

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

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1. Introduction

This publication presents the top-line results from the thirteenth year of an annual survey investigating public opinion about a variety of federal transportation tax options.

Respondents answered questions that included their opinions related to mileage fees, support for different variations on raising the federal gas tax rate, priorities for improving the transportation system, and knowledge of when the U.S. Congress last raised the federal gas tax rate.

A second MTI report, to be released soon, will present more detailed survey results, including analysis of how different population subgroups responded (e.g., people who drive vs. those who do not) and a comparison with results from the earlier surveys in the series.

2. Survey Administration Method

The online survey was administered by Qualtrics from January 31, 2022 to March 10, 2022. Quota sampling was used in order to ensure a sample that closely represents the U.S. adult population. A total of 2,620 adults responded with usable data. The median time to complete each survey was 14 minutes, and the mean time was 17 minutes. We did not calculate response or frequency rates because the Qualtrics sampling method does not track how many people received the survey invitation.

3. About the Respondents

Table 1 compares the socio-demographic characteristics of the final set of respondents to the U.S. adult population. Values for the sample were within five percentage points of the U.S. population for the great majority of characteristics. The sample varied by more than 10 percentage points for only one characteristic: the percent who had graduated from high-school but had no higher education (a 14-point variation). To account for the variations, we weighted the results to match the Census Bureau's 2015 – 2019 American Community Survey five-year estimates with respect to gender, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education level, annual household income, and age.¹

¹ Steven Ruggles, et al., "IPUMS USA: Version 10.0 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2015-2019" (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V11.0>.

Table 1. Survey Respondents Compared to the U.S. Adult Population

		Sample (%)	U.S. adults ^a (%)
Gender	Male	48.8	48.7
	Female	51.2	51.3
Of Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin		16.0	15.9
Race	White only	68.1	74.1
	Black or African-American only	17.3	12.3
	Asian or Asian-American only	8.3	5.9
	Other or multi-race	6.3	7.7
Education	< high school graduate	3.2	10.3
	High school graduate	22.1	36.1
	Some college	33.0	24.2
	College graduate	27.1	18.6
	Graduate degree	14.6	10.9
Income (annual household)	0 – \$24,999	18.0	17.2
	\$25,000 – \$49,999	22.1	19.6
	\$50,000 – \$74,999	19.6	16.2
	\$75,000 – \$99,999	12.7	12.4
	\$100,000 – \$149,999	17.9	15.8
	\$150,000 – \$199,999	5.8	7.3
	\$200,000 +	3.9	11.5
Age (years)	18 – 24	10.6	12.2
	25 – 34	19.7	17.9
	35 – 44	19.6	16.3
	45 – 54	14.7	16.7
	55 – 64	16.0	16.6
	65 – 74	15.9	11.8
	75 – 84	3.2	6.0
	85+	0.2	2.5

^a US data are for adults 18 years and older, except that household income is for all U.S. households.

Source: Steven Ruggles, et al., "IPUMS USA: Version 10.0 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2015-2016" (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V11.0>.

4. Topline Survey Results

Notes:

- Missing and refused responses were removed from the dataset before calculating the response rates.
- Columns of numbers in some tables do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

* * *

We are interested in your opinions about the transportation system. The “transportation system” means local streets and roads, highways, and public transit services like buses, light rail, trains, and ferries.

Q1. In your community, how is the quality of:

	Very good (%)	Somewhat good (%)	Somewhat bad (%)	Very bad (%)	Not sure / doesn't apply (%)
Interstates, highways, and freeways	25	52	16	5	2
Local streets and roads	18	46	25	9	1
Bicycle and pedestrian facilities	19	38	23	8	12
Public transit (bus, rail, etc.)	15	37	18	11	18

Q2. How concerned are you about traffic congestion in your community?

	%
Very concerned	29
Somewhat concerned	44
Not at all concerned	27

Q3. How concerned are you that disasters such as flooding, wildfires, or hurricanes will severely damage the transportation system in your community?

	%
Very concerned	25
Somewhat concerned	38
Not at all concerned	37

Q4. How important are the following transportation-related goals for the United States?

	Very important (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Not important (%)
Reduce crashes and improve safety	72	25	4
Ensure that everyone, regardless of income, can conveniently get to jobs, school, health care, etc.	70	26	4
Reduce health impacts caused by air pollution from cars and trucks	57	35	8
Reduce traffic congestion	56	38	6
Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation sources that contribute to climate change	53	36	11
Make it more convenient to go places without driving (bus, walk, bike, etc.)	50	38	12

Q5. Now, imagine that Congress is deciding how to spend transportation money in the next 5 years. What percent of the money should go to each of the following goals? The total must add up to 100%.

