

# Omaha Conditions Survey: 2004

## Residents' Views of the Best and Worst Aspects of the Omaha Area

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One of the primary purposes of the Omaha Conditions Survey: 2004 was to collect information on how residents view the Omaha area and their neighborhoods—what the best and worst attributes are and what problems leaders should be addressing. The 1994 Omaha Conditions Survey had a similar focus; thus, comparing the survey results depicts how perceptions have changed over the ten-year period.

Separate open-ended survey questions asked respondents what they felt were the three best and the three worst aspects of the Omaha area. Another open ended question asked their opinion on the three most important problems the Omaha area should be trying to address. Respondents who listed combinations of crime, drugs, or gangs for the worst aspects and/or problems to address were given the opportunity to mention additional items.

Likewise, the same question about the most important problem to address was asked regarding the respondent's neighborhood. However, respondents were asked to state only one item, versus listing three items when answering about the entire Omaha area.

The open-ended format was used since it allows respondents to characterize issues in their own words. In addition, answers to open-ended questions show all of the respondents' priority issues, including those that researchers might not anticipate

or include as specific answer choices when developing a social survey.

To classify the open-ended responses, categories were developed and the responses were assigned to the most appropriate category. Responses that listed multiple items were assigned to a maximum of two categories; specifically, the first two separate items listed were analyzed and classified, with additional items excluded from the analysis.

Placing limits on the number of items mentioned prevented the overrepresentation of one respondent's viewpoints. The first two items mentioned were viewed as having primary importance, with additional statements related to and often used to further describe the already mentioned item(s). Thus, a hypothetical response such as "all the crime—we need policemen" was assigned to two categories: *crime* and *law enforcement*. Similar statements like "the crime, we need more police; they say there's no budget to hire more police" were also assigned to two categories, the first two listed: *crime* and *law enforcement* while the statement regarding the "budget" was not classified into a category.

The total number of responses classified into each specific category represented the sum total for each category. These category totals were then divided by the total number of persons who gave a classifiable response to the question and multiplied by 100 to express the figures as percentages. The percentages do not add up to 100 percent since each respondent could give up to three separate responses and responses could be classified into two categories. All of the tables

in this report are constructed as a ranking of the various categories' percentages, indicating how often a category was mentioned relative to all other categories.

## Best Aspects of the Omaha Area

Table 1 presents summary information on the categories of items most often mentioned in response to the question “In your opinion, what are the three best things about the Omaha area?”.

Entertainment, cultural activities, or other comments about “many things to do” were mentioned most frequently by 32.9 percent of respondents as being a best aspect about the Omaha area. Five other attributes were mentioned by 20 percent or more of the respondents: schools and education (26.5 percent), friendly people (24.4 percent), comments about the size of the city (23.3 percent), the quality of life or being a good place to live (22.7 percent), and jobs and business opportunities (21.7 percent).

Filling out the top 10 most mentioned items were ease of travel and short travel times, low crime, shopping, and the low cost of living.

## Variations in the Perceptions of the Best Aspects of the Omaha Area

To better understand respondents' views, the five most frequently mentioned categories of items were examined across population subgroups using demographic characteristics of the respondents such as age, gender, race,<sup>1</sup> marital status, family status (children under 18 in household), income, educational attainment, and whether the respondents indicated they lived in a neighborhood. Several interesting patterns were identified and are highlighted in the following sections.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1: Respondents' Views of the Best Things About the Omaha Area, 2004**

Rank	Description	Percent
1	Entertainment and cultural activities (many things to do)	32.9
2	Schools, education	26.5
3	Friendly people	24.4
4	Size of city	23.3
5	Quality of life, good place to live	22.7
6	Jobs and business opportunities	21.7
7	Ease of travel, short distances/travel times	18.7
8	Low crime, safe	11.7
9	Shopping	11.1
10	Low cost of living	9.9
11	Downtown, Old Market, Qwest Center	9.5
12	Location	7.9
13	Eating and drinking places	7.3
14	Medical and health	6.7
15	Quality of the environment	6.2
16	Weather, climate	6.0
17	Sports (including golf courses)	5.5
18	Growth, development	5.4
19	Parks, recreation, trails	5.3
20	Family here, born here, home	5.0
21	Good government and services	4.2
22	Cultures, diversity	2.7
23	Churches	1.5
24	Housing	1.4
24	Good police/fire protection	1.4
26	Good leaders, people trying to improve the city	1.1

Valid cases: 772

### Entertainment and Cultural Activities:

Little variation was noted among the Omaha-area residents who listed entertainment and cultural activities as a best aspect of the Omaha area. Thus, the plurality of respondents who listed an item related to “many things to do” did not vary much by demographic characteristics—entertainment and cultural activities were viewed as an attribute by young and old, White and non-White, and married and non-married alike (among others). Women, when compared to men, did list this item significantly more often statistically.

