Running on Empty: The Case for Highway Trust Fund Reform / Gas Tax

By Jake Johnson

***Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reform its transportation policy.***

The following case mandates that the USFG raises the gas tax by 12 cents over the next two years in order to fully fund the Highway Trust Fund and pegs the gas tax to inflation. It also mandates that revenue from the gas tax will only go toward building and maintaining roads, bridges and transit systems. This is a similar proposal to one introduced by Senators Chris Murphy and Bob Corker. The majority of Americans and numerous advocates want the plan. The harms are specific to the fact that the HTF is underfunded and uses deficit spending to bridge the gap between revenue and spending within the fund.

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Will Rafey said it best in September 2010 QUOTE[[1]](#footnote-1):

“This does not bode well for the federal interstate highway system, which faces a drastic revenue shortfall. In 1956, the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act committed the federal government to establish and maintain a national transportation network. While the projects of the early ’50s and ’60s—roads, highways, bridges, freight rails, and mass transit systems—consolidated American economic dominance in their time, a steady increase in use has stretched infrastructure to the breaking point, while political constraints threaten its fiscal sustainability. To ensure long-term stability, Congress must reform the way transportation dollars are collected and spent”

END QUOTE. Please join my partner and me as we affirm that The United States federal government should substantially reform its transportation policy.

OBSERVATION 1. Our DEFINITIONS.

**Transportation:** “the activity of moving people or things from one place to another, or the system used for doing this” *(Macmillan Dictionary 2017 “Transportation”* [*http://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/american/transportation*](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/american/transportation)*)*

**Policy:** “a high-level overall plan embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures especially of a governmental body” *(Merriam Webster Online Dictionary 2017 “Policy”* [*https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/policy*](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/policy)*)*

OBSERVATION 2. One simple Background point: The Highway Trust Fund or HTF

Michael Sargent 2015 (with Heritage Foundation’s Thomas A. Roe Institute for Economic Policy Studies. His research analyzes the federal role in funding and overseeing the nation’s transportation infrastructure, as well as issues concerning the federal budget and the national debt; graduate of Davidson College, B.A. in History with minor in Economics) 11 May 2015 “Highway Trust Fund Basics: A Primer on Federal Surface Transportation Spending” <http://www.heritage.org/transportation/report/highway-trust-fund-basics-primer-federal-surface-transportation-spending>

The Highway Trust Fund collects and distributes money dedicated to federal highway and transit projects. The federal government provides roughly one-quarter of public spending on highways and mass transit, mostly in the form of grants to states. States and localities fund the remainder. The trust fund is funded primarily by the federal taxes on gasoline and diesel fuel, which are 18.3 cents and 24.3 cents per gallon, respectively. The gas and diesel tax rates have not changed since 1993, and account for 90 percent of the fund’s revenues. The remainder comes from taxes on tires, trucks and trailers, and certain kinds of vehicles as well as interest credited to the trust fund.

OBSERVATION 3. The Harms

Harm 1: Endless Deficits

A. HTF Spending exceeds gas tax revenue

Dr. Chad Shirley 2015 (Deputy Assistant Director of Microeconomic analysis at the Congressional Budget Office; formerly Associate at Cornerstone Research, economist for Econ One Research, and an associate economist for RAND Corporation. Ph.D. in Economics from Univ of California Berkeley;A.B. in Economics from Stanford) 17 June 2015 “The Status of the Highway Trust Fund and Options for Paying for Highway Spending” <https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/114th-congress-2015-2016/reports/50298-TransportationTestimony_1.pdf>

Moreover, with its current revenue sources, the Highway Trust Fund cannot support spending at the current rate. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that spending in fiscal year 2015 for highways and transit programs funded from the Highway Trust Fund will be $44 billion and $8 billion, respectively, whereas revenues collected for those purposes are projected to be $34 billion and $5 billion, respectively. By CBO’s estimate, at the end of fiscal year 2015, the balance in the trust fund’s highway account will fall to about $2 billion and the balance in its transit account will be about $1 billion.

