

**Canadians' Attitudes and Opinions on the  
Establishment of a National Highway Program and the  
Treatment of Drinking Water**

**A POLLARA Report**

**July 2002**

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# I. Introduction

POLLARA is pleased to present to the Canadian Construction Association (CCA) the following report of findings from a national telephone survey. The objectives of this research were twofold: to investigate the attitudes of Canadians toward the establishment and management of a National Highway Program; and, to determine whether or not Canadians are prepared to pay additional monthly fees to ensure their drinking water and sewage are properly treated.

# II. Methodology

A total of twelve (12) questions were appended to a national omnibus survey on behalf of the CCA. Results from this study are based on telephone interviews conducted with a random sample of 1663 Canadians 18 years of age and over between July 12<sup>th</sup> and July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2002.

The results are weighted to a nationally representative sample of 1,200 and are accurate to within  $\pm 2.4\%$ , nineteen times out of twenty.

The following table outlines both the weighted and unweighted sample sizes for each region, along with the corresponding margin of error.

	Unweighted # Of Interviews	Weighted # Of Interviews	Margin of Error (%)
Atlantic Canada	300	98	$\pm 5.7$
Québec	300	296	$\pm 5.7$
Ontario	449	445	$\pm 4.6$
Prairies	309	199	$\pm 5.6$
British Columbia/Territories	305	162	$\pm 5.6$
Men	818	592	$\pm 3.4$
Women	845	608	$\pm 3.4$
Total	1663	1200	$\pm 2.4$

### **III. Executive Summary**

#### **A. Support for National Highway Program**

On a top-of-mind basis, most Canadians point to the need to upgrade the conditions of Canada's highway system, particularly those who are located in the Atlantic and Prairie provinces. Residents of the more populated provinces are also likely to point to concerns about traffic congestion and commuting times.

Concerns about local highway systems within each of the regions also suggest that access to US markets and safety are areas which residents would like to see improved.

Support for a National Highway Program, subsidized by gasoline taxes is widespread, although it encounters its highest levels of opposition in Canada's western provinces. Moreover, supporters of Canada's traditional federal political parties express support for the proposed Program, while support among Alliance voters is somewhat lagging.

Canadians would like to see the fiscal responsibility for the improvement of Canada's highway system shared equally among provincial and federal governments, with additional support for tipping the balance of responsibility toward the Federal government. This view is supported across all regions, but not all voting cohorts. Specifically, Liberal supporters are the least likely to want to see the federal government assume a greater share of the responsibility for highway maintenance, preferring instead that an equitable balance be established.

#### **B. Paying More for Safer Water and Sewage Treatment**

Overall, Canadians appear to be willing to assume a modest increase in the cost of their water supply, be it through increased direct billing or through an increase in their rental fees, to ensure that their water and sewage are properly treated. This willingness, however, is lowest among Liberal supporters, as is the maximum increase which they would assume to ensure proper treatment.

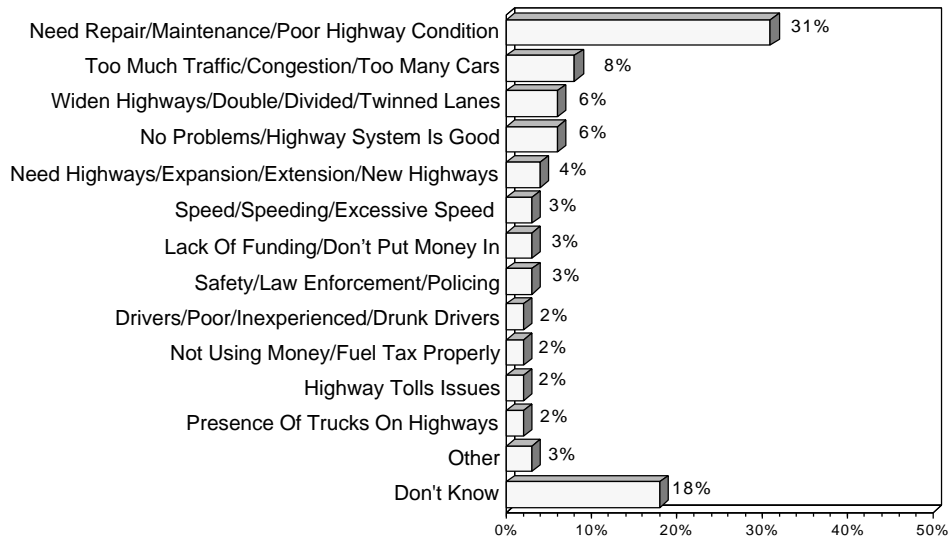
Specifically, while a small number of Canadians appear to be willing to pay in excess of \$10 for treatment of their water and sewage, the threshold for most Canadians is actually well below this amount.