**Schools and Education:** Not surprisingly, schools and education were mentioned most frequently by people who had children under age 18 living in their household. However, no statistically significant differences were noted by age, showing that various age groups such as those 35 to 49 most likely to be parents, those 65 and older, and college ages of 19 to 24 all listed schools and education about the same amount.

Those defined as living in a neighborhood listed schools and education more often than those not living in a neighborhood.

**Friendly People:** Respondents with a Bachelor's Degree or more education listed the people being friendly most often compared to other education levels. Those living in a neighborhood also listed friendly people more often—the percentage of those living in a neighborhood mentioning friendly people was twice as high as among those not living in a neighborhood.

**City Size:** Those mentioning comments about the city's size varied significantly statistically by three demographic characteristics. Those with higher incomes and those with more education listed this item more frequently. Additionally, Whites mentioned the size of the city more often than non-Whites.

**Quality of Life, Good Place to Live:** Non-Whites and those respondents living in neighborhoods were most likely to indicate the quality of life as a best aspect of the Omaha area. One in three non-Whites mentioned Omaha being a good place to live compared to about one in five Whites doing likewise. This trend by race is the reverse of the previously-mentioned item regarding city size.

### **Comparisons with 1994**

Table 2 (end of report) presents comparisons among the top items listed regarding the best aspects of Omaha in the 1994 and 2004 Omaha Conditions Surveys. The categories and methods used to classify the open-ended responses are not identical, as some categories have been added and others deleted between the surveys. Generally, the items mentioned as the best aspects of Omaha have a great deal of similarity between 1994 and 2004. The top 10 items in 2004 were all in the

top 10 in 1994, with the exception of shopping, which was ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in 1994. Some changes occurred in the percentage of respondents mentioning the specific categories.

One major difference was the decline in the ranking and percentage of those listing jobs and business opportunities as a best aspect of Omaha. Jobs slipped from being the most mentioned item in 1994 at 33.8 percent to 6<sup>th</sup> at 21.7 percent in 2004. The response patterns likely reflect differing economic conditions in 1994 and 2004 to an extent, but the decline of 12 percentage points mentioning jobs was substantial.

The percentage stating entertainment and cultural activities rose by about 4 percentage points and now ranks highest among all categories in 2004 versus being 4<sup>th</sup> in 1994. New features added to the Henry Doorly Zoo since 1994 and an increase in entertainment events offered by the recently-opened Qwest Center likely led in part to this increase. Specific mentions of the Qwest Center were classified in a separate category; the Qwest Center, when combined with items related to downtown and the Old Market, ranked 11<sup>th</sup> overall regarding best aspects of Omaha (Table 1).

Schools and education and friendly people continued to hold the second and third highest rankings in 2004. The percentage of respondents mentioning these specific items did decrease several percentage points however. Conversely, the percentage indicating quality of life was essentially unchanged while maintaining its fifth-place ranking.

The mention of an aspect related to the size of the city increased several percentage points, raising the ranking of this item from 7<sup>th</sup> in 1994 to 4<sup>th</sup> in 2004. The opposite is true regarding low crime, which declined several percentage points and fell from ranking 6<sup>th</sup> in 1994 to 8<sup>th</sup> in 2004.

The percentage mentioning short travel times and distances increased from 15.4 percent in 1994 to 18.7 percent in 2004, raising its ranking one notch from 8<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>. The 2004 American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau showed that Omaha had the

5<sup>th</sup> lowest commute time out of 70 major U.S. cities having 250,000 or more population at 17.8 minutes.<sup>3</sup>

## Worst Aspects of the Omaha Area

Table 3 summarizes the categories of items mentioned in response to the question “In your opinion, what are the three worst things about the Omaha area?”. The data in Table 3 were developed using the process described earlier. Table 3 shows that the category of items mentioned most often related to road and streets. This included items on road conditions, road construction, and the planning of road and construction projects. Road items were listed by 41.0 percent of respondents.

