

# What Do Americans Think About Federal Tax Options to Support Transportation? Results from Year Twelve of a National Survey

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This research brief summarizes results from the twelfth year of an annual survey series exploring national support for raising additional federal transportation revenues through higher gas taxes or new mileage fees.

## Study Methods

A nationally representative sample of 2,516 respondents completed the survey from February 5 to February 23, 2021. The survey was administered online using a survey platform and panel of respondents managed by Qualtrics. A 2021 study by the Pew Research Center found that 93% of U.S. adults are online, making online panels a reasonable method for surveying the public on policy topics such as this one.

The survey questionnaire was designed to test public knowledge and opinions related to support for increasing the federal gas tax rate, replacing the federal gas tax with a mileage fee, and creating a new mileage fee on commercial travel. Multiple variations on the gas tax and mileage fee concepts were presented to test relative support levels among these options.

**Support for mileage fees has risen slowly but steadily since 2010.**

## Findings About Mileage Fees

**Roughly half of adults support some form of a mileage fee, whether it is assessed on all travel or just on commercial travel.** Forty-seven percent of respondents supported replacing the gas tax with a flat-rate mileage fee of three cents per mile, and 53% supported a “green” version for which the average rate would be three cents per mile, but vehicles that pollute less would be charged less and vehicles that pollute more would be charged more. Similarly, 50% supported a “business road-use fee” that would apply to the miles ride-hailing vehicles drive while on the job, and 52% supported such a fee on delivery and freight vehicles.

**Support for mileage fees has risen slowly but steadily since 2010.** Support for the flat-rate mileage fee grew 26 percentage points, from 21% in 2010 to 47% in 2021. Support for the “green” version of the fee grew 20 percentage points, from 33% in 2010 to 53% in 2021. That trend has persisted through the past year’s COVID-related disruptions to travel.

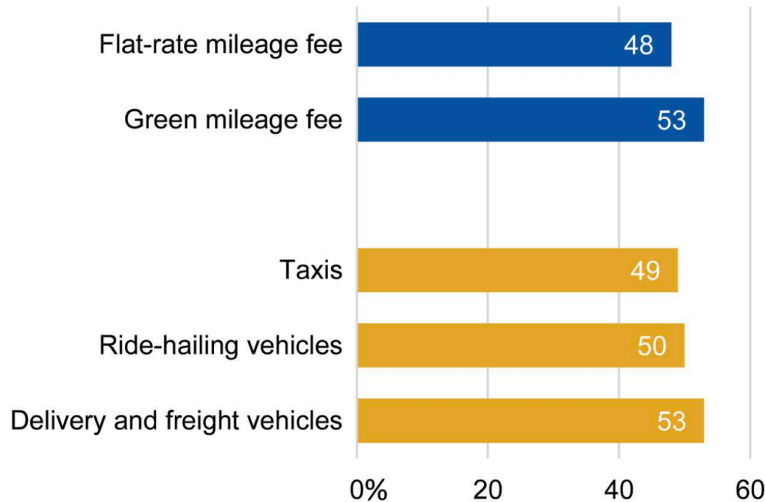
**People favor charging a lower mileage fee rate for both low-income drivers and for electric vehicles.** Close to two-thirds of respondents (62%) thought that low-income drivers should pay a lower rate if Congress adopts a mileage fee, and just over half (52%) thought that electric vehicles should be charged a lower rate than gas and diesel vehicles.

## Findings About Gas Taxes

**Almost nobody knows that the federal gas tax has not been raised since 1993.** Only 2% of respondents knew that the federal gas tax rate has not been raised in over 20 years. More than half of respondents (53%) said they simply didn’t know when the federal rate was last raised, and 39% incorrectly believed the rate had been raised within the past decade.

**The majority of people support raising the gas tax—if the revenue is dedicated to a specific transportation purpose.** Just shy of the majority (48%) supported raising the federal gas tax if the money were to be used generally “for transportation.” In contrast, 71% supported raising the gas tax if the money were dedicated to maintaining the transportation system. The majority also supported raising the gas tax if the new revenue were spent on transportation projects for safety, clean air, or climate protection.

**The majority of people support spending gas tax revenue on all modes of travel.** The survey probed this topic with multiple questions, and in every case a clear majority favored spending gas tax revenue on public transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists.



Percent of Respondents Supporting Different Mileage Fee Options

### Mileage fees to replace the federal gas

- Flat: all vehicles pay three cents per mile
- Green: the average rate is three cents per mile, but more polluting vehicles pay a higher rate and less polluting vehicles pay a lower rate

### Business road-use fees

These would be assessed only on miles that different kinds of commercial vehicles drive on the job, and those vehicles would continue to pay the current federal gas tax as well

**More than two-thirds of people support spending gas tax revenue to encourage adoption of electric vehicles.** Sixty-eight percent thought the federal government should prioritize providing financial incentives for people to purchase electric vehicles, and 70% prioritized installing electric vehicle charging stations.

### About the Authors

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### To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at [transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2101](https://transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2101)



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