living shorelines, marsh/oyster features alongside engineered bridge and road solutions?



191 respondents

12. In your view, how important is minimizing impacts on Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge and Cape Hatteras National Seashore habitats when considering future road solutions?



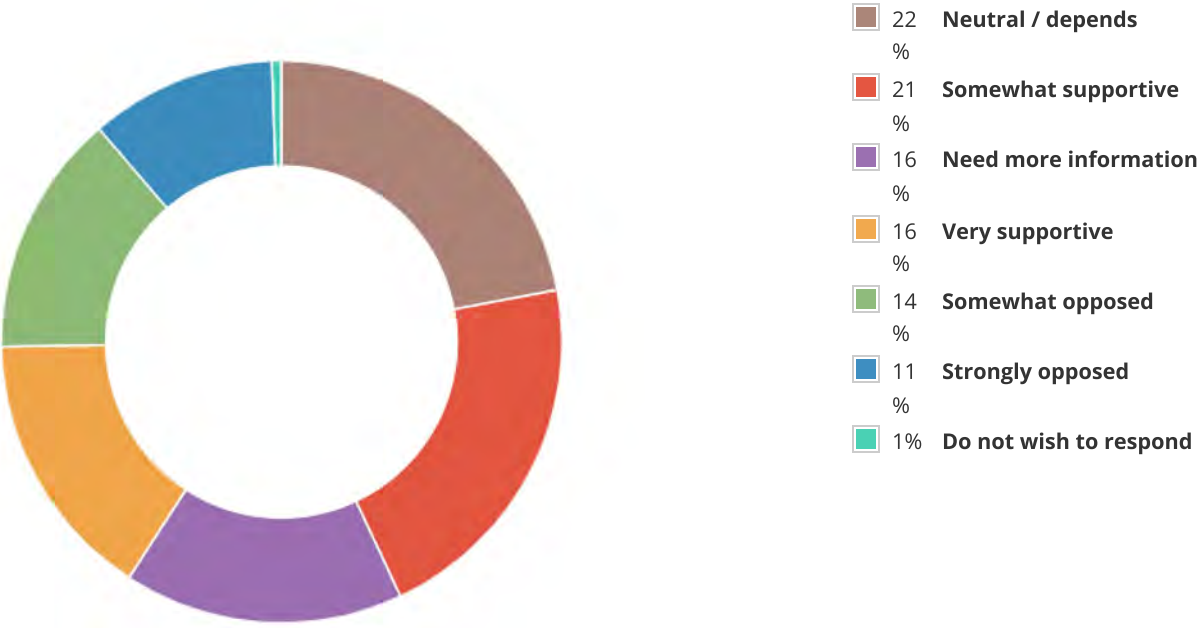
192 respondents

13. How do you currently use Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge and Cape Hatteras National Seashore? (Select all that apply)

66%	Beach access/walking	116 ✓
45%	Birding/wildlife viewing	80 ✓
40%	Fishing	70 ✓
34%	Hiking or trails	59 ✓
29%	Photography	51 ✓
20%	Kayaking or paddling	36 ✓
20%	Do not use	35 ✓
18%	Visitor Center	32 ✓
13%	Educational/research	23 ✓
9%	Other	15 ✓

176 Respondents

14. How supportive would you be of a transportation option that gives reliable access to southern Outer Banks communities, but does not keep public vehicle access to northern sections of Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge?



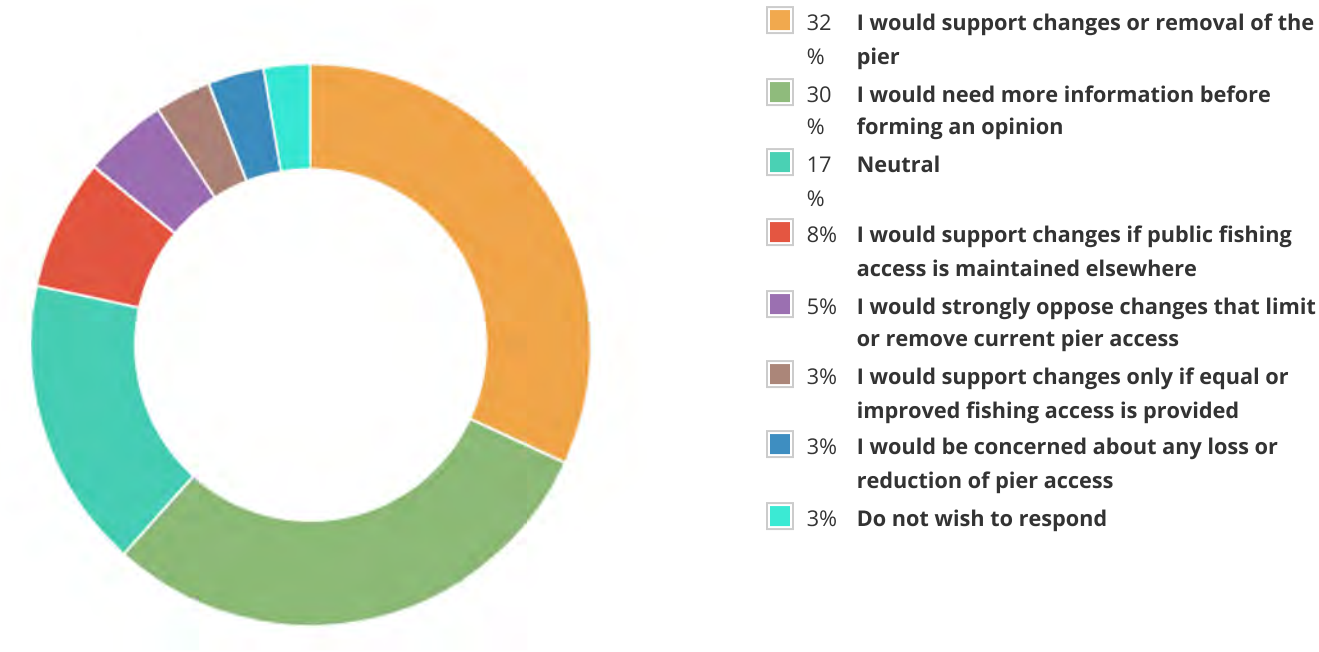
186 respondents

15. How do you currently use the Bonner Bridge Fishing Pier? (Select all that apply)

67%	I do not currently use the pier	120 ✓
16%	I visit the pier for recreation or sightseeing (not fishing)	28 ✓
14%	I bring visitors or guests to the pier	26 ✓
14%	I fish from the pier occasionally	25 ✓
13%	I use the pier for photography or wildlife viewing	23 ✓
3%	I was not aware the pier is open to the public	6 ✓
2%	I fish from the pier regularly	3 ✓
1%	Other	2 ✓

180 Respondents

16. If coastal conditions, safety concerns, or long-term access planning require changes to the Bonner Bridge Fishing Pier in the future, which statement best reflects your perspective?



185 respondents

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