Traffic and traffic congestion were a separate category. Items related to traffic were mentioned by 13.1 percent of respondents, the sixth highest total among all categories. Thus, road items and traffic were viewed as key items regarding worst aspects of the Omaha area by a large portion of respondents.

Recall that short distances/travel times ranked 7<sup>th</sup> regarding the best aspects of the Omaha area, an apparent contradiction. One explanation is that Omaha-area residents believe they have short travel times even though they have to fight traffic congestion and construction while making their way through the city.

Another explanation is that Omaha-area residents are polarized regarding road construction and traffic, either being a big problem if routinely traveling in areas with construction and congestion, or travel times being a positive if normal personal routes avoid such areas. The Omaha Conditions Survey: 2004 shows that over one-third of respondents considered both the smoothness or roads/streets and traffic flow to be important and that they were dissatisfied with them at the present time,

by far the highest level of all conditions/services asked about in the survey.

**Table 3: Respondents' Views of the Worst Things About the Omaha Area, 2004**

Rank	Description	Percent
1	Roads, road construction, roads planning	41.0
2	High taxes (includes vehicle licensing)	34.7
3	Crime, violence	22.0
4	Local government	17.9
5	Climate, weather	16.5
6	Traffic	13.1
7	Entertainment, not enough to do	13.0
8	Neighborhood improvement, beautification	8.5
9	People and community attitude	7.7
10	Race relations and issues, immigration	7.6
11	Suburban and urban development	7.3
12	Lack of jobs and business opportunities	6.0
13	Get better leaders	5.5
14	Youth needs	5.2
15	Location and natural resources	5.1
16	Law enforcement	4.6
17	Gambling issue	4.3
18	Size (city too big/too small)	3.8
18	Schools, education	3.8
20	Public transportation	3.3
21	Cost of living	2.5
21	Gangs	2.5
21	Infrastructure expansion	2.5
24	Drugs	2.0
24	General safety issues	2.0
24	City image	2.0
27	Quality of the environment, recycling	1.7
28	Housing problems and issues	1.6
29	Big business/corporations; mass media	1.5
29	Better jobs, higher wages	1.5
31	General infrastructure issues	1.4
31	General social issues	1.4
33	Poverty	1.3
33	Balance the budget, stay within the budget	1.3
35	Keeping people in Omaha (especially younger residents)	1.0
36	Homelessness	0.9

Valid Cases: 761

Respondents mentioned items related to taxation or paying a “high” level of taxes second most frequently regarding the worst aspects of Omaha. Nearly 35 percent of respondents listed an item related to taxation. Following third was crime and violence at 22.0 percent. The local government was mentioned by 17.9 percent of respondents and complaints regarding the climate and weather in Omaha rounded out the top 5 worst aspects of the Omaha area (16.5 percent). The Omaha Conditions Survey: 2004 was conducted in the spring after the Omaha area

had received record snowfall in the preceding winter months.

Like traffic congestion and short travel times, the lack of entertainment and things to do was in the top 10 worst items (13.0 percent) while a related item, entertainment and cultural activities, was listed in the top 10 best items, ranking first. Thus, while entertainment is commonly cited as a best part of Omaha, expanded entertainment and “things to do” are sought by area residents. The same pattern regarding entertainment being in the top 10 best and worst aspects also occurred in the 1994 Omaha Conditions Survey.

Other items in the top 10 worst aspects included the need for neighborhood improvement and beautification, the people and community attitude, and issues related to race relations and immigration.

### **Variations in the Perceptions of the Worst Aspects of the Omaha Area**

The following sections compare the five items ranked as worst about the Omaha area across demographic characteristics of the respondents. The characteristics compared are the same as those used in the previous section regarding the best aspects of the Omaha area (age, gender, income, etc.).