B. Shortfalls covered by deficit spending

Peter G. Peterson Foundation 2014 (non-partisan organization dedicated to addressing America’s long-term fiscal challenges to ensure a better economic future. Led by Founder and Chairman Pete Peterson and President and CEO Michael Peterson, the Foundation works with leading policy experts, elected officials, and the public to build support for solutions to put America on a sustainable fiscal path.) 5 Sept 2014 “BUDGET EXPLAINER: HIGHWAY TRUST FUND” <http://www.pgpf.org/budget-basics/budget-explainer-highway-trust-fund>

Lawmakers have been reluctant to address the mismatch between HTF revenues and spending. Instead, they have opted to address funding shortfalls by transferring funds — mostly from the Treasury’s general fund — to the HTF. Those transfers do not bring in any new federal revenues, but they allow infrastructure spending to increase under current law. As a result, they add to current-law federal deficits and debt and do nothing to improve our nation’s overall fiscal outlook. With the August 2014 stopgap agreement, these transfers total $65 billion since 2008.

C. Bailouts Not Viable

Michael Sargent 2015 (with Heritage Foundation’s Thomas A. Roe Institute for Economic Policy Studies. His research analyzes the federal role in funding and overseeing the nation’s transportation infrastructure, as well as issues concerning the federal budget and the national debt; graduate of Davidson College, where he earned a B.A. in History with a minor in Economics) 11 May 2015 “Highway Trust Fund Basics: A Primer on Federal Surface Transportation Spending” <http://www.heritage.org/transportation/report/highway-trust-fund-basics-primer-federal-surface-transportation-spending>

In recent years Congress has routinely addressed the Highway Trust Fund shortfall by transferring money ($62 billion since 2008) from the general fund. However, these bailouts are not a viable long-term solution and indicate that federal highway funding requires extensive structural reform.[2] This paper gives an overview of the Highway Trust Fund, its role in transportation funding, and the current state of its finances.

D. The Impact: Every increase in the deficit hurts the economy

Dr William Gale and Benjamin Harris 2011. (Gale - PhD in economics, Stanford Univ.; senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and co-director of the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center; former assistant professor in the Department of Economics at UCLA, and a senior economist for the Council of Economic Advisers under Pres. George H.W. Bush; Harris - master’s degree in economics from Cornell University and a master’s degree in quantitative methods from Columbia Univ; senior research associate with the Economics Studies Program at the Brookings Institution) “A VAT for the United States: Part of the Solution” <http://www.taxanalysts.com/www/freefiles.nsf/Files/GALE-HARRIS-5.pdf/$file/GALE-HARRIS-5.pdf>

But even in the absence of a crisis, sustained deficits have deleterious effects, as they translate into lower national savings, higher interest rates, and increased indebtedness to foreign investors, all of which serve to reduce future national income. Gale and Orszag (2004a) estimate that a 1 percent of GDP increase in the deficit will raise interest rates by 25 to 35 basis points and reduce national saving by 0.5 to 0.8 percentage points of GDP.

Harm 2: Failing Infrastructure. Inadequate highway funding hurts Americans in 4 ways

A. Families Hurt

Benjamin Preston 2017 (automotive journalist; worked both as a writer and editor for the New York Times Automobiles section and as a mechanic at the Pep Boys in Fredericksburg, Va.) 4 March 2017 “Fixing America's failing infrastructure won't be easy, despite Trump's pledge” [Brackets added] <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/04/donald-trump-infrastructure-plan-roads-highway-trust-fund>

Perhaps nowhere is the plight of US infrastructure – and the issues with fixing them – more obvious than on its roads. ASCE [American Society of Civil Engineers] calculates that 32% of America’s roads are in poor or mediocre condition and 25% of its bridges are structurally deficient or obsolete. Bad roads and bridges will cost each American family $3,400 per year through 2025 unless something is done to improve their condition, according to the ASCE’s 2016 Failure to Act report. Those potholes, cracks and poor surfaces add up to a $4.3tn investment deficit, according to the ASCE. It calculates that by 2025, failing roads will cost the American economy more than $2.2tn in lost business sales.

B. 700,000 Jobs at Stake

Keith Laing 2014 (journalist who has covered government and politics at the national, state and local levels; works for The Detroit News in their Washington, D.C. bureau, where he covers automotive regulation and lobbying.) 7 May 2014 “DOT chief: Highway fund bankruptcy would cost 700,000 jobs” [http://thehill.com/policy/transportation/205464-dot-chief-highway-fund-bankruptcy-would-cost-700000-jobs](%20http://thehill.com/policy/transportation/205464-dot-chief-highway-fund-bankruptcy-would-cost-700000-jobs)

Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said Wednesday that a bankruptcy in the Department of Transportation's Highway Trust Fund would cost the U.S. 700,000 construction jobs. Lawmakers are grappling with a Sept. 30 deadline for reauthorizing the federal government's surface transportation bill, which provides funding for road and transit projects across the country.

