

# **2004 HOV Public Opinion Survey**

by

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INTRODUCTION 3  
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS 3  
COMMUTE CHARACTERISTICS 4  
PUBLIC OPINIONS ON VARIOUS HOV ISSUES 7  
General Perception 7  
HOV Lane Operation 11  
HOV Lane Violations 13

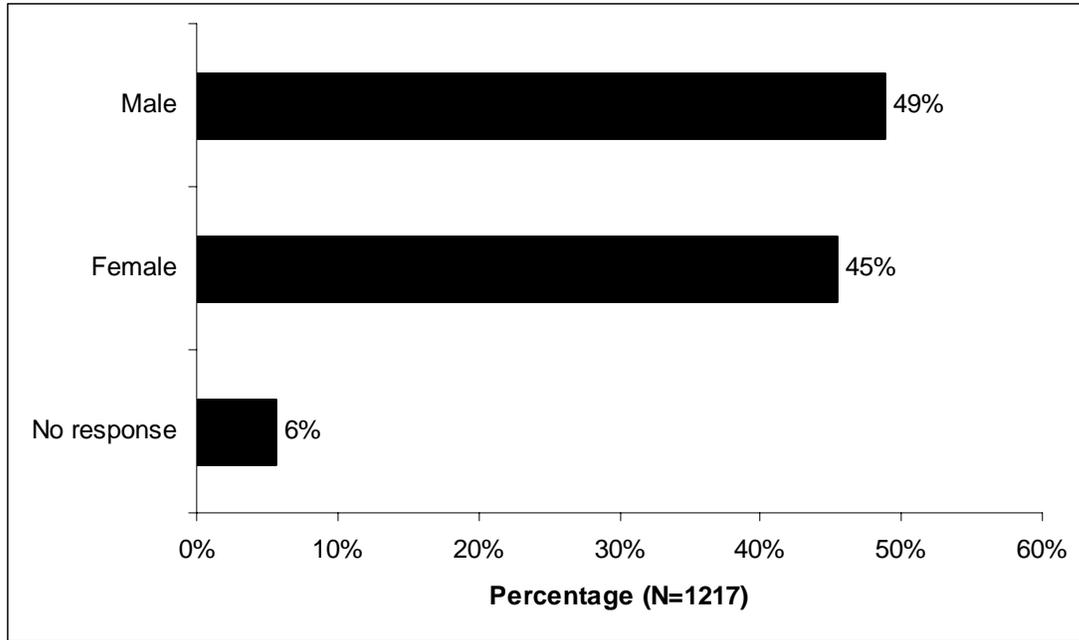
## **INTRODUCTION**

As part of its ongoing HOV lane performance monitoring program, the WSDOT sponsors a public survey concerning HOV lanes. This survey has been administered by the University of Washington and has been performed annually or biannually since 1993. The response rate for the survey has been fairly consistent over the years, normally in the range of 23 percent.

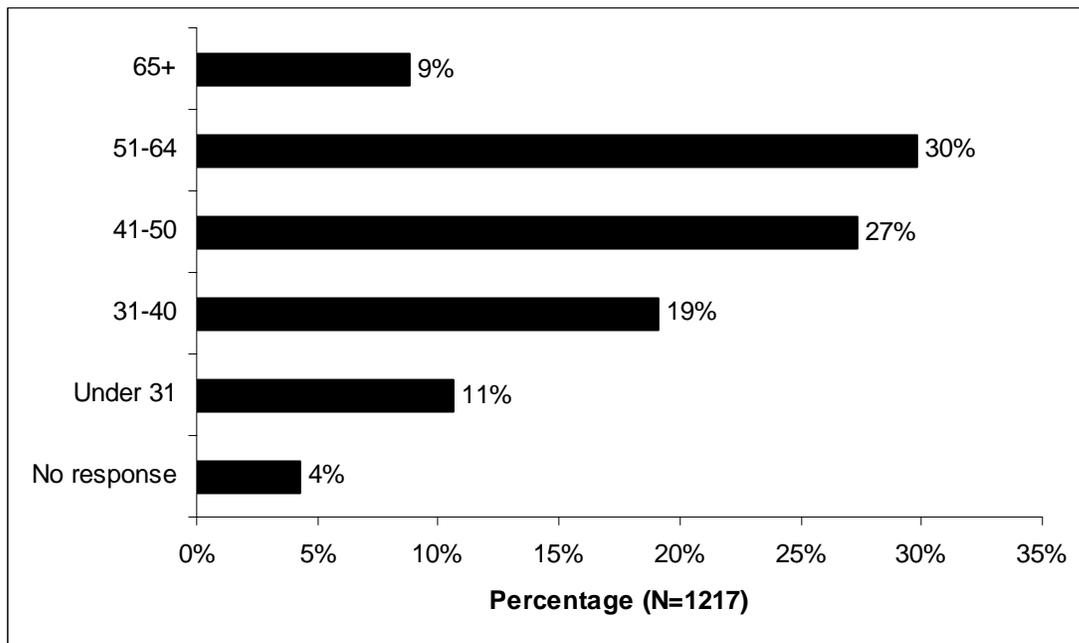
While the survey is anonymous, it is not a true random sample. The survey is targeted to individuals who frequently travel on urban freeways that are served by HOV lanes. In addition, an effort is made to ensure that surveys are filled out by a mixture of people who drive alone, carpool, and take transit. The survey is sent only to the owners of vehicles registered in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties, with an additional sample of surveys handed out to transit riders of bus routes that include HOV lanes. While this approach to survey distribution helps ensure that the opinions of these key groups can be extracted from the survey, it also means that conclusions drawn from the aggregated survey responses should not be considered representative of the total population of either the state or the three-county region. Nevertheless, the data obtained from the survey do provide an excellent description of public opinion regarding the HOV lanes and valuable insight into how key demographic factors affect those opinions.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

The survey respondents were closely divided between male and female. As shown in Figure 1, 49 percent of the respondents were male, whereas 45 percent were female. The age group of the respondents ranged primarily from 31 to 64, as seen in Figure 2.