**Roads, Road Construction, Roads Planning:** Respondents who listed road items did not vary much by demographic characteristics—roads were viewed as a worst part of Omaha by young and old, White and non-White, and married and non-married alike (among others). Those with higher incomes did list road items significantly more often. Omaha-area residents with higher incomes tend to live in the western parts of Douglas County or surrounding metro-area counties, where road construction projects have been numerous. Road planning in these areas

has had increased importance given new housing development and associated new road construction, coupled with a strained capacity of existing roads.

**High Taxes:** In contrast to roads, those who listed high taxes as a worst part of Omaha varied significantly statistically by several demographic characteristics. Not surprisingly, homeowners listed taxes more often than renters as they pay property taxes on the homes they own. Those persons who were married and those living in a neighborhood also listed this item more often. Those aged 50 to 64 years were most likely to say high taxes while people aged 19 to 24 were least likely to list this item. In addition, those with higher incomes listed high taxes more often. Many of these demographic characteristics are correlated with home ownership, as those older, married, and with higher incomes are more likely to own their residences and pay associated property taxes.

**Crime:** Those mentioning crime also varied by several demographic characteristics. In general, trends by demographic characteristics for those mentioning crime were the opposite from those who mentioned high taxes described above. Renters, those not living in a neighborhood, those with lower incomes, and those with less education listed crime significantly more often statistically. In addition, women and those who were widowed listed crime more often.<sup>4</sup> Thus, response patterns show two separate demographic groups who indicated either crime or high taxes as a worst aspect of the Omaha area.

**Local Government:** Those who listed aspects of local government differed by age and neighborhood status. Those 65 and over were most likely to mention local government, followed by those 50 to 64 and then by those 35 to 49. Those who indicated that they lived in a neighborhood also listed items related to local government significantly more often than those who did not consider themselves living in a neighborhood.

**Climate and Weather:** Men listed the climate and weather of Omaha as a worst aspect more often than women. Those without children under 18 living in the household and those with more education also mentioned this item more often. Those listing the climate and weather did not vary significantly statistically by the other demographic characteristics compared.

### **Comparisons with 1994**

Several substantial changes in both the ranking and percent of respondents listing specific items have occurred in the ten-year period between the 1994 and 2004 Omaha Conditions Surveys. Most notably, the percentage of respondents indicating crime as a worst aspect of Omaha dropped sharply between 1994 and 2004. In 1994, crime was overwhelmingly the most mentioned item, with 67.5 percent of respondents mentioning crime (Table 4). That figure was only 22.0 percent in 2004, about one-third the 1994 level. Among all items, crime ranked as the 3<sup>rd</sup> most mentioned item in 2004, after being by far the item mentioned most often in 1994.

Conversely, the percentage indicating road items and high taxes as a worst aspect of Omaha both doubled between 1994 and 2004. Road items were mentioned 2<sup>nd</sup> most often in 1994 by 20.3 percent of respondents. The 2004 figure for road items of 41.0 percent made it the item most often mentioned in the 2004 survey. The relative ranking regarding high taxes also increased from 4<sup>th</sup> most mentioned in 1994 to the 2<sup>nd</sup> most mentioned in 2004. As indicated above, the percentage citing high taxes was twice as high in 2004 (34.7 percent) as in 1994 (15.3 percent).

The relative ranking also increased for responses regarding the local government and climate/weather. In 2004, local government had the 4<sup>th</sup> highest number of

responses versus being 5<sup>th</sup> in 1994. The percentage citing local government items increased a small amount, from 15.1 percent in 1994 to 17.9 percent in 2004. The percentage citing climate and weather items increased a larger amount, from 9.4 percent in 1994 to 16.5 percent in 2004. This increased the ranking of climate and weather to the 5<sup>th</sup> most mentioned item in 2004, after being 8<sup>th</sup> in 1994. The responses regarding climate and weather are likely related to the timing of the 2004 Omaha Conditions Survey, which was conducted in April of 2004 after the Omaha area experienced record snowfall in the preceding winter months.

The relative ranking regarding traffic and lack of entertainment held steady when comparing the 1994 and 2004 surveys. Respondents cited traffic as a worst aspect of Omaha 6<sup>th</sup> most often in both surveys while the lack of entertainment ranked 7<sup>th</sup> highest in each survey. The percentage mentioning each of these items did increase a small amount between 1994 and 2004.