C. National Economy Devastated

Ethel Navales 2016 (Associate editor at Right of Way Magazine. Bachelor of Arts in English from UCLA) July 2016 “PAYING THE PRICE How deteriorating infrastructure affects America’s economic future” <http://www.irwaonline.org/eweb/upload/web_jul_aug_16_PayingthePrice.pdf>

Infrastructure is critical to every nation’s prosperity, public health and welfare. Despite this, we have only been paying roughly half of America’s infrastructure bill, leaving a giant funding gap that hurts the economy, businesses, workers and families. All of the Failure to Act reports conclude that business costs and prices will increase if surface transportation worsens, if airports and waterways become too congested and outdated, or if water and electricity systems deteriorate. In fact, if none of the infrastructure gaps are addressed, the nation is expected to lose 2.5 million jobs, $4 trillion in GDP, $34,000 in disposable income per household and $7 trillion in lost business sales by 2025. This is largely because the weakening of even one of the infrastructure systems has an effect on the others. For example, if airports become too congested, passengers may turn to surface transportation. But what happens if surface transportation infrastructure is too deteriorated to take on the extra strain? And what happens when power plants that provide electricity do not have a reliable source of clean water? Ultimately, these infrastructure systems depend on one another and the deterioration of just one will have a cascading impact on the other systems.

D. Lives Lost

Ron Nixon 2015 (Washington Correspondent for the New York Times who covers homeland security.) 5 November 2015 “Human Cost Rises as Old Bridges, Dams and Roads Go Unrepaired” <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/06/us/politics/human-cost-rises-as-old-bridges-dams-and-roads-go-unrepaired.html?_r=0>

It is a concern shared by many Americans. From coast to coast, the country’s once-envied collection of bridges, dams, pipelines, sewage treatment plants and levees is crumbling. Studies have shown that a lack of investment in public infrastructure costs billions of dollars a year in lost productivity, as people sit in traffic or wait for delayed shipments. But experts on transportation infrastructure say the economic measures obscure the more dire threat to public safety: Every year, hundreds of deaths, illnesses and injuries can be attributed to the failure of bridges, dams, roads and other decaying structures.

OBSERVATION 4: In order to solve the aforementioned harms, we offer the following PLAN, implemented by Congress and the President

1. Congress enacts the Murphy-Corker plan, increasing the federal gasoline and diesel taxes both by 12 cents over the next two years to increase HTF revenue
2. Gas tax revenue will be used for building and maintaining roads, bridges and transit systems within the HTF
3. Peg the gas tax to inflation
4. Enforcement: US Department of Transportation, Internal Revenue Service and any other necessary federal agencies
5. Funding: No funding is necessary as this plan is purely legislative
6. Timeline: Immediately upon an affirmative ballot
7. The Affirmative Team reserves the right to clarify the plan as needed.

OBSERVATION 5: Solvency. The 12-cent gas tax increase solves.

Shortfalls are covered and future deficits prevented

Alexander Bolton 2014 (staff writer at The Hill.) 18 June 2014 “Senators propose raising the gas tax for the first time since 1993” <http://thehill.com/homenews/senate/209769-murphy-and-corker-propose-raising-164-billion-through-higher-gas-tax>

Sens. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) and Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) on Wednesday unveiled the first bipartisan Senate proposal to raise the gas tax, broaching a dangerous political issue that lawmakers have avoided for years. The Murphy-Corker plan would raise the gas tax by 12 cents over the next two years, raising $164 billion over the next decade and covering the shortfall in the Highway Trust Fund. It would index the gas tax to inflation, pegging it to the Consumer Price Index, to avoid future shortfalls.

2A Evidence: Highway Trust Fund / Gas Tax

OPENING QUOTES / AFFIRMATIVE PHILOSOPHY

Congress Needs to Act Immediately

Ray Lahood and Ed Rendell 2014 (LaHood - former US Secretary of Transportation ; former congressman from Illinois. Rendell – former Governor of Pennsylvania, B.A. from Univ of Penn. J.D. from Villanova Univ School of Law; former District Attorney of Philadelphia) 14 May 2014 “Congress must increase gas tax before highway fund runs dry” <http://www.bafuture.org/news/congress-must-increase-gas-tax-highway-fund-runs-dry>

Congress should act immediately to keep the Highway Trust Fund from going bankrupt. The years of kicking the can down the pothole-filled road must end. Congress needs to make a real and sustainable long-term fix for funding America’s transportation system. The economic prosperity of North Carolina – and our nation – depends upon it.