**Figure 1. Gender of Respondents**



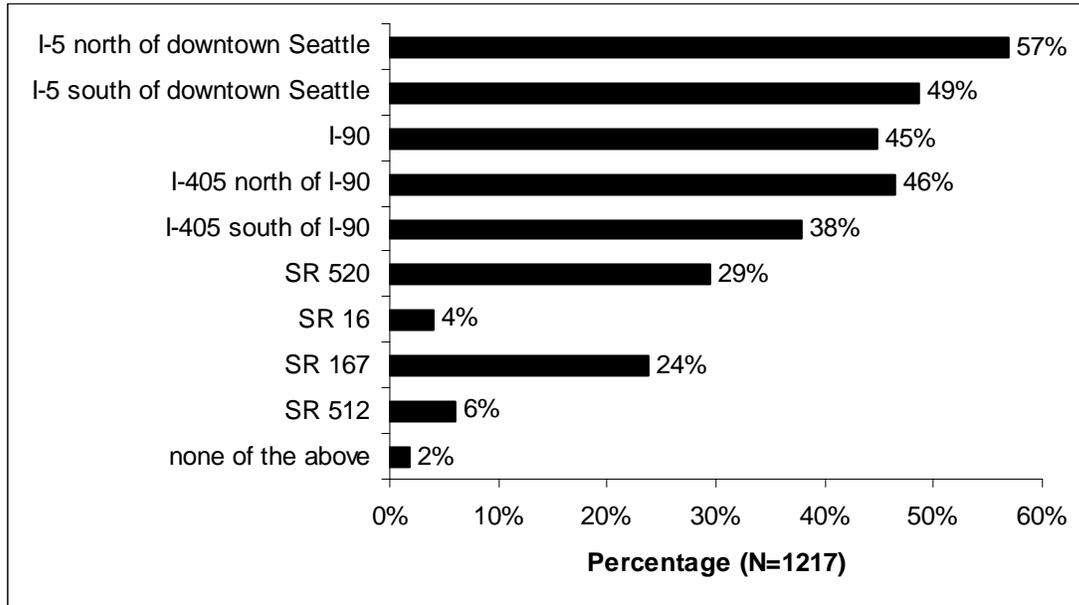
**Figure 2. Age of Respondents**

**COMMUTE CHARACTERISTICS**

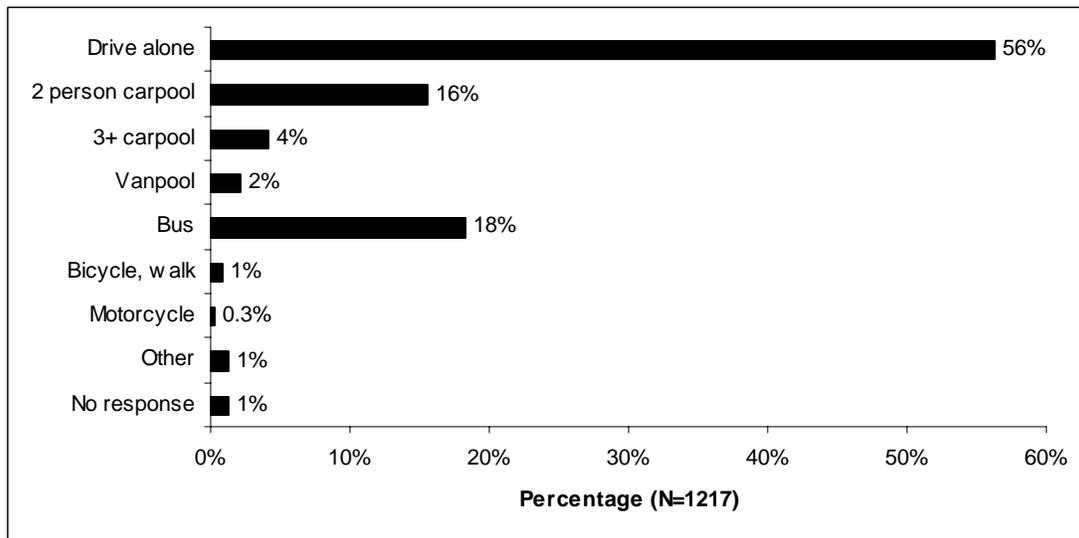
The respondents were asked to describe their commute characteristics, including:

- their frequently used freeways
- their typical commute mode
- whether they had ever used HOV lanes to commute, and in which corridor.

Figure 3 shows the frequently used freeways of the survey respondents. The percentages represent the use of a given corridor by the survey population. Figure 4 displays the usual commute mode of the survey respondents. The majority of respondents are SOV, representing 56 percent, despite efforts to generate comparable samples of HOV and SOV drivers. Forty percent of respondents use rideshare (carpool, vanpool, or bus).