# IV. Assessment of Support for a National Highway Program

## A. Most Urgent Problem with Canada's Highway System

According to almost one-third of Canadians, poor conditions and the need for repair represent the most urgent problem with Canada's highway system (31%). Less often, urgent problems include traffic congestion (8%), the need for wider access and twinned lanes (6%) and an overall expansion and extension of existing systems (4%). Six percent (6%) of Canadians believe there are no problems with the existing highway system. Almost one-in-five Canadians (18%) are unable to name an urgent problem with Canadian highways.

**Figure 1**  
**Most Urgent Problem with Canada's Highway System**



Question: In your opinion, what is the most urgent problem with Canada's highway system?

Regionally, residents of Ontario are least likely to cite the need for repair as the most urgent problem facing the highway system (19%). These residents are, however, most likely of all regional cohorts to mention traffic congestion as an urgent problem (16%).

Residents of the Prairie provinces are most likely to report that there are no urgent problems with Canada’s highway system (10%), while residents of the Atlantic provinces are most likely to highlight the need for lane widening as an urgent problem (10%).

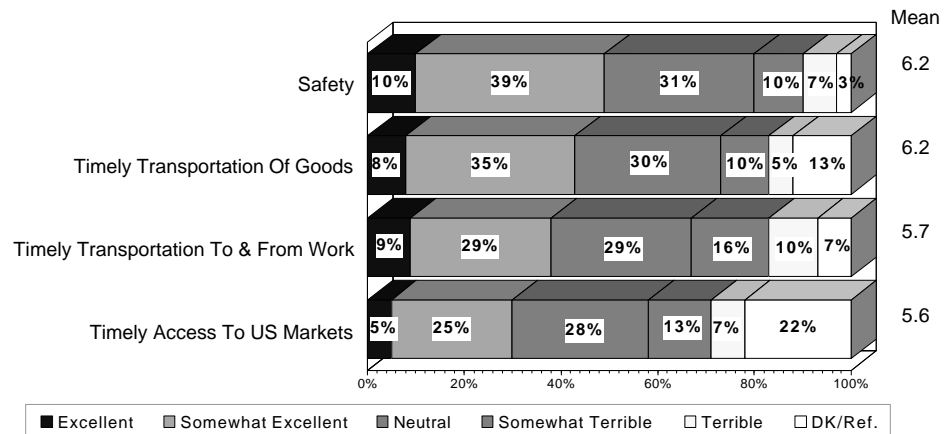
**Table 1**  
**Most Urgent Problem with Canada’s Highway System, by Region**

	Need Maintenance/ Repair %	Traffic Congestion %	No Problems %	Widen Lanes %	Expansion/ Extensions %
Atlantic	45	1	5	10	2
Québec	38	2	2	3	4
Ontario	19	16	6	7	5
Prairies	38	3	10	6	2
BC/Territories	31	5	7	5	3

## B. Perceptions of Local Highway Systems

Using an eleven-point scale where zero means “terrible” and ten means “excellent”, Canadians rate safety and the timely transportation of goods to market highest when considering their local highway systems (mean rating of 6.2 each). Ratings for timely access to US markets and for timely transportation to and from work are only somewhat lower (5.6 and 5.7 respectively).

**Figure 2**  
Perceptions of Local Highway Systems



Question: Using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is terrible and 10 is excellent, how would you rate your local highway system for each of the following:

On a regional basis, residents of the Atlantic provinces provide the lowest rating of all regions for local highway systems when it comes to safety (5.4) and access to US markets (5.3). Access to US markets also receives a low rating from Québec residents (5.4), as does transportation to and from work (5.6). Ontario residents also register a low rating for their local highway systems when considering transportation to and from work (5.6).

