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Would Americans Support Increased Taxes to Improve Highways, Streets, and Transit?
Mineta National Transit Research Consortium's free report gives results of an ongoing national survey.

San Jose, Calif., June 21, 2012 – The Mineta National Transit Research Consortium (transweb.sjsu.edu/mntrc) has released a peer-reviewed research report, [*What Do Americans Think about Federal Tax Options to Support Public Transit, Highways, and Local Streets and Roads? Results from Year 3 of a National Survey*](#). The report was conducted by the Mineta Transportation Institute. It summarizes the results of a national random-digit-dial public opinion poll that asked 1,519 respondents if they would support various tax options for raising federal transportation revenues. Special focus was placed on understanding what would motivate people to support increased revenues for public transit. The study authors were Asha Weinstein Agrawal, PhD, Hilary Nixon, PhD, and Vinay Murthy. The free 88-page report is available for download at transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1128.html

“Over several decades, the transportation revenues from state and federal fuel taxes have fallen significantly, especially in terms of inflation-adjusted dollars per mile traveled,” said Dr. Agrawal. “At the same time, the transportation system requires critical and expensive upgrades. This dilemma means that the U.S. must dramatically lower its goals for system preservation and enhancement, or new revenues must be raised. If the latter is to happen, legislators must be convinced that increasing taxes or fees is politically feasible. When legislators decide whether to raise new revenues, they must consider likely public support for – or opposition to – raising different kinds of taxes. This report helps them understand public sentiment.”

The survey results show that:

- A majority of Americans would support higher taxes for transportation, but only under certain conditions. For example, a gas tax increase of 10 cents per gallon to improve road maintenance was supported by 58 percent of respondents. Support levels dropped to just 20 percent if revenues were to be used more generally to maintain and improve the transportation system:
- For tax options where revenues were to be spent for undefined transportation purposes, support levels varied considerably by what kind of tax would be imposed, with a sales tax much more popular than either a gas tax increase or a new mileage tax.
- American public opinion about the tax options tested has changed very little in the past two years. The 2012 survey found Americans about as willing to support tax increases for transportation as they were in 2010 and 2011.
- With respect to public transit, the survey results from all three years show that most people want good public transit service in their state. However, the 2012 questions exploring different methods to raise new revenues to improve and expand public transit found relatively low levels of support for all of them.

- Large minorities of respondents did not know that all levels of government – local, state, and federal – support public transit. The federal government was the least widely recognized source of support.

The researchers tested eleven specific tax options: variations on raising the federal gas tax rate and creating a new mileage tax, plus creating a new federal sales tax. Other questions probed various perceptions related to public transit, including knowledge and opinions about federal taxes to support transit.

In addition, the survey collected data on standard socio-demographic factors, travel behavior (public transit use, annual miles driven, and vehicle fuel efficiency), and attitudinal data about how respondents view the quality of their local transportation system and their priorities for government spending on transportation in their state. All of this information was used to assess support levels for the tax options among different population subgroups.

Because the survey was the third year of a project to assess how public support for federal transportation taxes may change over time, most of the questions were identical to those in the earlier surveys carried out in 2010 (*[What Do Americans Think about Federal Transportation Tax Options? Results from a National Survey](#)*) and 2011 (*[What Do Americans Think about Federal Transportation Tax Options? Results from Year 2 of a National Survey](#)*). This report compares the results of the three surveys to establish how public views may have shifted over the past years.

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ABOUT THE INVESTIGATORS

Asha Weinstein Agrawal, PhD, is director of the MTI National Transportation Finance Center and an associate professor and chair 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 the area of planning and transportation history. She has a BA from Harvard University in folklore and mythology, an MSc from the London School of Economics and Political Science in urban and regional planning, and a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley in city and regional planning. For a complete listing of her publications, see <http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/weinstein.agrawal/>.

Hilary Nixon, PhD, 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 BA from the University of Rochester in environmental management and a PhD in planning, policy, and design from the University of California, Irvine.

Vinay Murthy is an independent researcher who has worked for several academic and nonprofit research programs, including the Survey + Policy Research Institute and the Urban Strategies Council. His research interests in transportation policy and planning include the relationships among transportation infrastructure, housing affordability, and local economic resiliency. He has a BA from the University of California, Berkeley in American studies and a Master of Urban Planning from San José State University.

ABOUT THE MINETA NATIONAL TRANSIT RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

The [Mineta National Transit Research Consortium](#) (MNTRC) is composed of nine university transportation centers led by the [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) at San Jose State University. The Consortium was organized in January 2012 after winning a competition sponsored by the US Department of Transportation (DOT) to create consortia tasked with “Delivering Solutions that Improve Public Transportation.” MNTRC’s goal is to expand and synergize each member university’s unique abilities and expertise so they may respond as a group to any transit-related research needs. MNTRC conducts research to meet the US DOT strategic goals of safety, state of good repair, economic competitiveness, livable communities, and environmental sustainability. The partner universities are Bowling Green State University; Grand Valley State University; Howard University; Penn State University; Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey; San Jose State University; University of Detroit Mercy; University of Nevada, Las Vegas; and University of Toledo.

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