The percentage mentioning the people and community attitude nearly doubled from 4.2 percent in 1994 to 8.1 percent in 2004. This ranked the people and community attitude the 9<sup>th</sup> most mentioned item in 2004, a new item in the top 10 after being ranked 17<sup>th</sup> highest in 2004. The jump of 8 spots from 17<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> most mentioned was the largest ranking movement among the various categories of responses regarding the worst aspects of the Omaha area.

### **Most Important Problems for the Omaha Area to Address**

When asked about “the three most important problems that the Omaha area should be trying to address”, one-third of respondents (33.6 percent) mentioned an item related to roads (Table 5). Road items included responses regarding street conditions, road construction, and roads planning (construction projects and new roads). Similar to the question on the worst aspects of the Omaha area, road items were the most mentioned

category of items regarding priority problems to address.

The next most mentioned categories of items regarded high taxes and the tax system, and crime and violence, with about 3 in 10 respondents mentioning these items (30.5 and 29.5 percent respectively). These items also ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> regarding worst aspects of Omaha, although the percentages had more separation (Table 3: 34.7 percent regarding high taxes versus 22.0 percent for crime and violence).

Somewhat fewer respondents mentioned schools and education as a priority problem to address. Approximately 20 percent of respondents mentioned this item, versus around 30 percent for the three most mentioned items.

While the three most mentioned items regarding priority problems were also the three most mentioned items regarding worst aspects of the Omaha area, schools and education as the 4<sup>th</sup> most mentioned priority problem, was rarely mentioned regarding the worst aspects of Omaha. Only 3.8 percent mentioned schools or education as a worst aspect, ranking this item 18<sup>th</sup> highest (Table 3). In comparison, schools and education ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> regarding best aspects of Omaha, with 26.5 percent listing this item (Table 1). Thus, Omaha-area residents consider schools and education more of a best aspect than a worst aspect, but many consider it an area to address or improve.

Respondents mentioned items relating to local government 5<sup>th</sup> most often, at 16.7 percent. A similar percentage listed local government as a worst aspect of Omaha, ranking it the 4<sup>th</sup> most mentioned item (Table 3).

Rounding out the top 10 priority problems to address were suburban and urban development, lack of jobs or business opportunities, law enforcement,

budgetary issues, and youth needs. Each item ranking in the top 10 priority problems had at least 10 percent of respondents mentioning the item.

**Table 5: Respondents' Views of the Most Important Problems to Address in the Omaha Area, 2004**

Rank	Description	Percent
1	Roads, road construction, roads planning	33.6
2	High taxes, tax system (includes vehicle licensing)	30.5
3	Crime, violence	29.5
4	Schools, education	19.8
5	Local government	16.7
6	Suburban and urban development	15.4
7	Lack of jobs or business opportunities	13.4
8	Law enforcement	11.0
9	Balance the budget, stay within the budget	10.7
10	Youth needs	10.1
11	Race relations and issues, immigration	8.7
12	Traffic	8.4
13	Drugs	7.8
14	Neighborhood improvement, beautification	7.0
15	Entertainment, things to do	5.3
16	Gambling issue	5.2
17	Gangs	5.1
18	Attracting business(es) to Omaha	4.2
19	General social issues	2.8
19	General infrastructure issues	2.8
21	Better jobs, higher wages	2.7
22	Homelessness	2.6
23	Housing problems and issues	2.5
24	Health and health care	2.4
25	Get better leaders	2.1
25	Keeping people in Omaha (especially younger residents)	2.1
27	Poverty	1.9
28	General safety issues	1.6
29	Cost of living	1.5
29	Community relations	1.5
29	Elderly needs and issues	1.5
32	Public transportation	1.4
33	City image	1.1

Valid Cases: 763

### **Variations in the Perceptions of the Most Important Problems for the Omaha Area to Address**

The following sections compare the five items ranked as highest priority problems to address for the Omaha area across demographic characteristics of the respondents. The characteristics compared are the same as those used in previous sections.

**Roads, Road Construction, Roads Planning:** Those mentioning road items as a priority problem did not differ by any of the

demographic characteristics analyzed. Hence, respondents viewed road items as a priority problem regardless of their age, race, marital status, income, education level, or other demographic characteristics.