Residents of the Prairie provinces provide the highest ratings for their local highway systems on all considerations.

**Table 2**  
**Mean Ratings of Local Highway Systems, by Region**

	Safety %	Transportation of Goods %	Access to US Markets %	Transport To/From Work %
Atlantic	5.4	6.2	5.3	6.1
Québec	6.2	6.0	5.4	5.6
Ontario	6.3	6.2	5.8	5.6
Prairies	6.3	6.5	5.9	6.4
BC/Territories	6.2	6.1	5.5	5.5

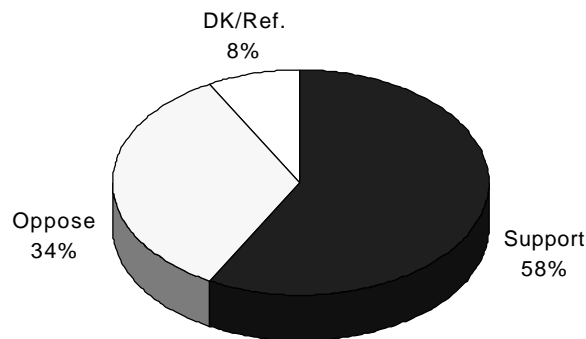
Within each region, federal Liberal Party supporters generally accord the highest ratings for their local highway systems on all considerations. Within the Atlantic region, Alliance supporters also express elevated ratings for local highways. In Québec, the NDP and Bloc Québécois supporters attribute the highest ratings to their local highway systems, while Ontario sees Liberal and NDP supporters expressing these views. In the western regions (including the Prairie provinces and BC), Liberal and PC supporters are most complimentary of their local highway systems.



## C. Support for National Highway Program

Almost three-in-five (58%) Canadians support the federal government in creating a National Highway Program which would be committed to investing in Canada's highway system through a share of gasoline taxes. Approximately one-third of Canadians oppose the proposition (34%), while 8% don't know whether they support or oppose a National Highway Program funded by gasoline taxes.

**Figure 3**  
**Support/Opposition for National Highway Program**



Question: Would you support or oppose the federal government committing to a permanent National Highway Program committed to investing in Canada's highway system through a share of gasoline taxes?

Regionally, support for a National Highway Program funded by gasoline taxes is highest among residents from Ontario (64%) and the Atlantic provinces (60%). Conversely, opposition is most widespread among residents of the Prairie provinces and BC (41% and 38%, respectively).

**Table 3**  
**Support/Opposition for NHP, by Region**

	Support %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
Atlantic	60	33	7
Ontario	64	30	6
Québec	58	32	10
Prairies	53	41	6
BC/Territories	54	38	8

Residents from suburban areas are most likely to express support for the National Highway Program proposal (67%).

**Table 4**  
**Support/Opposition for NHP, by Community Type**

	Support %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
Large City (> 500,000)	59	34	6
Smaller City	59	33	8
Suburban Area	67	30	4
Small Town	56	35	9
Rural Area	55	35	10

Supporters of Canada's traditional federal political parties (62% of Liberal supporters, 61% of PC supporters and 60% of NDP supporters) are more likely than supporters of the Alliance Party (55%) to offer their support for the creation of a National Highway Program. Bloc Québécois voters also express high levels of support for the proposed program (63%).

**Table 5**  
**Support/Opposition for NHP, by Federal Vote Intent**

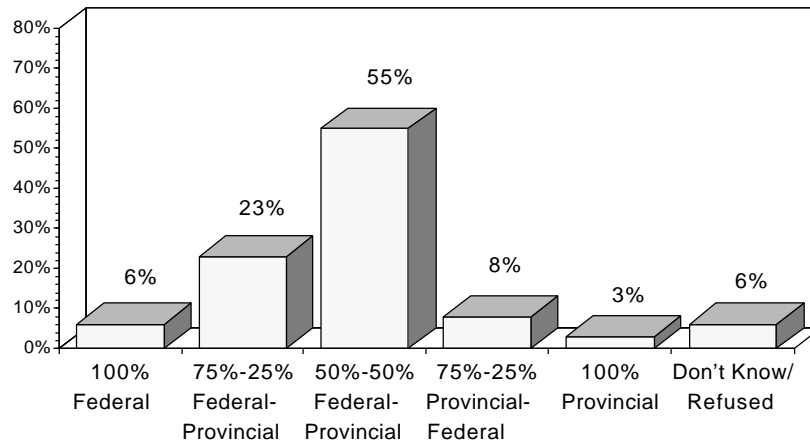
	Support %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
Liberal	62	32	6
PC	61	34	5
NDP	60	33	6
Alliance	55	36	9
Bloc Québécois	63	35	3