Time to End the Pothole Penalty

Alexander Bolton 2014 (staff writer at The Hill.) 18 June 2014 “Senators propose raising the gas tax for the first time since 1993” <http://thehill.com/homenews/senate/209769-murphy-and-corker-propose-raising-164-billion-through-higher-gas-tax>

Terry O’Sullivan, president of the Laborers’ International Union of North America, applauded the tax plan. “It’s time to end the ‘pothole penalty’ – the lost lives, accidents and damage to vehicles caused by poor roads and deficient and obsolete bridges. Congress now has multiple, viable options to work with to address our crumbling transportation infrastructure and they should feel compelled to do so,” he said.

No Reform Since 1993

Alec MacGillis 2015 (covers politics and government for ProPublica; previously spent three years writing for The New Republic and five years as a national reporter for The Washington Post) 22 July 2015 “Road Hazard: How the ‘Embarrassing’ Gas Tax Impasse Explains Washington” <https://www.propublica.org/article/road-hazard-how-the-embarrassing-gas-tax-impasse-explains-washington>

In 1993, the Dow Jones industrial average was still well under 4,000, the best-selling car in the country was the Ford Taurus, and the average cost of a Major League Baseball ticket was under $10. That was also the year that Congress last raised the federal tax on gasoline. The gas tax pays most of the tab for America’s federal highway program; it’s what we rely on for new highways and for the bridge repairs that keep us safe. Those costs go up every year, but the tax remains stuck at 18.4 cents per gallon. In fact, it’s effectively going down: since it was last raised, those 18.4 cents have lost more than a third of their value to inflation, and at the same time drivers with fuel-efficient vehicles have been buying less gasoline, further reducing the federal take.

A Good Bang for the Buck

Joshua Smith 2014 (Budget Policy Director at U.S. Senate Budget Committee and was previously a senior policy analyst at Economic Policy Institute) 27 June 2014 “Tax Gasoline, Save the Highway Trust Fund, and Help the Economy (and the Planet)” <http://www.epi.org/blog/tax-gasoline-save-highway-trust-fund-economy/>

Increasing the gasoline tax—thus discouraging driving, incentivizing higher fuel efficiency, and enabling job-creating infrastructure spending—would be a good bang for the buck (or for the 12 cents a gallon).

INHERENCY

SQ Barriers and policies

Congress is covering shortfalls with emergency cash, and even that runs out by 2020

Benjamin Preston 2017 (automotive journalist; worked both as a writer and editor for the New York Times Automobiles section and as a mechanic at the Pep Boys in Fredericksburg, Va.) 4 March 2017 “Fixing America's failing infrastructure won't be easy, despite Trump's pledge” <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/04/donald-trump-infrastructure-plan-roads-highway-trust-fund>

According to the CBO since 2008, the federal government had transferred $65bn into the HTF from the US treasury’s general fund to cover the shortfall. Later that year, Barack Obama signed the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (Fast) Act into law, buying time for the HTF by infusing an additional $70bn into it from the general fund. Joung Lee, the policy director for the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, said the additional Fast Act funding is set to run out by 2020.

Congress using extensions and stop-gap measures to keep HTF going

Kristen Doerer 2015 (digital reporter-producer for PBS NewsHour’s Making Sen$e.) 27 October 2015 “The Highway Trust Fund keeps bridges from falling down, but will Congress reauthorize it?” <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/making-sense/highway-trust-fund-keeps-bridges-falling-will-congress-pay-bill/>

Since 2005, Congress has passed 34 short-term extensions, and it has not reauthorized the fund for more than two years at a time. To keep the fund solvent, Congress has relied on a number of stopgap measures — most notably, in 2014, using “pension smoothing,” which allowed businesses to defer putting money into employees pensions in order to report bigger profits and therefore pay higher taxes. This revenue was then funneled into the Highway Trust Fund.