**High Taxes:** In contrast to roads, those who listed high taxes as a priority problem varied significantly statistically by several demographic characteristics. Not surprisingly, homeowners listed taxes more often than renters since they are responsible for paying property taxes on the homes they own. Those persons who were married and Whites also listed this item more often. Those aged 50 to 64 years along with those 35 to 49 were most likely to say high taxes while people aged 19 to 24 were least likely to list this item. In addition, those with higher incomes and more education listed high taxes more often. Many of these demographic characteristics are correlated with home ownership, as those older, married, and with higher incomes are more likely to own their residences and pay associated property taxes.

**Crime:** Those mentioning crime varied by gender and educational attainment. Women listed this item more often as did those who had less education. Those listing crime as a priority problem did not vary by as many demographic characteristics as those who listed crime as a worst aspect of Omaha. Thus, similar to schools and education mentioned above, many Omaha-area residents likely view crime as an area where improvements can be made, regardless of most demographic characteristics of the residents.

**Schools and Education:** Those mentioning schools and education also varied by gender and educational attainment. Women listed this item more often as did those who had more education. The finding that those citing schools and education did not vary by many

demographic characteristics gives support to the idea that many Omaha-area residents, regardless of most background characteristics, view schools and education as an area for continued improvement.

**Local Government:** Those who listed aspects of local government differed only by age. Those 65 and over were most likely to mention local government and the percentage citing local government decreased at each successively younger age category. Once again, the relatively few differences by demographic characteristics show that residents view aspects of local government as a priority problem to address or improve, regardless of their background characteristics.

### Comparisons with 1994

Changes in both the ranking and percent of respondents listing specific priority problems between 1994 and 2004 were similar to those previously described regarding the worst aspects of Omaha. The percentage of respondents indicating crime again dropped sharply between 1994 and 2004. In 1994, crime was overwhelmingly the most mentioned item, with 75.1 percent of respondents mentioning crime (Table 6). That figure was only 29.5 percent in 2004, roughly one-third the 1994 level. Among all items, crime ranked as the 3<sup>rd</sup> most mentioned priority problem in 2004, after being by far the item mentioned most often in 1994.

The percentage indicating both road items and high taxes as priority problems also doubled between 1994 and 2004. Road items were mentioned by 14.6 percent of respondents in 1994, the 6<sup>th</sup> most mentioned item. In 2004 road items jumped to the highest ranked or most frequently mentioned category of responses, at 33.6 percent of respondents mentioning an aspect of roads as an issue to address. The relative ranking regarding high taxes also increased five places, from 7<sup>th</sup> most mentioned in 1994 to the 2<sup>nd</sup> most mentioned in 2004. As described above, the percentage citing high taxes was twice as

high in 2004 (30.5 percent) as in 1994 (14.1 percent).

The relative ranking regarding schools and education and local government held steady when comparing the 1994 and 2004 surveys. Respondents cited schools and education as a priority problem 4<sup>th</sup> most often in both surveys while aspects of local government were listed 5<sup>th</sup> highest in each survey. The percentage mentioning each of these items remained almost exactly the same in 2004 as in 1994 (Table 6).

Items having higher importance based on an increased level of responses in 2004 include suburban and urban development and law enforcement. The percentage citing suburban and urban development nearly tripled from 5.3 percent in 1994 to 15.4 percent in 2004. This made suburban and urban development the 6<sup>th</sup> most mentioned item in 2004 after being 13<sup>th</sup> in 1994. The percentage indicating law enforcement as an issue to address nearly doubled from 5.9 percent in 1994 to 11.0 percent in 2004, raising its ranking from 12<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>.

These changes show that the quite rapid westward expansion of Omaha in Douglas County and development in other metro counties apparently has impacted local residents, especially regarding related items such as road construction and road planning that were also mentioned often. Law enforcement issues such as racial profiling and the need for police officers have also come to the forefront and been issues of debate in recent years.

The category regarding jobs and business opportunities received fewer responses in 2004 relative to 1994. Respondents listed the lack of jobs and business opportunities 2<sup>nd</sup> most often in 1994, with nearly one in four respondents mentioning the item (23.1 percent). In 2004, closer to one in eight mentioned jobs or business opportunities as an important

problem to address (13.4 percent), the 7<sup>th</sup> most mentioned category. Thus, fewer Omaha-area residents view jobs and business opportunities as a priority problem to address, with relatively more people citing a need to focus on roads, taxes, and development.