	Mean (%)	0% (%)	1-10% (%)	11-20% (%)	21-30% (%)	>30% (%)
Ensure that everyone, regardless of income, can conveniently get to jobs, school, health care, etc.	19	10	30	33	14	13
Reduce crashes and improve safety	19	10	31	32	15	11
Reduce traffic congestion	17	12	37	30	11	10
Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation sources that contribute to climate change	16	17	32	30	12	9
Reduce health impacts caused by air pollution from cars and trucks	15	14	37	33	11	5
Make it more convenient to go places without driving (bus, walk, bike, etc.)	14	15	42	29	8	5

Q6. As you may be aware, the federal government charges a gas tax and spends the money collected for transportation. Listed below are different ways the government could spend that money to improve the transportation system. How much of a priority should each one be?

	High (%)	Medium (%)	Low (%)	Not at all (%)
Maintain interstates, highways, and freeways	60	33	6	1
Maintain local streets and roads	57	34	7	2
Maintain public transit (rail, buses, etc.)	43	43	12	2
Improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists	40	41	15	3
Provide discounted public transit fares for low-income people	40	38	16	6
Build/widen interstates, highways, and freeways	37	45	14	4
Make the transportation system more resilient to disasters like wildfires, floods, and hurricanes	36	42	18	4
Build/improve sidewalks	35	43	19	3
Build/widen local roads and streets	34	45	17	4
Add more frequent public transit service on existing routes	32	44	18	5
Add new public transit routes	32	43	21	5
Provide financial incentives for people to purchase electric vehicles	29	33	23	14
Build/improve bike lanes and bike paths	26	45	24	6
Install more charging stations for electric vehicles	26	37	26	10

Q7. Here is the same list of transportation purposes that the federal government could spend the gas tax money on. Select the three you think are most important.

	Selected at top 3 (%)
Maintain local streets and roads	43
Maintain interstates, highways, and freeways	41
Provide discounted public transit fares for low-income people	26
Build/widen interstates, highways, and freeways	22
Improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists	20
Build/widen local roads and streets	19
Build/improve sidewalks	18
Provide financial incentives for people to purchase electric vehicles	18
Add more frequent public transit service on existing routes	17
Add new public transit routes	15
Maintain public transit (rail, buses, etc.)	15
Install more charging stations for electric vehicles	14
Make the transportation system more resilient to disasters like wildfires, floods, and hurricanes	11
Build/improve bike lanes and bike paths	11

The next set of questions ask about the types of transportation your household uses and how much money your household spends on certain transportation-related expenses. As a reminder, “household” means all the people currently living with you in your home. (Do not include renters or tenants.) If you live in a dormitory, in a boarding house, or with roommates, just answer the following questions for yourself.

Q8. In the last 30 days, which types of transportation have you or any other members of your household used? Check all that apply.

	Used in last 30 days (%)
Drive yourself (car, truck, motorcycle, etc.)	82
Walk	42
Ride as a passenger in a personal vehicle (exclude trips in taxis, rideshare like Uber/Lyft, etc.)	39
Public transit (bus, light-rail, ferry, etc.)	18
Ridesharing service like Uber or Lyft	16
Bicycle	13
Taxi	8
Airplane	6
Electric kick-scooter, skateboard, or other small device	4
Other	1

Q9. How often does your household not have enough money to pay for gasoline, transit fares, or other transportation costs?

	Frequently (%)	Occasionally (%)	Never (%)	Does not apply (%)
Not enough money for transportation costs	17	30	47	7

There are many ways the U.S. Congress could raise money to pay for maintaining and improving the transportation system. The next few questions ask your opinion about some of these options. In each case, assume that the money collected would be spent only for transportation purposes.

Q10. Right now the federal government collects a tax of 18¢ per gallon when people buy gasoline. One idea to raise money for transportation is to increase the federal gas tax by 10¢ a gallon, from 18¢ to 28¢. Would you support or oppose this gas tax increase?

	%
Strongly support	13
Somewhat support	25
Somewhat oppose	24
Strongly oppose	38

Q11. Now, imagine that the U.S. Congress decided that the best option to raise money for transportation is to increase the federal gas tax by ten cents per gallon. Would you support or oppose the gas tax increase if the new money were spent only on the following types of projects?