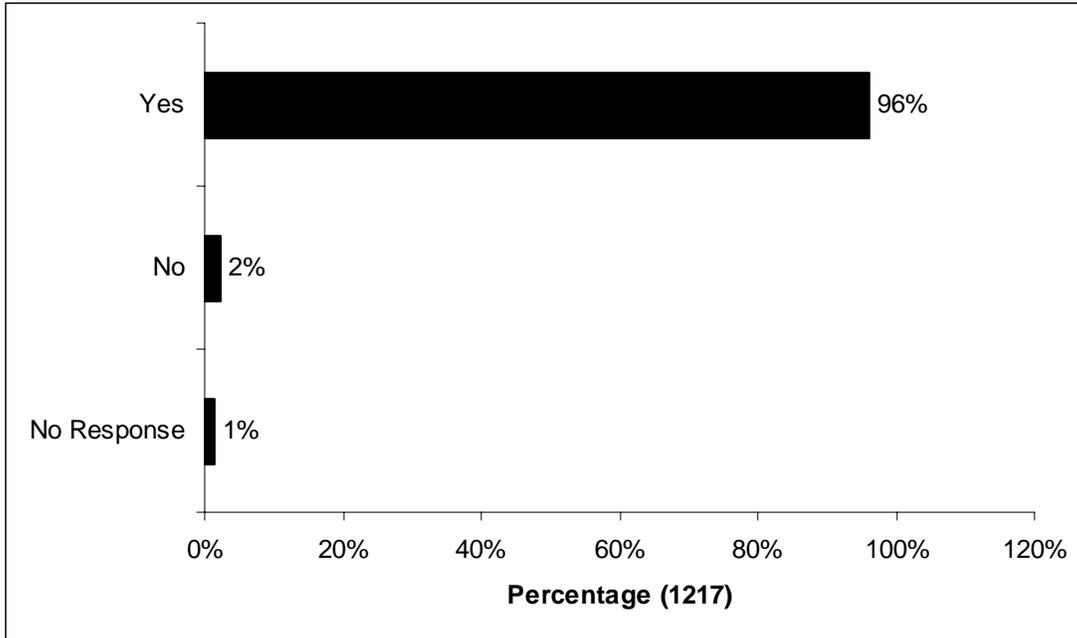


**Figure 3. Frequently used freeways**

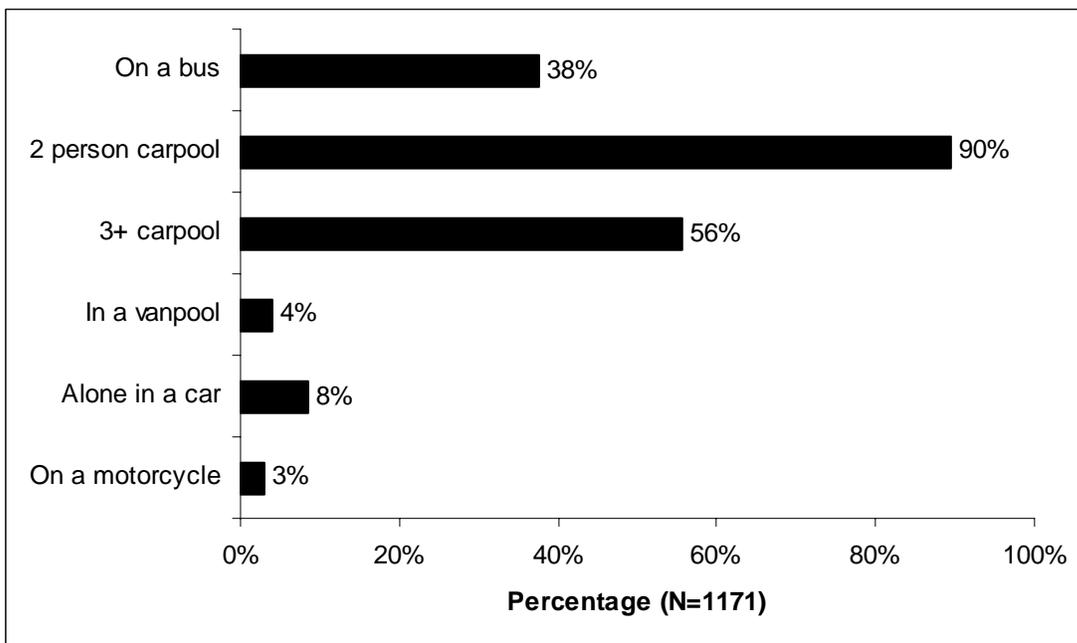


**Figure 4. Usual mode of travel between 6:00 to 9:00 AM and 3:00 to 6:00 PM**

The survey also addressed the HOV lane use of respondents. Figure 5 shows that 96 percent of respondents have used HOV lanes in the Puget Sound area. Figure 6 displays the mode of travel while using these HOV lanes.



**Figure 5. Respondents who have used the HOV lanes in Puget Sound**



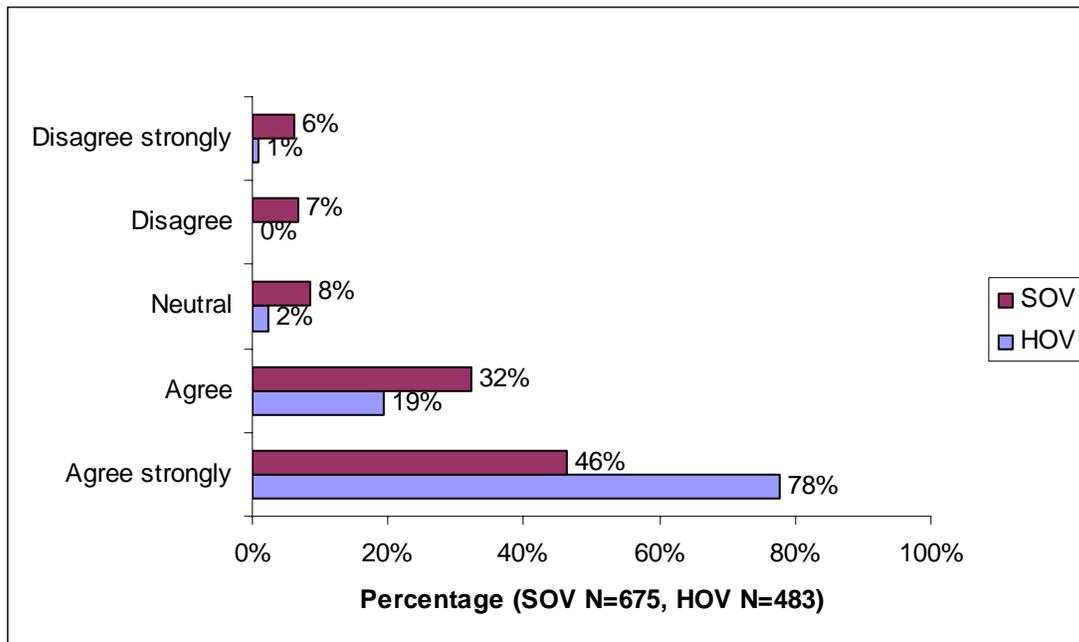
**Figure 6. Past use of HOV lanes**

**PUBLIC OPINIONS ON VARIOUS HOV ISSUES**

The survey responses are broken down by normal commute mode and by the degree to which respondents agree to certain assertions. Sample sizes for both HOV and SOV groups are provided for each question. The SOV group contains those respondents who answered, “Drive alone,” as their usual mode of travel. The HOV group contains those respondents who answered either, “Carpool-you and 1 other person,” “Carpool-you and 2 or more other people,” “Vanpool,” or “Bus” as their usual mode of travel.