## D. Dividing the Cost of Highway Improvement Between Federal and Provincial Governments

More than half of all Canadians believe that the responsibility for funding the improvement of Canada's highway system should be equally shared between the federal and provincial governments (55%). Almost one-quarter (23%) believe the responsibility should be weighted more heavily on the federal government (75% federal / 25% provincial), while less than one-in-ten (6%) feel the federal government should shoulder 100% of the funding responsibility.

Just over one-in-ten (11%) feel the responsibility for funding the improvement of highways should fall predominantly to the provincial governments: 8% report the balance should be 75% provincial/ 25% federal; 3% feel the provincial governments should take 100% of the responsibility.

**Figure 4**  
**Dividing Costs for Highway Improvement**



Question: In your opinion, how should the federal and provincial governments divide the costs of maintaining and improving Canada's highway system?

Residents in the Atlantic and Prairie regions are most likely to suggest that the responsibility for funding highway improvements should fall primarily on the federal government (38% and 37% respectively). Residents in Québec and Ontario are more likely to support the equal sharing option (59% and 57% respectively) and even a larger portion of the responsibility for their respective provincial governments (13% and 12% respectively).

**Table 6**  
**Dividing Costs for Highway Improvement, by Region**

	75%+ Federal %	Equal Fed/Prov %	75%+ Provincial %	Don't know %
Atlantic	38	50	7	5
Québec	24	59	13	4
Ontario	26	57	12	6
Prairies	38	45	10	6
BC/Territories	28	55	9	7

Residents of rural areas are more likely than their cosmopolitan counterparts to opt for the federal government taking on the greatest share of responsibility for the improvement of Canada's highways.

Alliance supporters are the most likely cohort to want to see the Federal government take-on more than 75% of the funding responsibility for the improvement of Canada's highways (37%), while Liberal supporters are least likely to support this option (25%), preferring, instead, that the provinces and the federal government share the responsibility equally (59%). Supporters of the Conservative and NDP parties are also likely to voice this preference (59% and 57%, respectively).

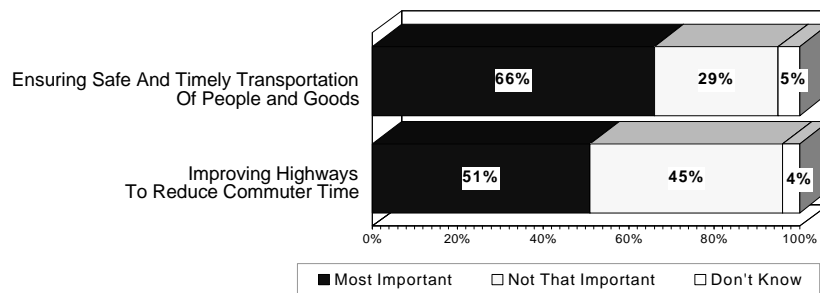
**Table 7**  
**Dividing Costs for Highway Improvement, by Federal Vote Intent**

	75%+ Federal	Equal Fed/Prov	75%+ Provincial	Don't know
Liberal	25	59	11	5
PC	33	59	7	2
NDP	30	57	10	3
Alliance	37	48	11	3
Bloc Québécois	30	58	13	-

## E. Government Helping the Economy and Families

Two-thirds (66%) of Canadians agree that “ensuring the safe and timely transportation of people and goods” is one of the most important things the government can do to help the economy, while just over half (51%) feel that “improving highways so that commuters would spend less time on the road” would be an important contribution to helping Canadian families.

**Figure 5**  
**Government Helping the Economy and Families**



Question: Would you say that ensuring the safe and timely transportation of people and goods is one of the most important things government can do to help the economy or is it not that important?