Inherent Barrier = Congressional Inaction

Brett LoGiurato 2014 (executive editor at Business Insider; graduated from Syracuse University in 2011 with degrees in newspaper and online journalism and political science.) 18 June 2014 “Two Senators Have A Very Simple And Very Unpopular Idea For Saving The Highway Trust Fund” <http://www.businessinsider.com/highway-trust-fund-solution-gas-tax-hike-corker-murphy-2014-6>

But Murphy said the tough choice would pay dividends for the fund in the long run, and Corker said it was an "embarrassment" that no one has spoke about this potential solution already. "In Washington, far too often, we huff and puff about paying for proposals that are unpopular, yet throw future generations under the bus when public pressure mounts on popular proposals that have broad support," Corker said in a statement. "Congress should be embarrassed that it has played chicken with the Highway Trust Fund and allowed it to become one of the largest budgeting failures in the federal government."

A/T “States do it instead”

Federal involvement in highway funding is justified and needed. States can’t do it alone

Becky Moylan 201 4 (MA in Public Communication from American University ;Senior Manager of Public Affairs and Media Relations at the American Society of Civil Engineers. The American Society of Civil Engineers represents more than 150,000 members of the civil engineering profession in 177 countries.) 3 June 2014 “10 Myths About the Highway Trust Fund” <http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/10-myths-about-the-highway-trust-fund/>

The Highway Trust Fund is designed to assist states in paying (historically about 45 percent) for transportation projects for many reasons, and it is a system that has served the country well. The cost of transportation projects is a huge expense and states do not have the funding to go this alone. The U.S. Constitution’s Commerce Clause (Article 1, Section 8, Clause 3) grants Congress the power to invest and maintain roads, bridges and transit. From the Interstate Highway System (keyword: Interstate) to our ever-expanding electrical grid, infrastructure is indeed a national issue that must be addressed through a national vision.

Some might, but most won’t: Gas taxes are unpopular at the state level in most of the country.

Alan Greenblatt 2016 (covers politics as well as policy issues for Governing; coauthor of a standard textbook on state and local governments; previously worked as a reporter for NPR and CQ.) 5 February 2016, with Governing.com (provides nonpartisan news, insight and analysis) “Gas Tax Increases Still a Hard Sell in States and Congress” [http://www.governing.com/topics/transportation-infrastructure/gov-raising-gas-taxes-states-obama-oil.html](http://www.governing.com/topics/transportation-infrastructure/gov-raising-gas-taxes-states-obama-oil.htmlr) [brackets added]

Raising the gas tax is a tough sell in Missouri. For one thing, the state's constitution limits the total annual increase in all taxes and fees to about $90 million. Since each penny of tax on gasoline brings in $39 million, lawmakers couldn't increase the tax by much more than 2 cents. There's widespread recognition that roads require more revenue, and the state's gas tax is among the lowest in the nation. But even a modest-sized bump is unlikely to pass this year. "In an election year, it's an uphill battle," said Glen Kolkmeyer, who chairs the Missouri House Transportation Committee. The same is true all over the country. Many states have long lists of projects that are approved but not paid for. Even with the [recent passage](http://www.governing.com/topics/transportation-infrastructure/gov-congress-highway-transportation-bill.html) in Congress of a five-year, $300 billion package -- the first major federal transportation bill in a decade -- there's not enough money to make up the shortfalls in states. Despite all that, most governors and legislators are reluctant to raise their gax tax rates to increase infrastructure funding. "Raising taxes in any form continues to be a very radioactive strategy," said Sujit CanagaRetna, a senior fiscal analyst with the Council of State Goverments.

[**End quote. Later in the same article, it continues. Quote:]**

Eight states did approve gas tax increases last year -- including conservative places like Georgia, Idaho and Nebraska -- and another eight did so the previous two years. "That's more than we've seen in a significant amount of time," said Allison Premo Black, senior economist with the American Road and Transportation Builders Association. Nevertheless, gas taxes remain highly unpopular throughout most of the nation. In California, the tax rate is tied to the price of gas, much like a sales tax, rather than taxing a certain number of cents per gallon. Falling prices have meant plummeting revenues, leading the California Transportation Commission last month to cancel $754 million worth of projects over five years, or 38 percent of the total. In his [State of the State address](http://www.governing.com/topics/politics/tns-california-jerry-brown-state-address.html), California Gov. Jerry Brown implored legislators to "bite the bullet and enact new fees and taxes" to reduce the state's $77 billion backlog of road repairs. But what couldn't pass in a special session last year isn't expected to get much further in an election year.