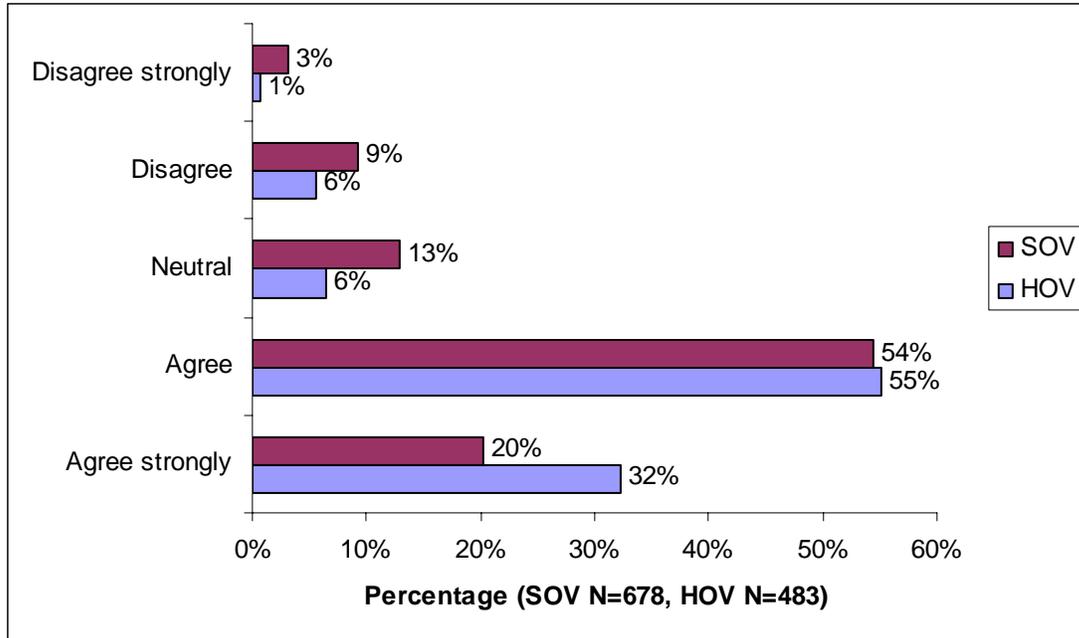
**General Perception**

The support for HOV lanes remains high among all commuters. Figure 7 shows that support for HOV lanes is high among both SOV and HOV drivers. A large majority of both groups agree that HOV lanes are convenient to use, as displayed in Figure 8. Respondents were also asked about utilization of HOV lanes. Thirty-five percent of respondents disagreed that the HOV lanes are adequately used, while 47 percent thought that the lanes were adequately utilized (see Figure 9).

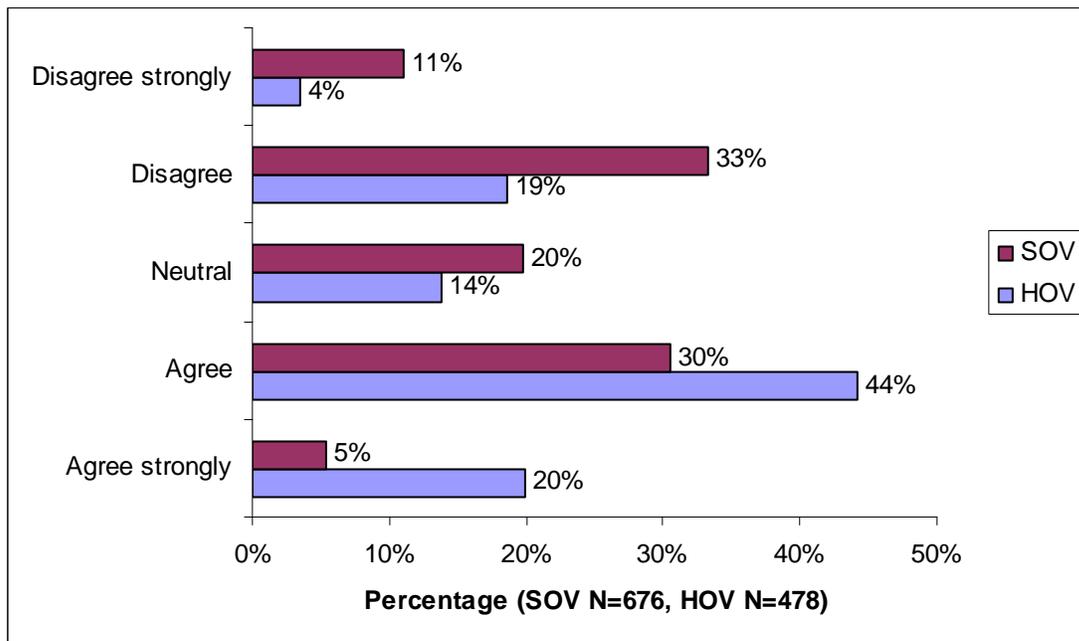


**Figure 7. HOV lanes are a good idea**

SOV: 78%



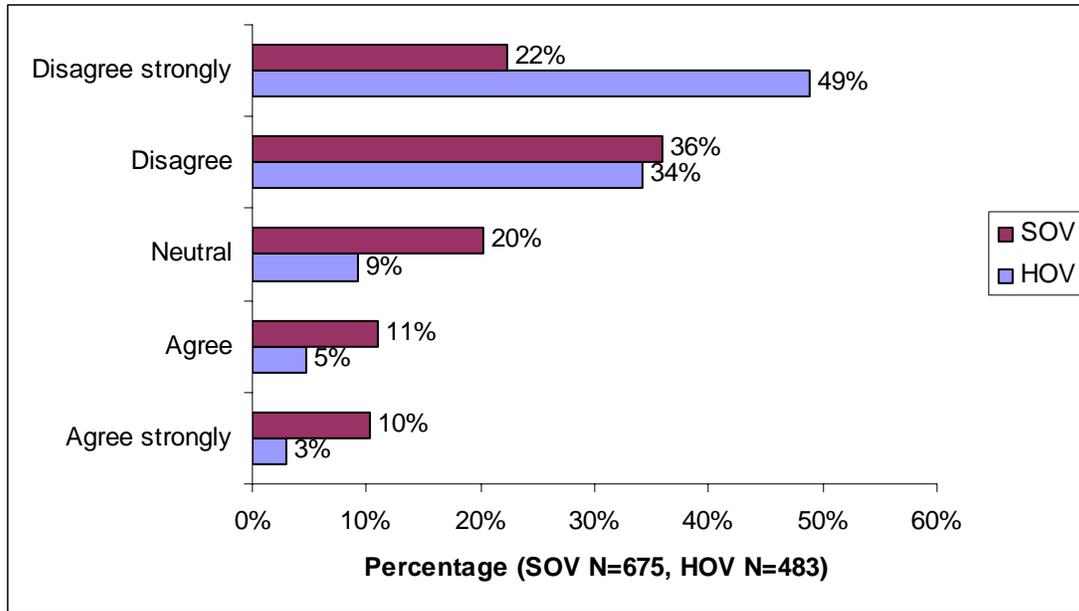
**Figure 8. HOV lanes are convenient to use**