Would you say that improving highways so that commuters would spend less time on the road would be one of the most important things government can do to help families or is it not that important?

On a regional basis, the general importance of “ensuring the safe and timely transportation of people and goods” exceeds that of “improving highways so commuters spend less time on the road”, with the exception of Québec where only half (52% and 50%, respectively) of all residents feel either contribution would be one of the most important ways in which the government can help the economy and families.

Of all regions, residents of the Atlantic provinces are the most likely to identify the “safe and timely transportation of goods and people” as one of the most important ways in which the government can help the economy (78%). Ontario residents, on the other hand, are the most likely of all regional cohorts to feel that “improving highways so commuters spend less time on roads” is one of the most important ways in which the government can help families (58%).

**Table 8**  
**Percentage Who Feel Contributions are Most Important to Helping**  
**Canadian Economy and Families, by Region**

	Ensuring Safe & Timely Transportation of Goods and People %	Improving Highways so Commuters Spend Less Time %
Atlantic	78	54
Québec	52	50
Ontario	73	58
Prairies	64	40
BC/Territories	66	48

Supporters of the federal Conservative Party are the most likely to report that ensuring the “safe and timely transportation of goods and people” is one of the most important things the government can do to help the economy (76%). By contrast, supporters of the Bloc Québécois are the least likely to report this view (47%).

Overall, support for the proposition that improving highways to reduce commuter time is one of the most important things the government can do for families is less predominant, however it is consistent across voting cohorts.

**Table 9**  
**Percentage Who Feel Contributions are Most Important to Helping**  
**Canadian Economy and Families, by Federal Vote Intent**

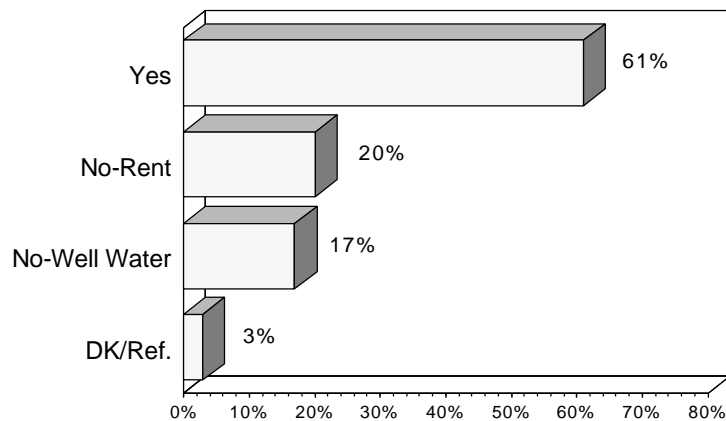
	Ensuring Safe & Timely Transportation of Goods and People	Improving Highways so Commuters Spend Less Time
	%	%
Liberal	68	52
PC	76	53
NDP	69	48
Alliance	68	49
Bloc Québécois	47	47

## V. Canadians' Willingness to Pay for Safe Water

### A. How Canadians Pay for Water

Three-in-five Canadians currently pay for the water that comes through their taps at home (61%). Approximately equal proportions of Canadians report that they do not pay for their water supply as it is either included in their rent (20%) or derived from a well source (17%). Only three percent (3%) don't know how they currently pay for water.

**Figure 6**  
**How Canadians Pay for Water**



Question: Do you or your family currently pay for water that comes through your taps at home?

On a community-to-community basis, direct payment for water is high among residents of cities, while those residing in rural areas are most likely to obtain their water from a well source (63%). Residents of larger and smaller cities also have the highest incidence of having their water accounted for in their rent payments (29% and 22%, respectively).



Regionally, residents of the Atlantic provinces are most likely to obtain their water from well sources (44%), while Québec residents are most likely to have their water supply included in their payment of rent. Subsequently, these two regions are the least likely to pay for their water supply (45% and 48%, respectively).