States historically have neglected infrastructure

Elizabeth McNichol 2016 (Senior Fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities) 23 February 2016 (CBPP is a nonpartisan research and policy institute, founded in 1981 with the goal of analyzing federal budget priorities) “It’s Time for States to Invest in Infrastructure” <http://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/its-time-for-states-to-invest-in-infrastructure>

Every state needs infrastructure improvements that have potential to pay off economically in private sector investment and job growth. But rather than identifying and making the infrastructure investments that provide the foundation for a strong economy, many states are cutting taxes and offering corporate subsidies in a misguided approach to boosting economic growth. Tax cuts will spur little to no economic growth and take money away from schools, universities, and other public investments essential to producing the talented workforce that businesses need. This pattern of neglect of infrastructure by states — the primary stewards (along with their local government partners) of the nation’s infrastructure — has serious consequences for the nation’s growth and quality of life as roads crumble, school buildings become obsolete, and outdated facilities jeopardize public health.

[**End quote. Later in the same article, it continues. Quote:]**

But overall, states are cutting infrastructure spending as a share of the economy, the opposite of what is needed. Spending by state and local governments on all types of capital dropped from its high of 3 percent of the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the late 1960s to less than 2 percent in 2014. Falling federal spending on infrastructure is exacerbating the problem.

States are “ill-suited” to deal with increased responsibility for transportation funding

Prof. Christopher Yoo and Timothy Pfenninger 2015 (Yoo, - professor of law at Univ of Pennsylvania Law School, has authored books on technology and law, and frequently testifies before congress on such issues as technology and law || Pfenninger is a J.D. candidate at the Penn Law School, and has frequently worked as a research assistant and/or interns at places such as the US Attorney’s Office) 13 October 2015, with the Univ of Pennsylvania School of Law. “CONVERGING ON CRISIS: SAVING THE HIGHWAY TRUST FUND” <https://publicpolicy.wharton.upenn.edu/live/news/989-converging-on-crisis-saving-the-highway-trust-fund/for-students/blog/news.php>

When American surface transportation infrastructure requires the largest influx of capital investment due to lifespan obsolescence, deferred maintenance, and mothballed projects, the HTF faces constrained revenues due to (1) hypothecation, (2) inflation, (3) technological advancements, and (4) shifting microeconomic behaviors. Furthermore, the states are ill-suited to accept increased responsibility for transportation administration and capitalization due to serious budgetary constraints, the incongruence of state gas tax rates with transport needs, and the appropriation of gas tax receipts for mandatory state spending. The myriad impediments to government infrastructure investment preclude modernization and adaptation for changing transport modes and shifting economic demands.

States are even worse at managing highway funding than the federal government

Prof. Christopher Yoo and Timothy Pfenninger 2015 (Yoo, - professor of law at Univ of Pennsylvania Law School, has authored books on technology and law, and frequently testifies before congress on such issues as technology and law || Pfenninger is a J.D. candidate at the Penn Law School) 13 October 2015, with the Univ of Pennsylvania School of Law. “CONVERGING ON CRISIS: SAVING THE HIGHWAY TRUST FUND” <https://publicpolicy.wharton.upenn.edu/live/news/989-converging-on-crisis-saving-the-highway-trust-fund/for-students/blog/news.php>

New Jersey also exemplifies another problem with state gas taxes: states do not spend these funds on roads. In New Jersey, the state government, spent 95 percent of over $500 million in gas tax revenues to service its debt. Meanwhile, Texas spends 25 percent of its fuel receipts on education. Then, these states are forced to pull funds from the HTF to pay for infrastructure maintenance and expansion, drawing from the already-depleting fund. While this may be interpreted as an argument for hypothecated state gasoline taxes, it also demonstrates that the states are even less able to administer a transportation program than Washington is. It would seem that states should have less authority over transportation revenues and expenditures so that they can stop robbing Peter (the HTF) to pay Paul (their state transportation funds) to pay Patty (their state debt servicing and other programs).