**Figure 9. Existing HOV lanes are being adequately used**

Figures 10 and 11 display that the majority of commuters believe that constructing HOV lanes is a fair use of taxpayers' money and that HOV lane construction should continue. However, when asked about specific construction designs, commuters tend to be more neutral. Figure 12 displays opinions regarding construction of direct

entrance and exit ramps for left side HOV lanes. The neutral responses could be the result of unfamiliarity with this type of ramp and its effect of traffic. When asked about whether HOV lanes help save commuters a lot of time, a difference in opinion is apparent (see Figure 13). SOV users tend to be more negative about travel-time savings due to HOV lanes. The majority of HOV users agree that HOV lanes save commuters' time. Most respondents were neutral or disagreed about the suggestion that vehicles dart in and out of HOV lanes causing the lanes to be unsafe (see Figure 14).



**Figure 10. Constructing HOV lanes is unfair to taxpayers who choose to drive alone**

SOV: 58%

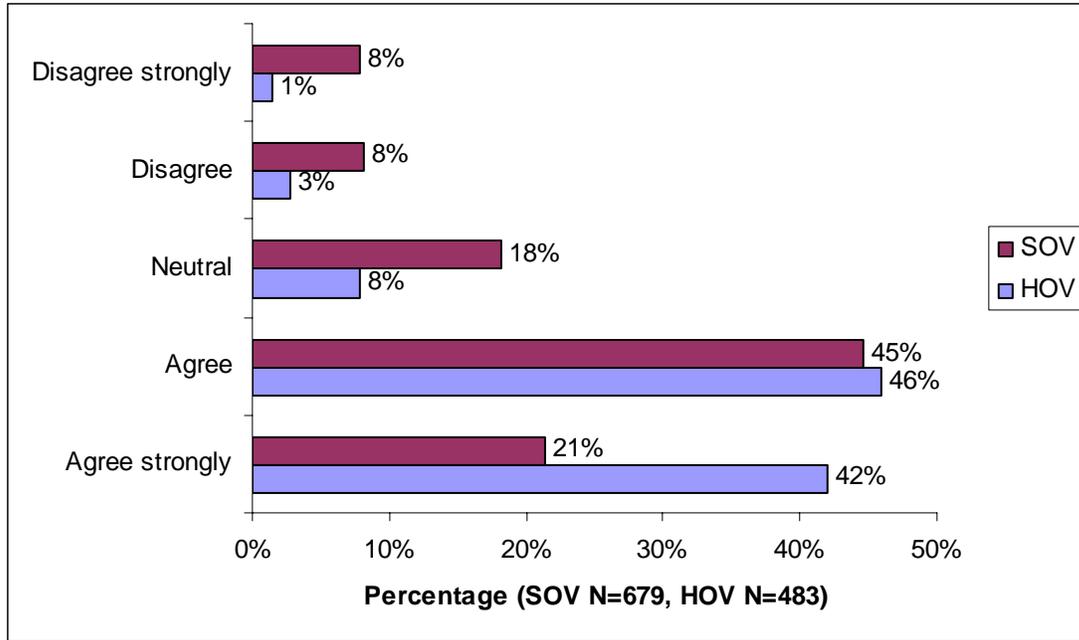


Figure 11. HOV lane construction should continue

SOV: 66%

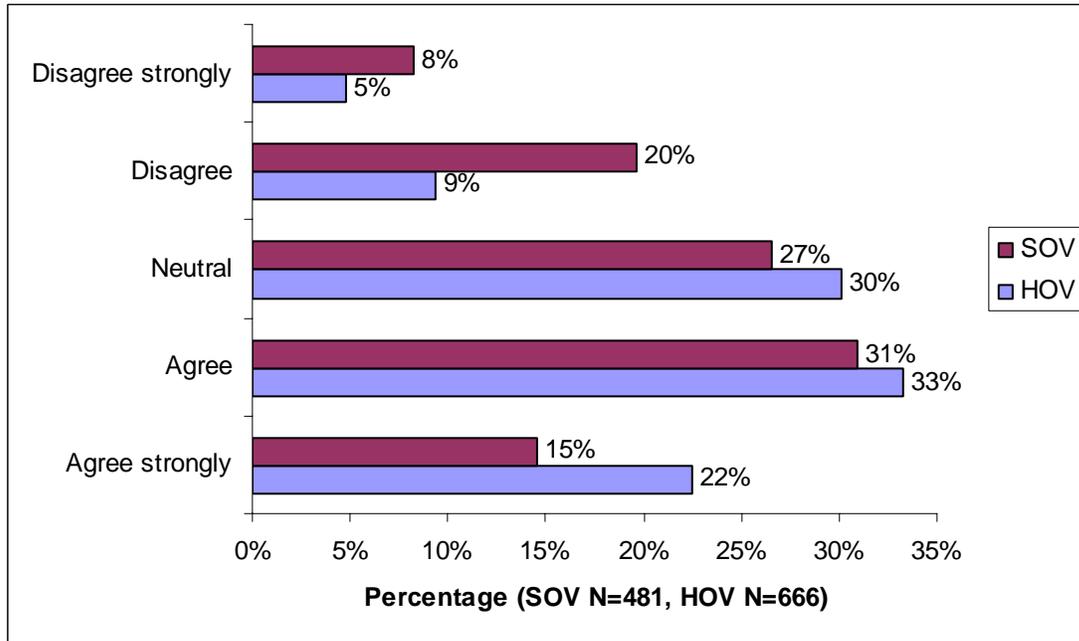


Figure 12. Constructing direct entrance and exit ramps that connect with inside (left side) HOV lanes will improve the freeway