## **Perceptions of the Most Important Problems to Address in the Respondent's Neighborhood**

In addition to being asked about the best and worst aspects of the Omaha area as well as the most important problems for the area to address, respondents were asked to give their views on the most important problem for their neighborhood to address. In contrast to listing three items for the Omaha area, respondents were asked to list only one item for their neighborhood<sup>5</sup> to address. Therefore, the percentages listed are not comparable between those for the Omaha area and those for the respondent's neighborhood.

Crime and violence was perceived to be the most important problem to address in the respondents' neighborhoods, mentioned by 11.8 percent of respondents (Table 7). Respondents listed crime as a priority problem 3<sup>rd</sup> most often for the entire Omaha area (Table 5).

Roads and road construction were listed second most often, with 10.2 percent of respondents mentioning this category of items. Respondents cited a related item, traffic, 7.6 percent of the time, the 5<sup>th</sup> most mentioned item. The relative ranking for roads was similar to the question for the Omaha area, where road items received the most responses, while relatively more people cited traffic as a neighborhood problem, as traffic ranked 12<sup>th</sup> among priority problems for the Omaha area to address (Table 5).

A separate transportation item related to neighborhoods, speeders and speeding, was cited often by respondents. The numerous listings of speeders and speeding prompted the creation of a separate category for this item in the analysis of

neighborhood problems to address.<sup>6</sup> Speeding was mentioned 3<sup>rd</sup> most often, by 9.3 percent of respondents.

Suburban and urban development was also an important neighborhood issue. This item was mentioned by 7.7 percent of respondents, ranking suburban and urban development the 4<sup>th</sup> most mentioned item. This item ranked 6<sup>th</sup> among Omaha-area issues to address.

Rounding out the top 10 most mentioned items were neighborhood improvement and beautification, high taxes, local government, housing issues, and drugs. Taxes and local government had a higher ranking regarding the entire Omaha area while neighborhood improvement and housing issues as viewed more often as neighborhood issues, ranking lower on the question for the entire Omaha area.

One interesting item not ranking in the top 10 most mentioned items for neighborhood improvement was schools. Respondents listed schools as a neighborhood issue to address only 3.3 percent of the time, ranking this item 13<sup>th</sup> most mentioned. This compares to ranking 4<sup>th</sup> most mentioned regarding the Omaha area. Thus, respondents may not view their local school as a priority problem but believe that schools, including those outside their local neighborhood, and the education system in the Omaha area as a whole are worth addressing.

### **Comparisons with 1994**

Respondents also listed crime as the most important neighborhood problem in 1994. Recall that crime, by far, was the most often listed worst aspect of Omaha and problem for Omaha to address in 1994. The response pattern was similar regarding neighborhood problems to address in 1994, as 40.7 percent of respondents listed crime

(Table 8). The number listing crime in 2004 (11.8 percent) was only about one-fourth the 1994 level. Thus, similar to the questions regarding the Omaha area, the percentage listing crime as a neighborhood problem to address has dropped dramatically.

The issues of roads and suburban and urban development have risen in importance. The percentage listing each of these items has increased and the relative ranking rose six places for each item. These items are related as expanding development has led to road construction and expansion.

As mentioned previously, speeders and speeding are a new category of often-mentioned items. There was not a separate category for this item in 1994 for comparison. Thus, the relative importance of addressing speeders and speeding has likely increased greatly since 1994.

The percentage listing traffic as a neighborhood problem to address was 7.6 percent in both 1994 and 2004. The relative ranking did decline from 2<sup>nd</sup> most often mentioned in 1994 to 5<sup>th</sup> in 2004.

