

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

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This research brief summarizes results from the fourteenth 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 2,531 respondents completed the online survey in February and March 2023. 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 and experiences, and sociodemographic characteristics.

Findings

Transportation System Priorities

Respondents lived in multi-modal households. For example, 43% of respondents reported that in the previous month someone in their household had walked, 23% reported public transit trips, 15% reported bicycle trips, and 4% reported trips on a micro-mobility device, such as an electric kick-scooter.

Half of the respondents drove less than 7,500 miles per year, 60% of them drove a primary vehicle no more than 10 years old, and the average fuel efficiency of their primary vehicle was 26 miles per gallon.

Vehicle crashes were a sadly common experience. One in six respondents (17%) reported having experienced a motor vehicle collision in the previous year, and one in nine (12%) had suffered an injury from a collision during the same period.

Transportation System Priorities

The majority of respondents supported improvements to all transportation 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.

Mileage Fees

Support for mileage fees hovers around 50%. Support for replacing the gas tax with a mileage fee ranged from 45% for a flat-rate fee on all travel to 51% for a "green" fee on all travel where the rate would vary according to the vehicle's pollution emissions. Almost half of respondents supported creating a new

"Business Road-Use Fee" that would be charged to taxis (47% support), delivery and freight trucks (48%), or ride-hailing vehicles (48%).

Support for implementing a mileage fee on all travel rose from 2010 to 2023. Support for the flat-rate mileage fee grew from just 22% in 2010 to 45% in 2023. Similarly, support for the green version grew from 33% in 2010 to 51% in 2023.

A strong majority of respondents favored charging a discounted mileage fee rate for low-income drivers (62%), and half (51%) thought electric vehicles should be charged a lower rate than gasoline or diesel vehicles.

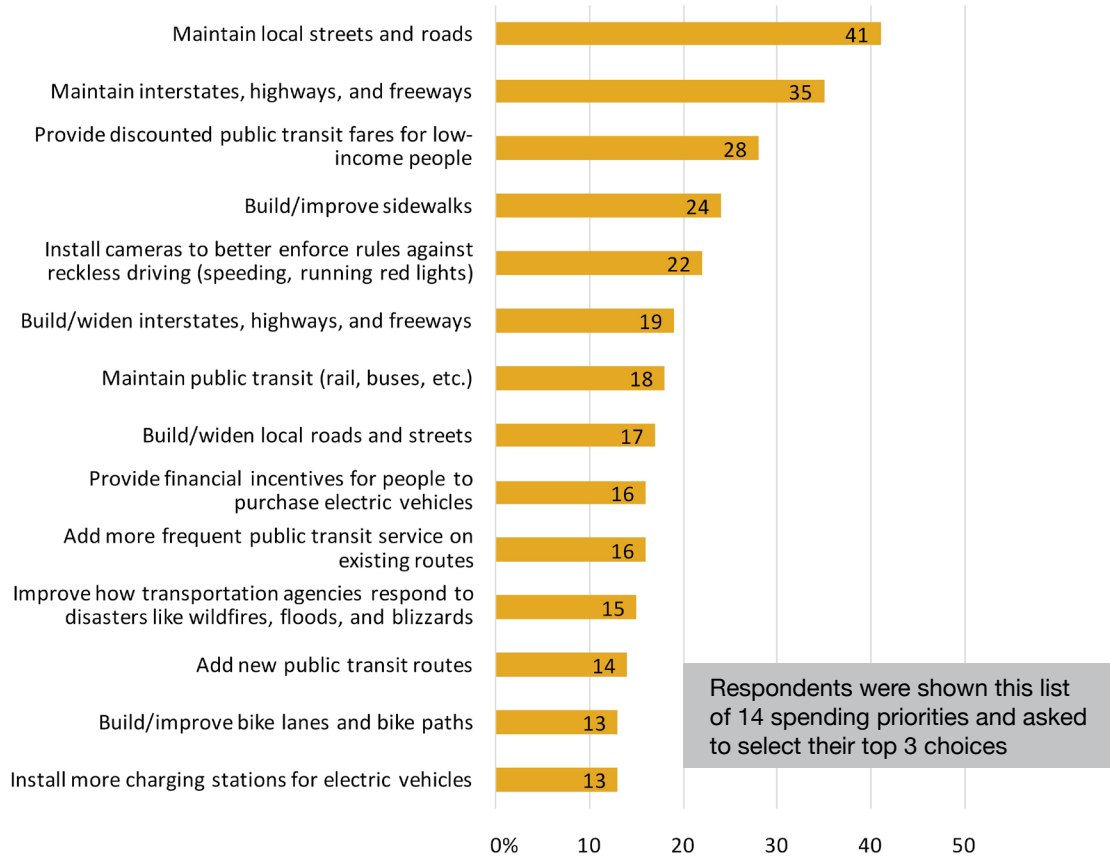
Gas Taxes

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 41% incorrectly believed the rate had been raised within the past decade.

The majority supported raising the gas tax rate if the revenue were dedicated to a specific transportation purpose. For example, 71% supported raising the gas tax if the money were dedicated to maintaining the transportation system, but only 40% 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 support for the gas tax increase with the proceeds to be spent "for transportation." For this option, support rose 16 percentage points.

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



Policy Implications

The study findings suggest the following implications for policymakers:

- Proposals to raise gas tax rates or adopt a mileage fee should commit to spending the revenue for a specific purpose that the public values. Maintenance and safety are the most popular priorities tested.
- Mileage fee programs may be more popular if they incorporate variable rate structures, such as lower rates for low-income drivers and less-polluting vehicles. Another popular design choice tested was to allow payment in small increments instead of requiring an annual payment.
- Design both the spending plan and tax structure to improve travel opportunities for low-income households.
- Support research to determine the true number of vehicle crashes occurring annually. The survey found crashes to be far more widespread than what is typically reported in the literature on U.S. road safety, underscoring a need for additional research to better understand the true extent of crashes.

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/2303



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