**Table 10**  
**Payment for Water, by Region**

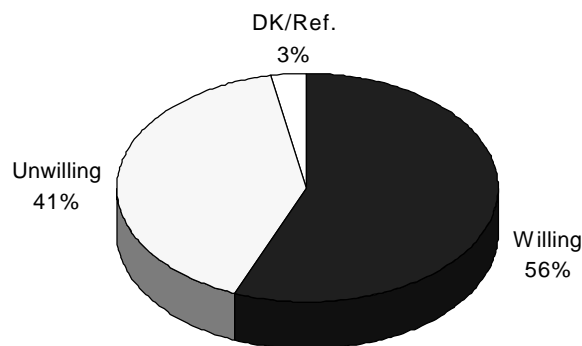
	Pay Directly %	Rent %	Well %
Atlantic	45	10	44
Québec	48	34	14
Ontario	67	16	15
Prairies	70	11	16
BC/Territorie s	63	19	12

## B. Willingness To Pay for Water Treatment

### *i. Among those who Pay for Water*

More than half of all Canadians who currently pay directly for their water supply are willing to pay more on their monthly water bill to ensure that drinking water and sewage are properly treated and safe (56%). Two-in-five are unwilling to pay for such safeguards (41%).

**Figure 7**  
**Willingness to Pay for Water Treatment,**  
**Among Those Who Pay for Water**



Question: (IF YES) Would you be willing or unwilling to pay more on your monthly water bill to ensure that your drinking water and sewage is properly treated and safe?

Willingness to pay for water and sewage treatment is highest among Canadians under the age of 34 (62%) and women (58%).

Residents of Québec are most unwilling to pay for this service (60%) as are residents of rural areas (56%).

**Table 11**  
**Willingness to Pay Higher Monthly Water Bill for Treatment, by Region**

	Willing %	Unwilling %
Atlantic	68	30
Québec	37	60
Ontario	60	37
Prairies	59	38
BC/Territories	59	37

Liberal supporters and supporters of the Bloc Québécois are the least likely to be willing to pay a higher monthly water bill to ensure that drinking water and sewage are properly treated (56% and 46%, respectively). By comparison, nearly two-thirds of all other voting cohorts would be willing to incur the monthly cost.

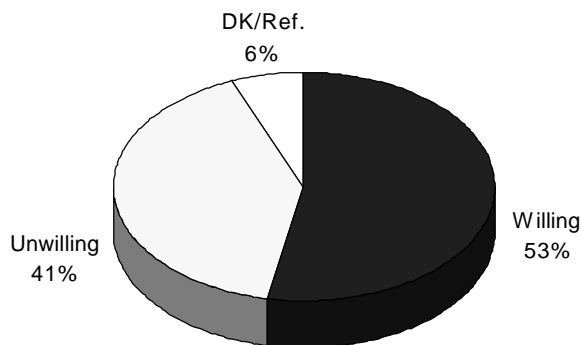
**Table 12**  
**Willingness to Pay Higher Monthly Water Bill  
for Treatment, by Federal Vote Intent**

	Willing %	Unwilling %
Liberal	56	41
PC	69	30
NDP	62	36
Alliance	64	32
Bloc Québécois	46	51

**ii. Among Renters**

Renters express much the same willingness as those who pay directly for their water supply when it comes to incurring increased monthly costs to ensure drinking water and sewage are properly treated and safe (53%). Similarly, two-in-five renters are unwilling to pay more rent to ensure treatment of their water supply (41%).

**Figure 8**  
**Willingness to Pay Higher Monthly Water Bill, Among Renters**



Question: (IF NO-RENT) Would you be willing or unwilling to pay more on your rent bill to cover increased water charges to ensure drinking water and sewage is properly treated and safe?

Once again, women are generally more likely than men to be willing to pay more rent for water and sewage treatment (56% vs. 50%), while young women (and to some extent, young men) are the most willing to absorb these additional monthly costs (61% of women 18 to 34 and 57% of men 18 to 34).

Québec residents are more unwilling than they are willing to pay additional rent to absorb the cost of water treatment.

**Table 13**  
**Willingness to Pay Higher Monthly Rent for Treatment, by Region**

	Willing %	Unwilling %
Atlantic	58	32
Québec	45	52
Ontario	61	31
Prairies	62	29
BC/Territories	57	38

In contrast to findings among Canadians who directly pay their water bills, Liberal and Bloc Québécois supporters who pay for their water through their rent are more likely than other voting cohorts to accept an increase in their rent bill to cover increased water charges to ensure the proper treatment of drinking water and sewage (60% and 54%, respectively).