**Table 7: Respondents' Views of the Most Important Problems for their Neighborhoods to Address, 2004**

Rank	Description	Percent
1	Crime, violence	11.8
2	Roads, road construction	10.2
3	Speeders and speeding	9.3
4	Suburban and urban development	7.7
5	Traffic	7.6
6	Neighborhood improvement, beautification	7.5
7	Taxes are too high (includes vehicle licensing)	6.3
8	Local government	5.5
9	Housing problems and issues	4.8
10	Drugs	4.5
11	General infrastructure issues	3.8
12	Youth needs	3.4
13	Schools	3.3
14	Jobs and business opportunities	2.9
15	Noise, loud music	2.8
16	Law enforcement	2.6
17	Neighborhoods general issues	2.0
18	Community relations	1.7
18	Neighborhood watch	1.7
18	General social issues	1.7
21	General safety issues	1.6
22	Race relations and issues, immigration	1.3
23	Entertainment, tourism	1.2
24	Cost of living	0.9

Valid Cases: 632

**Table 2: Respondents' Views of the Best Things About the Omaha Area, 1994 and 2004**

Category	2004		1994	
	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent
Entertainment and cultural activities (many things to do)	1	32.9	4	29.3
Schools, education	2	26.5	2	32.2
Friendly people	3	24.4	3	31.9
Size of city	4	23.3	7	17.0
Quality of life, good place to live	5	22.6	5	22.5
Jobs and business opportunities	6	21.7	1	33.8
Ease of travel, short distances/travel times	7	18.7	8	15.4
Low crime, safe	8	11.7	6	17.3
Shopping	9	11.1	11	9.7
Low cost of living	10	9.9	9	11.4

Valid cases: 772

764

**Table 4: Respondents' Views of the Worst Things About the Omaha Area, 1994 and 2004**

Category	2004		1994	
	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent
Roads, road construction, roads planning	1	41.0	2	20.3
High taxes (includes vehicle licensing)	2	34.7	4	15.3
Crime, violence	3	22.0	1	67.5
Local government	4	17.9	5	15.1
Climate, weather	5	16.5	8	9.4
Traffic	6	13.1	6	12.1
Entertainment, not enough to do	7	13.0	7	10.4
Neighborhood improvement, beautification	8	8.5	25*	1.6
People and community attitude	9	8.1	17	4.2
Race relations and issues, immigration	10	7.7	13**	5.6

Valid cases: 761 763

\* The closest comparison was the 1994 category called "Run-down neighborhoods" which was more specific than the generalized 2004 category of neighborhood improvement.

\*\* "Discrimination" was the title for this category in 1994.

**Table 6: Respondents' Views of the Most Important Problems to Address in the Omaha Area, 1994 and 2004**

Category	2004		1994	
	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent
Roads, road construction, roads planning	1	33.6	6	14.6
High taxes, tax system (includes vehicle licensing)	2	30.5	7	14.1
Crime, violence	3	29.5	1	75.1
Schools, education	4	19.8	4	19.2
Local government	5	16.7	5	16.8
Suburban and urban development	6	15.4	13	5.3
Lack of jobs or business opportunities	7	13.4	2	23.1
Law enforcement	8	11.0	12	5.9
Balance the budget, stay within the budget	9	10.7	**	**
Youth needs	10	10.1	9	9.2

Valid cases: 763 780

\*\* No separate category for this item in 1994.

**Table 8: Respondents' Views of the Most Important Problems for their Neighborhoods to Address, 1994 and 2004**

Category	2004		1994	
	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent
Crime, violence	1	11.8	1	40.7
Roads, road construction	2	10.2	8	3.4
Speeders and speeding	3	9.3	**	**
Suburban and urban development	4	7.7	10	2.5
Traffic	5	7.6	2	7.6

Valid cases: 632 565

\*\* No separate category for this item in 1994.

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<sup>1</sup> Comparisons across racial/ethnic groups are reported as differences between Whites and non-Whites. The number of respondents for each racial group was too small for separate analysis, so the grouping of minorities was required to make accurate comparisons.

<sup>2</sup> Mentioned differences among population subgroups are statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level of significance.

<sup>3</sup> 2004 American Community Survey Ranking Tables for Places, United States Census Bureau, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

<sup>4</sup> The comparison was statistically significant across the four marital status groups of now married, single, divorced/separated, and widowed rather than the comparison of those currently married versus those currently not married.

<sup>5</sup> The question was worded “In your opinion what is the one most important problem that your neighborhood or area should be trying to address?”. The words “or area” helped define the question for those respondents who did not live in a neighborhood, such as a rural residence.

<sup>6</sup> The few responses regarding speeding for the question regarding priority problems in the Omaha area were placed into the law enforcement category.