	Strongly support (%)	Somewhat support (%)	Somewhat oppose (%)	Strongly oppose (%)
Maintain streets, roads, and highways	38	32	14	15
Reduce accidents and improve safety	37	31	15	17
Reduce traffic congestion	32	35	16	17
Reduce the transportation system's contribution to global warming	25	30	20	25
Reduce local air pollution caused by the transportation system	22	30	22	26

Q12. Some people say that money from gas taxes should only be spent on roads and highways, since drivers pay the tax. Other people say gas tax money should be used to pay for public transit in addition to roads and highways, because transit helps reduce traffic congestion and wear-and-tear on the roads. Would you support or oppose spending some gas tax money on public transit?

	%
Support	67
Oppose	33

Note on Q12: Half of respondents received the question as worded here, and the other half received the question with the two statements in reverse order: Some people say gas tax money should be used to pay for public transit in addition to roads and highways, because transit helps reduce traffic congestion and wear-and-tear on the roads. Other people say that money from gas taxes should only be spent on roads and highways, since drivers pay the tax. Would you support or oppose spending some gas tax money on public transit?

Now, imagine that the U.S. Congress decides to replace the gas tax with a mileage fee of 3¢ per mile driven. That means someone driving 10,000 miles a year would pay \$300. Vehicles would have an electronic meter to keep track of the miles driven.

Q13. Would you support or oppose replacing the gas tax with such a mileage fee?

	%
Strongly support	13
Somewhat support	26
Somewhat oppose	21
Strongly oppose	40

Q14. If Congress adopts a mileage fee, would you support or oppose charging a lower rate to low-income drivers?

	%
Strongly support	28
Somewhat support	31
Somewhat oppose	15
Strongly oppose	26

Q15. A variation on the mileage fee concept is to have the fee rate vary depending upon how much the vehicle pollutes. On average, vehicles would be charged 3¢ per mile, but vehicles that pollute less would be charged less, and vehicles that pollute more would be charged more. Would you support or oppose this new mileage fee?

	%
Strongly support	15
Somewhat support	32
Somewhat oppose	22
Strongly oppose	30

Q16. Another variation on the mileage fee concept is to replace the gas tax with a mileage fee of 3¢ per mile for all gas and diesel vehicles, but with a different rate for all-electric vehicles. What rate per mile do you think electric vehicles should pay?

	%
The same rate as gas/diesel vehicles	47
Half the rate set for gas/diesel vehicles	33
Nothing (electric vehicles pay no fee)	19

Q17. Now imagine that the US Congress decides to keep the gas tax, but to add a new per-mile “Business Road-Use Fee” for miles that commercial vehicles drive on the job. (These vehicles would continue to pay the current gas tax, as well.) Would you support or oppose this new Business Road-Use Fee for the following types of commercial vehicles?

	Strongly support (%)	Somewhat support (%)	Somewhat oppose (%)	Strongly oppose (%)
Delivery and freight trucks	18	30	27	26
Ridehailing vehicles	16	30	29	26
Taxis	16	30	29	25

Q18. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

I'm already tracked everywhere I go through my phone, so having my mileage tracked for a mileage fee wouldn't really bother me.

	%
Strongly agree	15
Somewhat agree	27
Somewhat disagree	20
Strongly disagree	37

Q19. Which statement is closer to your opinion?

	%
A mileage fee is MORE fair than the gas tax because everyone pays the same for use of the roads, regardless of vehicle fuel efficiency or vehicle type (electric vs. gas vehicles)	52
A mileage fee is LESS fair than the gas tax because the mileage fee doesn't give a break to people who buy cleaner vehicles	48

Q20. If Congress creates a federal mileage fee, which of the following possible fee structures would be fairer?

	%
The fee is the same for every mile the vehicle drives during the year	50
The fee is <u>lower</u> for the first 5,000 miles the vehicle drives during the year, and higher for all additional miles driven that year	50

Q21. If Congress does create a federal mileage fee, how would you prefer to pay? Remember that the total amount you pay annually would be the same in each option.

	%
Pay each time I purchase gas/diesel or charge an electric vehicle	47
Pay a bill that comes once a month	29
Pay a bill that comes once a year	23

Q22. As best you remember, when did the U.S. Congress last raise the federal gas tax?

	%
Less than a year ago	10
1 to 3 years ago	14
4 to 10 years ago	10
11 to 15 years ago	4
16 to 20 years ago	2
More than 20 years ago [correct answer]	2
Don't know	57

Q23. This past fall, the federal government passed a law to increase funding for transportation and other infrastructure. How much, if anything, have you heard, read, or seen about this topic?

	%
A great deal	24
A little	45
Nothing at all	31

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