States are poor planners for regional or national projects

The Economist 2011 (respected British news magazine, does not cite the names of individual authors) 28 April 2011. “Life in the Slow Lane” <http://www.economist.com/node/18620944>

States can make bad planners. Big metropolitan areas—Chicago, New York and Washington among them—often sprawl across state lines. State governments frequently bicker over how (and how much) to invest. Facing tight budget constraints, New Jersey's Republican governor, Chris Christie, recently scuttled a large project to expand the railway network into New York City. New Jersey commuter trains share a 100-year-old tunnel with Amtrak, a major bottleneck. Mr Christie's decision was widely criticised for short-sightedness; but New Jersey faced cost overruns that in a better system should have been shared with other potential beneficiaries all along the north-eastern corridor. Regional planning could help to avoid problems like this.

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE

Deficits

Gas Tax purchasing power is down 40% since it was last raised in ’93, creating HTF deficits

Laura Hale 2017 (Manager of Federal Relations at the American Society of Civil Engineers, the nation’s oldest engineering society; Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Univ of Notre Dame. ) 1 May 2017 “A Chance to Fix the Highway Trust Fund” [http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/a-chance-to-fix-the-highway-trust-fund/](%20http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/a-chance-to-fix-the-highway-trust-fund/)

The HTF is the main funding source for the federal government’s investments in highway and transit infrastructure and is primarily funded through the federal motor fuels tax (aka the ‘gas tax’) of 18.4 cents per gallon on gasoline and 24.4 cents per gallon on diesel. At the federal level, the gas tax has not been raised since 1993 and inflation has reduced its purchasing power by 40%. To make up for the dwindling value of the gas tax, Congress has transferred $140 billion from the General Fund to the HTF since 2008. Unless a solution is found, Congress will again have to transfer general funds to the HTF in 2020.

Purchasing Power Lost: Gas tax hasn’t been raised since ’93 but the cost of everything has gone up

Becky Moylan 201 4 (MA in Public Communication from American University ;Senior Manager of Public Affairs and Media Relations at the American Society of Civil Engineers. The American Society of Civil Engineers represents more than 150,000 members of the civil engineering profession in 177 countries.) 3 June 2014 “10 Myths About the Highway Trust Fund” <http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/10-myths-about-the-highway-trust-fund/>

The gas tax is not tied to inflation and hasn’t been raised in more than 20 years. We are trying to run a 2014 transportation system on 1993 dollars. Consider that the cost of many items has doubled or tripled since 1993. For example, a new car cost $12,750 in 1993, whereas in 2013 a new car costs on average $31,252. The purchasing power of the federal gas tax is not what it once was. This is obviously an untenable formula that must be addressed.

Reasons for Loss of Purchasing Power: Vehicle efficiency + Higher construction costs

Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy 2013 (The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) is a non-profit, non-partisan research organization that provides timely, in-depth analyses on the effects of federal, state, and local tax policies.) 23 September 2013 “A Federal Gas Tax for the Future” <https://itep.org/a-federal-gas-tax-for-the-future/>

Two important, yet completely unrelated developments have combined to greatly reduce the purchasing power of the poorly-designed federal gas tax. Improvements in vehicle fuel-efficiency have cut directly into gas tax revenues by allowing drivers to travel farther distances while buying less gasoline. Meanwhile, inevitable growth in the cost of asphalt, machinery, and other construction materials has put additional strain on the gas tax because its rate has not been adjusted to keep pace. The combined impact of these two factors has reduced the value of the gas tax by 28 percent relative to 1997—the year in which the federal government decided the gas tax should be used exclusively for transportation purposes

Vehicle fuel efficiency (less gas consumed) + Higher construction costs = Inadequate revenues for the HTF

Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy 2013 (a non-profit, non-partisan research organization that provides timely, in-depth analyses on the effects of federal, state, and local tax policies.) 23 Sept 2013 “A Federal Gas Tax for the Future” <https://itep.org/a-federal-gas-tax-for-the-future/>

Comparing the relative importance of these two issues, over three-fourths (78 percent) of the current gasoline tax revenue shortfall is a result of Congress’ failure to plan for inevitable growth in the cost of building and maintaining the nation’s infrastructure. The remainder (22 percent) is due to improvements in vehicle fuel-efficiency. In other words, construction cost growth has been 3.5 times more important than fuel-efficiency gains in eroding the purchasing power of the gas tax.

