

Survey: Americans support higher gas taxes, spending revenue on public transit

Mineta Transportation Institute's survey indicates public could support new gas tax legislation

San Jose, Calif., April 29, 2015 – Americans are willing to pay increased taxes at the gas pump if the revenue is invested in specific transportation improvements, according to the results of a new [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) (MTI) national telephone survey. These results indicate that Americans would likely support proposed federal legislation for funding transportation infrastructure. The Mineta survey was directed by Asha Weinstein Agrawal, PhD, and Hilary Nixon, PhD. The top-line survey results are available at <http://bit.ly/1El8aH3>, along with a figure showing the support level for each tax option polled.

One of the proposed federal bills, H.R. 1846, would index the gas tax to inflation and create a bi-partisan, bi-cameral transportation commission that would provide long-term funding of the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). Another proposed bill, H.R. 680, would increase the gas tax by five cents per year for three years.

“Conventional wisdom says that Americans strongly oppose any increase in the federal gas tax,” said Dr. Agrawal. “However, this survey shows that significant majorities want the government to provide better transportation infrastructure, are willing to pay for improvements, and want gas tax revenue spent on public transportation as well as on roads and highways.”

Voters will support targeted purposes

For example, one section of the survey tested whether people would support a ten-cent increase in the federal gas tax, which is currently 18.4 cents per gallon. Only 31% of respondents supported a gas tax increase for general transportation improvements, with no other information given. By contrast, 50% or more supported gas tax increases dedicated to more targeted transportation purposes such as improving maintenance (71% support), improving safety (64%), or reducing local air pollution (52%).

When asked whether or not gas tax revenue should be used to pay for public transit, a near “supermajority” (65%) said yes. This and other survey findings confirm that Americans desire a transportation system that includes good public transit as well as safe and well-maintained roads and highways.

“They envision a transportation future with a multimodal, safe, and well-maintained system,” said Dr. Agrawal. “More than 80% of respondents said that government should prioritize expanding and improving local public transit. Also, 91% want government to improve the safety of the transportation system, and 97% want government to prioritize maintenance of streets, roads, and highways.”

MTI has conducted several similar surveys

The random-digit-dial telephone survey tested national support for federal gas, mileage, and sales tax options to raise revenue for transportation purposes. Multiple variations on the mileage-tax and gas-tax concepts were presented to test relative support levels among the options. Mineta Transportation Institute has conducted similar surveys annually since 2010.

A total of 1,503 adults completed the survey in either English or Spanish between February 26, 2015, and March 31, 2015. For the full sample, which included both land-line and cell-phone numbers, the margin of error was ± 2.53 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

The full research report, to be issued Thursday, June 25, will provide in-depth analysis of the survey results, reviewing trends in support across the six annual surveys, and investigating how the revealed opinions may vary according to respondents' socio-demographic, political, and travel-behavior

characteristics.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM

Asha Agrawal, PhD, is director of the MTI National Transportation Finance Center and also 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 and bicycle planning, and 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.

Hilary Nixon, PhD, is an associate professor and chair of urban and regional planning at San José State University. Her research and teaching interests are in environmental planning and policy focusing on the relationship between environmental attitudes and behavior, particularly with respect to waste management and linkages between transportation and the environment. She holds a BA from the University of Rochester in environmental management and a PhD in planning, policy, and design from the University of California, Irvine.

ABOUT THE MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE

The Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) conducts research, education, and information transfer programs regarding surface transportation policy and management issues, especially related to transit. Congress established MTI in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act. MTI won national re-designation competitions in 2002, 2006 and 2012. The Institute is funded through the US Department of Transportation, the US Department of Homeland Security, the California Department of Transportation, and public and private grants. The internationally respected members of the MTI Board of Trustees represent all major surface transportation modes. MTI, the lead institute for the nine-university Mineta National Transit Research Consortium, is affiliated with San Jose (CA) State University's College of Business. Visit transweb.sjsu.edu

###

Contact: Donna Maurillo
MTI Communications Director
831-234-4009 (24 hours)
donna.maurillo (at) sjsu.edu