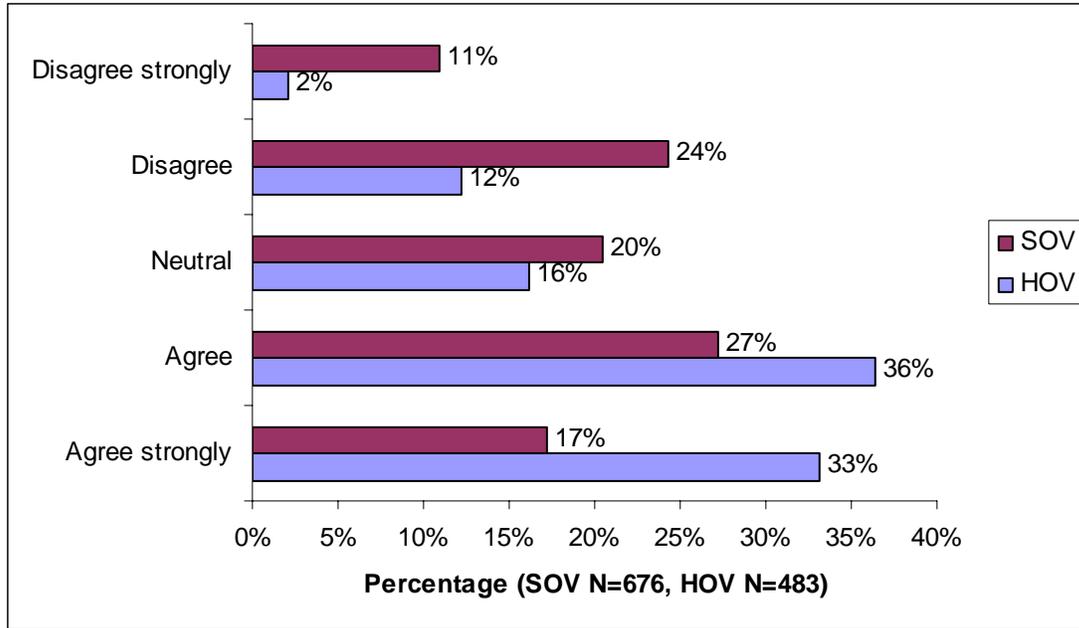


Figure 13. HOV lanes help save all commuters a lot of time

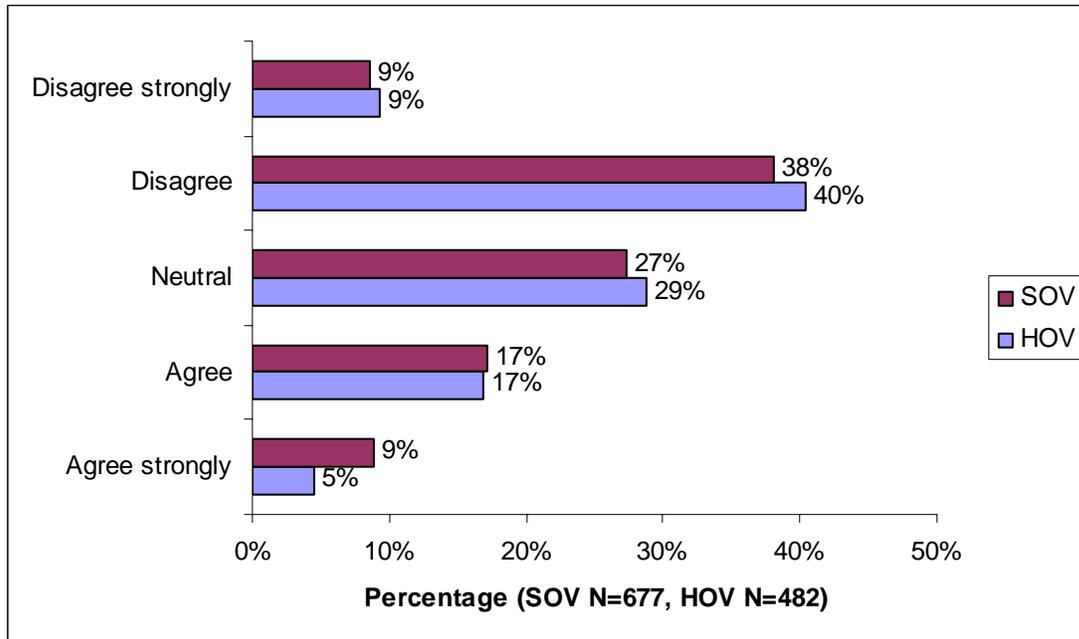


Figure 14. Vehicles dart in and out of HOV lanes too often for the lanes to be safe

**HOV Lane Operation**

Most respondents felt that the HOV lanes should not be open to all traffic, all the time (see Figure 15). Eighty-nine percent of HOV drivers and 66 percent of SOV drivers shared this opinion. Figure 16 shows that SOV users favor opening HOV lanes during non-commute hours, with 72 percent agreeing. HOV drivers remain somewhat

undecided on this issue, but the percentage of HOV users that agree has increased from previous surveys.

