

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

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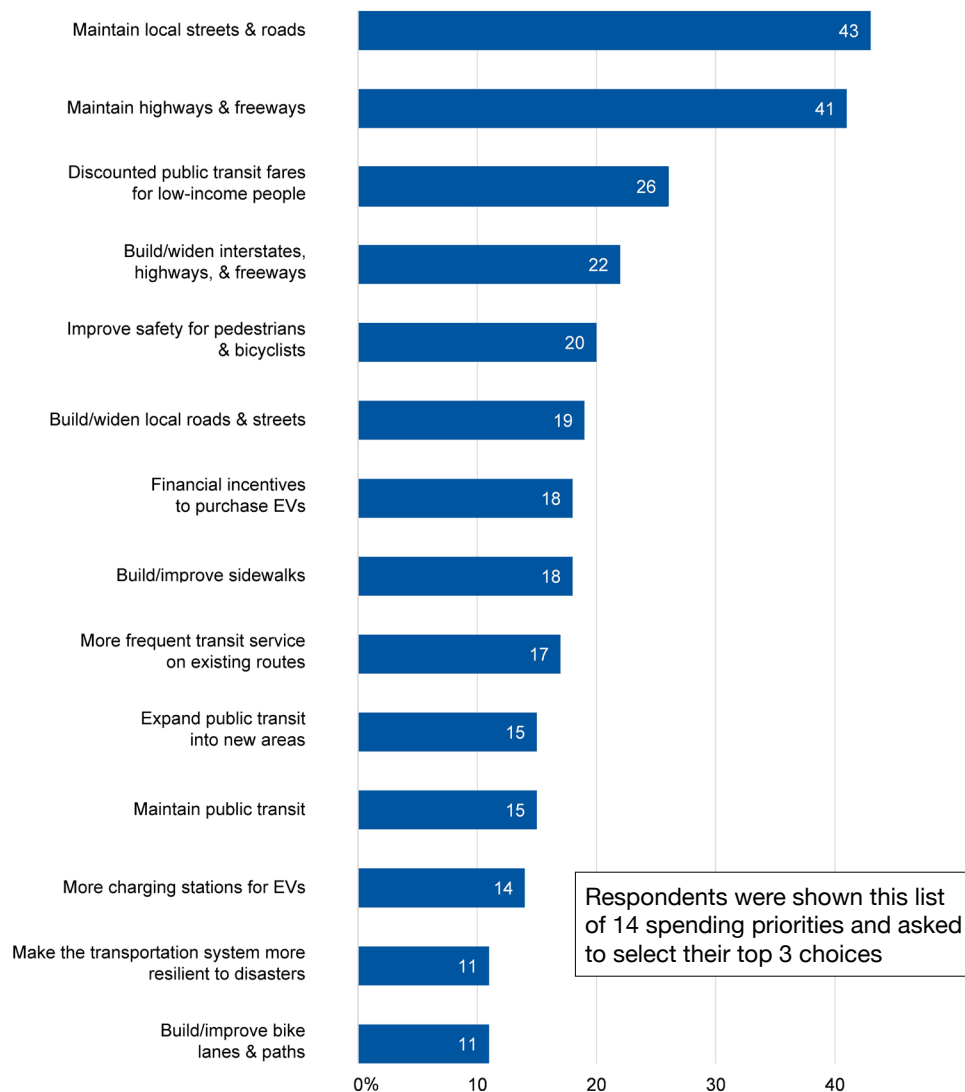
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This research brief summarizes results from the thirteenth year of an annual survey series exploring national support for raising additional federal transportation revenues through higher gas taxes or new mileage fees.

Study Methods

A nationally representative sample of 2,620 respondents completed the online survey from January 31 to March 10, 2022. In addition to questions about tax and fee support, the survey collected data on respondents' views on the quality of their local transportation system, priorities for federal transportation spending, knowledge about gas taxes, travel behavior habits, and standard sociodemographic variables.

Top-Three Federal Transportation Spending Priorities (% of Respondents)



Findings

Transportation System Priorities

The majority of respondents supported a wide variety of improvements to the transportation system across all modes. When asked to rate their priorities for improving the transportation system, respondents placed the very highest importance on safety, maintenance, and ensuring mobility for everyone, regardless of income.

Support for building and expanding both local streets and highways varied little according to respondent's personal characteristics and travel behavior. It is critical to note, however, that other spending priorities had larger overall support, even if there was more variation in support across population subgroups.

A majority of respondents favored charging a lower mileage fee rate for both low-income drivers and for electric vehicles.

Mileage Fees

Just under half of respondents supported two versions of a mileage fee. These were a "green" mileage fee on all travel for which the rate varied by how much pollution the vehicle emits, as well as a mileage fee assessed only on delivery and freight vehicles.

Support for adopting both a flat-rate and green mileage fee has grown since 2010. Support for the flat-rate fee grew from 21% in 2010 to 39% in 2022, while support for the green version grew at a slower rate, from 33% in 2010 to 48% in 2022.

A majority of respondents favored charging a lower mileage fee rate for both low-income drivers and for electric vehicles. Fifty-eight percent of respondents thought that low-income drivers should pay a lower rate if Congress adopts a mileage fee, and just over half (53%) thought that electric vehicles should be charged a lower rate than gas and diesel vehicles.

Gas Taxes

Only 2% of respondents knew that the federal gas tax rate has not been raised in over 20 years. More than half of respondents (57%) said they simply didn't know when the federal rate was last raised, and 34% incorrectly believed the rate had been raised within the past decade.

The majority support raising the gas tax rate if the revenue is dedicated to a specific transportation purpose. For example, 71% supported raising the gas tax if the money were dedicated to maintaining the transportation system. In contrast, only 38% supported the rate increase if the money were spent more generically "for transportation."

Support for all the variants on raising the federal gas tax has risen since 2011. The largest increase has been in support for the gas tax increase with the proceeds to be spent "for transportation." For this option, support rose 14 percentage points, from 23% to 38%.

Support for the most popular gas-tax increase options varied little among subgroups. For the gas variants dedicated to improving maintenance, improving safety, and reducing congestion, every subgroup supported the increase by at least 54%. In contrast, support varied the most among subgroups for the base-case variant that would raise money for transportation in general.

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/2208.2



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