

Contact: Donna Maurillo
MTI Communications Director
831-234-4009
donna.maurillo (at) sjsu.edu

**Mineta Transportation Institute Survey:
Opinions about Federal Transportation Tax Options**

Survey shows that Americans support gas tax and other transportation tax increases under certain conditions

San Jose, Calif., May 5, 2011 – The [Mineta Transportation Institute](http://www.transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1031.html) (MTI) has released the preliminary results of a national survey about tax options for funding transportation. *What Do Americans Think about Federal Transportation Tax Options? Preliminary Results from Year 2 of a National Survey* was authored by Asha Weinstein Agrawal, PhD, and Hilary Nixon, PhD. The survey results show that a majority of Americans would support higher taxes for transportation—under certain conditions. The preliminary report, which is a follow-up to a similar MTI survey conducted in 2010, is available for free download at www.transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1031.html. A complete analysis will be published this summer.

The 18-question survey was conducted because policy makers are seeking options for raising new revenues for transportation. Over the past decades, the revenues available from state and federal gas taxes have fallen significantly, especially in terms of inflation-adjusted dollars per mile traveled. At the same time, the US transportation system requires critical—and expensive—system upgrades. What funding options would Americans support?

“As one example, a gas tax increase of 10 cents per gallon to improve road maintenance was supported by 62 percent of respondents,” said Dr. Agrawal. “By contrast, support levels dropped to just under half if the revenues were to be devoted to reducing local air pollution or global warming. For tax options where the revenues were to be spent for undefined transportation purposes, support levels varied considerably by what kind of tax would be imposed. In these cases, a sales tax is much more popular than either a gas tax increase or a new mileage tax.”

The poll also asked respondents about their priorities for government spending on transportation in their states. More than two-thirds of respondents felt that governments should make it a high priority to maintain streets, roads, and highways, and almost two-thirds said the same about reducing accidents and improving safety. However, not quite half of respondents placed a high priority on reducing traffic congestion or expanding public transit service.

“The survey questions replicate those from a similar survey that MTI conducted in 2010 to establish how public views may have shifted over the past year,” said Dr. Nixon. “The survey findings suggest that Americans are just as willing to support tax increases for transportation this year as last, or perhaps even slightly more so.”

For example, this year 36 percent of respondents supported a new mileage tax if the rates varied by the vehicle’s pollution level, compared to a similar 33 percent supporting such a tax last year. The only substantial change in support levels over the two years was a jump in support for a gas tax with revenue spent to reduce local air pollution. This year the tax had 48 percent support, compared to 30 percent last year.

This preliminary report will be followed this summer by a final report providing further detail, including analysis of how factors like age, political party, and transit usage may correlate with respondents' support for the different tax options and spending priorities.

The Survey and Policy Research Institute at San José State University conducted this national telephone survey from March 1 to April 6, 2011, on behalf of MTI's National Transportation Finance Center. A total of 1,516 adults were interviewed in either English or Spanish.

The preliminary report, which includes the survey methodology, results, and questions, is available for free download from the Mineta Transportation Institute at www.transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1031.html

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Asha Weinstein Agrawal is Director of the MTI National Transportation Finance Center and an Associate Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at San José State University. Her research and teaching interests in transportation policy and planning include transportation finance, pedestrian planning, and urban street design. She also works in planning and transportation history. She has a B.A. from Harvard University in Folklore and Mythology, an M.Sc. from the London School of Economics and Political Science in Urban and Regional Planning, and a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley in City and Regional Planning. For a complete listing of her publications, see www.sjsu.edu/faculty/weinstein.agrawal/

Dr. Hilary Nixon is an Associate Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at San José State University. Her research and teaching interests in environmental planning and policy focus on the relationship between environmental attitudes and behavior, particularly with respect to waste management and linkages between transportation and the environment. She has a B.A. from the University of Rochester in Environmental Management and a Ph.D. in Planning, Policy, and Design from the University of California, Irvine.

ABOUT THE MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE

The Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) was established by Congress in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and was reauthorized under TEA-21 and again under SAFETEA-LU. The institute is funded by Congress through the US Department of Transportation's (DOT) Research and Innovative Technology Administration, by the California Legislature through the Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and by other public and private grants and donations, including grants from the US Department of Homeland Security. DOT selected MTI as a National Center of Excellence following competitions in 2002 and 2006. The internationally respected members of the MTI Board of Trustees represent all major surface transportation modes. MTI's focus on policy and management resulted from the Board's assessment of the transportation industry's unmet needs. That led directly to choosing the San José State University College of Business as the Institute's home. MTI conducts research, education, and information and technology transfer, focusing on multimodal surface transportation policy and management issues. Visit www.transweb.sjsu.edu

#####