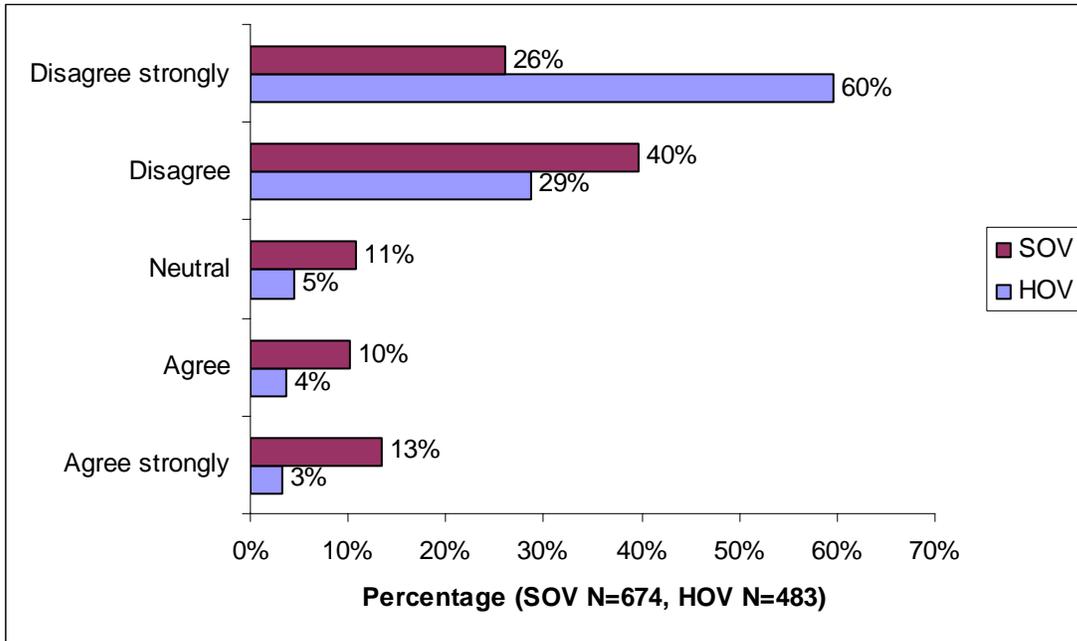


Figure 15. HOV lanes should be open to all traffic, all the time

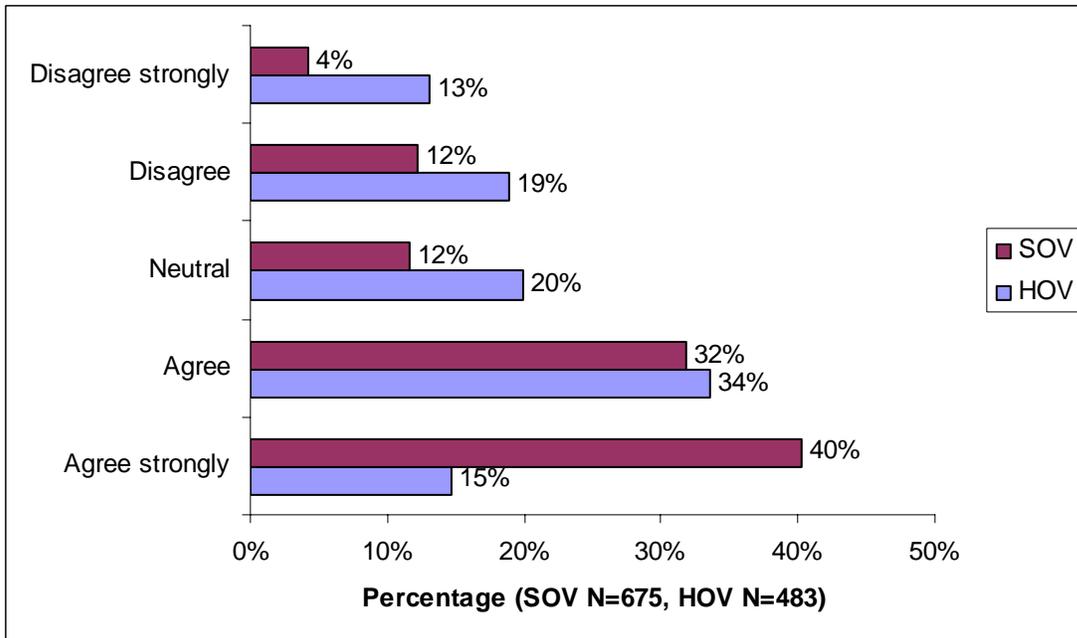
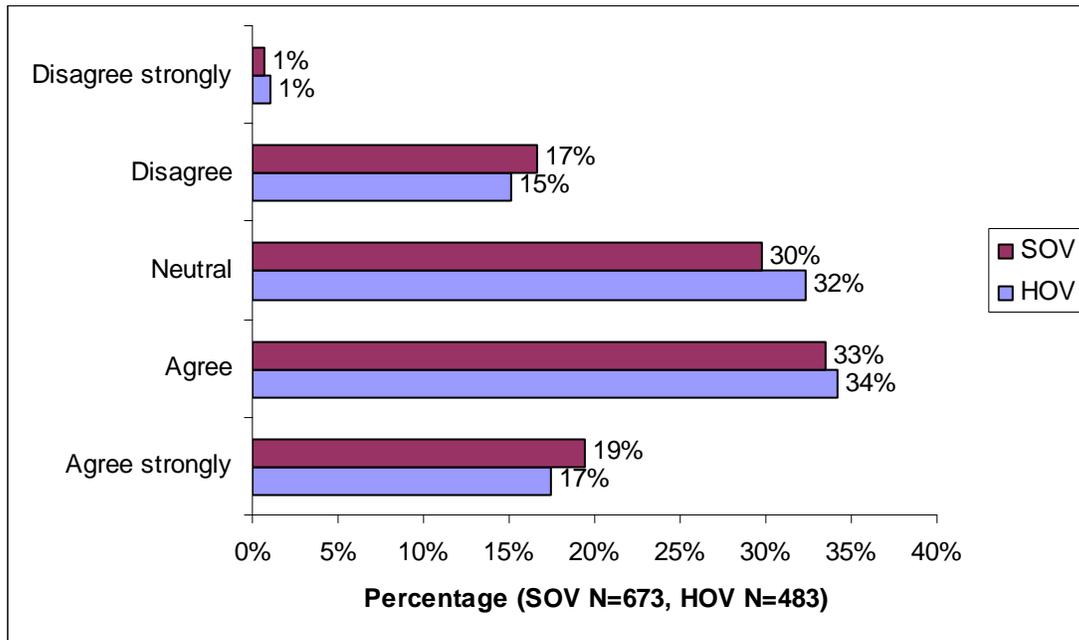


Figure 16. HOV lanes should be opened to all traffic during non-commute hours

**HOV Lane Violations**

HOV and SOV users share common opinions about how common HOV lane violations are during commute hours (see Figure 17). Figure 18 demonstrates that both groups appear to resent HOV lane violators, considering it to be a serious traffic violation. The majority of commuters were neutral about the usefulness of the HERO program to report HOV lane violations, as seen in Figure 19. This result suggests that further public education is still necessary to provide commuters with a better understanding of the important role 764-HERO plays in controlling lane violations. Figure 20 shows that the majority of commuters agree or are neutral about the need for more police enforcement of HOV lanes. This opinion is consistent with the evidence that commuters believe HOV lane violations are serious traffic violations.