PC supporters who pay rent are divided on the issue, while Alliance supporters are the most unwilling to accept an increase in their rent (66%).

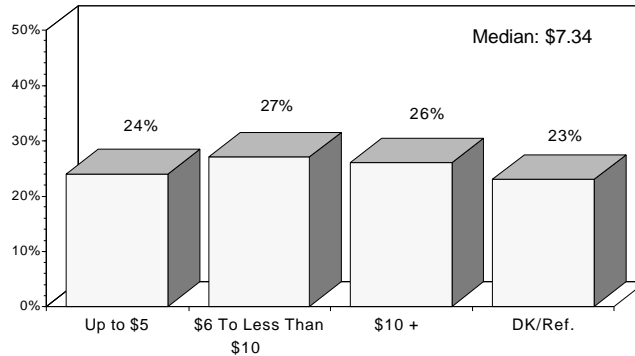
**Table 14**  
**Willingness to Pay Higher Monthly Water Bill for**  
**Treatment, by Federal Vote Intent**

	Willing %	Unwilling %
Liberal	60	37
PC	48	46
NDP	51	44
Alliance	34	66
Bloc Québécois	54	42

## C. Additional Amount Canadians are Willing to Pay for Water Treatment

Among all respondents who indicated that they would be willing to pay an additional monthly fee, whether through rent or direct water billing, one-half would be willing to pay over \$5/month for the service (53%). Specifically, 27% would pay between \$6 and \$10 in addition to what they currently pay, while 26% would pay in excess of \$10 for the service. A slightly smaller proportion (24%) would pay only up to \$5, while 23% don't know how much more they would be willing to pay for water and sewage treatment.

**Figure 9**  
**Additional Amount Canadians are Willing to Pay for Water Treatment**



Question: (IF WILLING TO PAY MORE IN Q.11 & Q.12) How much more would you be willing to pay per month?

Canadians who do not pay directly for water (their payment is either incorporated in their rent or their water is obtained from a well) are more willing to pay elevated fees for water treatment than are Canadians who pay directly for their water. Specifically, more than one-third of those who rent or use well-water (37%) would pay over \$10 to ensure their drinking water and sewage are properly treated. Those who pay directly for their water are more likely to offer less than \$10 for the service.

**Table 15**  
**Additional Amount Canadians are Willing to Pay**  
**for Water Treatment, by Direct Payment of Water Bill**

	< \$5	\$6-\$10	\$10+	Don't know	Median
Yes	26	27	23	24	\$7.98
No*	19	25	37	20	\$9.59

\* "No" includes both Canadians who report they pay for water through monthly rental and those who derive water from a well source.

Regionally, residents of Ontario and the Prairies are least likely to pay anything in excess of \$10 (22% respectively) – approximately three-in-ten Ontario residents will pay between \$6 and \$10 (30%) or less than \$5 (28%). Prairie residents are most willing to pay between \$6 and \$10 for water treatment service (33%), while residents of the Atlantic provinces and Québec are most likely to pay more than \$10 (36% and 34%, respectively).

**Table 16**  
**Additional Amount Canadians are Willing to Pay for**  
**Water Treatment, by Region**

	< \$5	\$6-\$10	\$10+	Don't Know	Median
Atlantic	16	17	36	30	\$10.25
Québec	21	22	34	22	\$9.09
Ontario	28	30	22	21	\$7.61
Prairies	22	33	22	23	\$7.92
BC/Territories	23	20	31	27	\$8.67

Of those Canadians who are willing to pay more for water treatment, whether through direct water bills or through their rent, Bloc Québécois supporters are most likely to offer more than \$10/month for this service (37%). PC (31%), NDP (31%) and Alliance (30%) voters are most likely to be willing to pay between \$6 and \$10, while Liberal voters are most likely to report a willingness to pay no more than \$5 for the service (29%).

**Table 17**  
**Additional Amount Canadians are Willing to Pay for Water Treatment, by Federal Vote Intent**

	< \$5	\$6-\$10	\$10+	Don't	Median
Liberal	29	25	26	21	\$8.14
PC	22	31	18	29	\$7.73
NDP	15	31	33	21	\$9.29
Alliance	28	30	26	16	\$7.86
Bloc Québécois	28	19	37	16	\$9.33