**Figure 17. HOV lane violations are common during the commute hours**

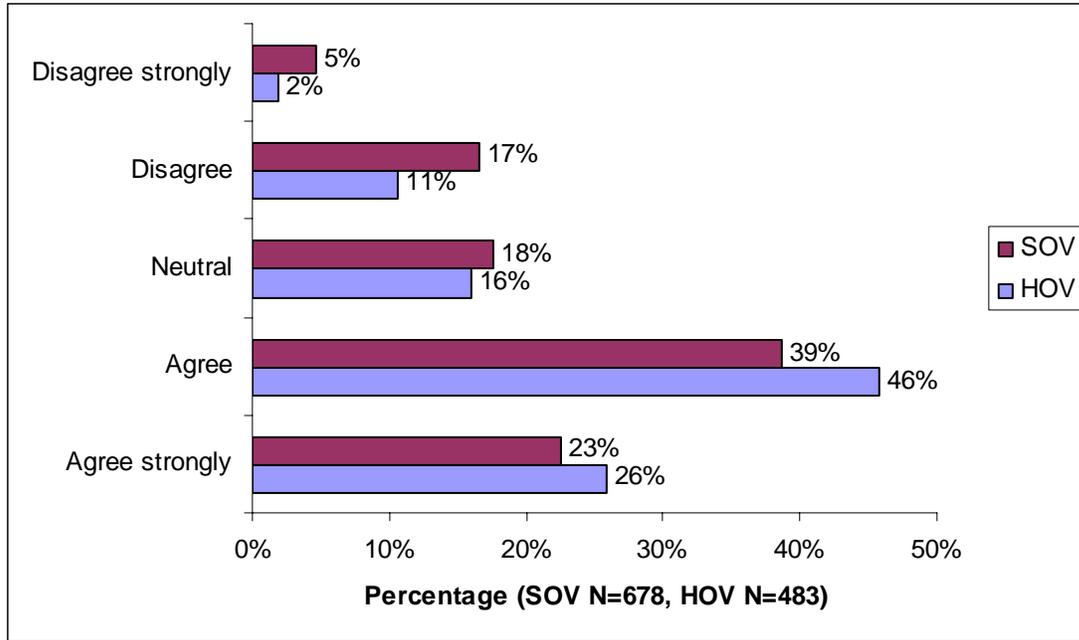


Figure 18. HOV lane violators commit a serious traffic violation

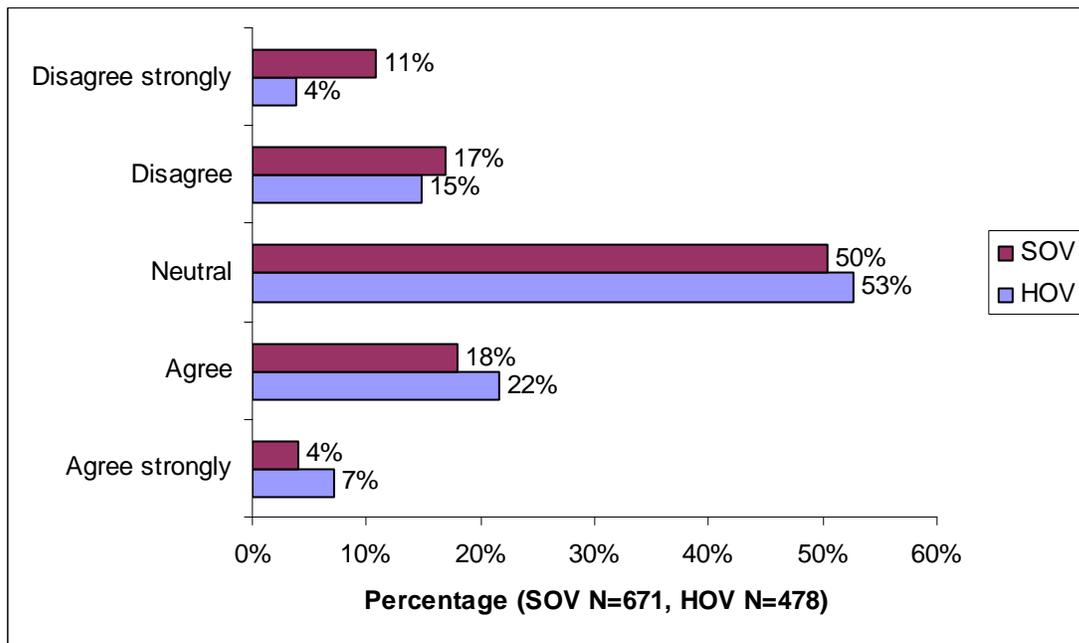


Figure 19. The HERO program helps reduce HOV lane violations [by encouraging commuters to report HOV lane violators at (206) 764-HERO]

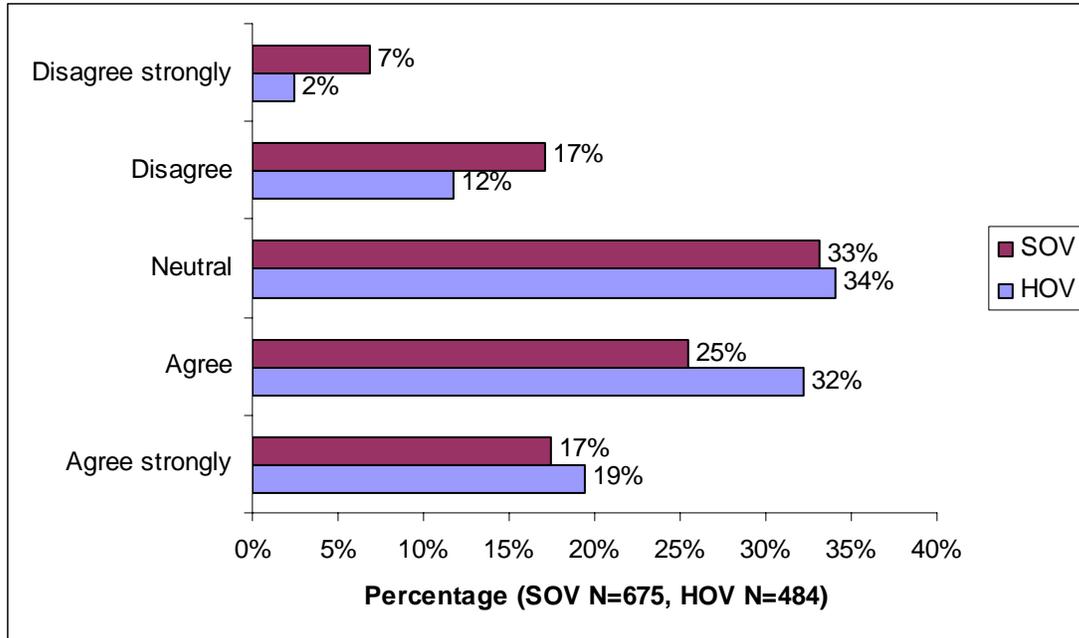


Figure 20. More police enforcement is needed for HOV lanes