Road Users Only Paying 66% of Infrastructure Costs

Rep. Reid Reibble 2015 (U.S. Representative for Wisconsin's 8th congressional district from 2011 to 2017) 3 June 2015 “Fix our roads and bridges now” <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/06/03/fix-our-roads-and-bridges-now-commentary.html>

Right now, people who use our roads are paying for only about 66 percent of the cost of those roads through the gas tax. The remaining 34 percent, approximately $16 billion every year, is consuming dollars that might otherwise go towards medical research or care for veterans, and is being paid for by all Americans regardless of road use. Our legislation, the Bridge to Sustainable Infrastructure Act, would index the gas tax to future inflation and provide Congress strong incentive to bring our transportation costs and revenue under control by creating an automatic revenue increase if Congress fails to act in a year. A prevailing principle is at play here: If something is important enough to buy, it is important enough to pay for!

HTF will have estimated $180 billion deficit over the next decade

Brian Devine 2015 (Digital Director at No Labels, an American political organization based in the United States, composed of Republicans, Democrats, and independents, whose mission is to "usher in a new era of focused problem solving in American politics.") 25 October 2015 “Just the Facts: Highway Trust Fund” <https://www.nolabels.org/blog/just-the-facts-highway-trust-fund/>

The fund is running out of money. In Fiscal Year 2015 spending from this fund is expected to reach $52 billion. This includes $44 billion from the Highway Account, which funds infrastructure, and $8 billion from the Mass Transit Account, which supports public transit. Unfortunately, combined revenue is calculated to be only $39 billion, leaving a deficit of $13 billion. Projections by the Congressional Budget Office predict a $180 billion deficit over the next decade, if things continue in the same direction.

HTF has $16 Billion Annual Deficit

Kristen Doerer 2015 (digital reporter-producer for PBS NewsHour’s Making Sen$e.) 27 October 2015 “The Highway Trust Fund keeps bridges from falling down, but will Congress reauthorize it?” <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/making-sense/highway-trust-fund-keeps-bridges-falling-will-congress-pay-bill/>

That $34 billion the federal gas tax brings in annually isn’t enough to fund all of our infrastructure needs. The federal government currently spends about $50 billion on transportation infrastructure and thus runs roughly a $16 billion annual deficit. Because the Fund cannot borrow money, it has needed regular general fund transfers in order to stay solvent. But even that $50 billion is seen as insufficient by transportation experts, including current Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx, who has said that “we need a transportation reset.” The Congressional Budget Office reports that to simply keep up with the current performance of the highway system, an additional $14 billion a year would have to be spent on transportation infrastructure.

Adding to the Unsustainable National Debt

Tre Goins-Phillips 2017 (assistant editor and staff writer for TheBlaze; graduate of Liberty University, where he served as the opinion editor for the student newspaper.) 17 January 2017 “Government watchdog: US debt is unsustainable” <http://www.theblaze.com/news/2017/01/17/government-watchdog-us-debt-is-unsustainable/>

The ever-growing federal debt is on an unsustainable path and requires swift action from Congress, according to a new report from the Government Accountability Office. The study, which was sent to President Barack Obama and congressional leaders, said the federal government is “highly leveraged in debt by historical norms and on an unsustainable long-term fiscal path caused by a structural imbalance between revenue and spending.”

Failing Infrastructure

Funding Uncertainty Stalls Projects

Alec MacGillis 2015 (covers politics and government for ProPublica; previously spent three years writing for The New Republic and five years as a national reporter for The Washington Post) 22 July 2015 “Road Hazard: How the ‘Embarrassing’ Gas Tax Impasse Explains Washington” <https://www.propublica.org/article/road-hazard-how-the-embarrassing-gas-tax-impasse-explains-washington>

As a result, the main U.S. spending account for infrastructure has fallen deep in the red, and the gap gets worse every year. The government, through a series of funding tricks, keeps the Highway Trust Fund on life support with short-term emergency patches. The latest infusion expires at the end of the month, and the argument about how to fix it is coming to a head this week. The uncertainty has frozen major projects around the country, from the widening of Route 1 in Delaware to the Kalispell bypass in Montana, while maintenance and repairs are long overdue on thousands of roads and bridges dangerously near the end of their expected life spans.

Infrastructure in Disrepair

CNN 2017 (journalist Madeline Holcombe) 15 February 2017 “Number of bridges in the US that need repair? More than 55,000” <http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/15/us/structural-deficient-bridges-trnd/index.html>

There are over 612,000 bridges in the United States. Almost 10% of them need to be repaired or replaced. That adds up to 55,710 bridges, according to a report on the state of the nation's roads and bridges from the American Road and Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA). The states with bridges in the worst shape? Iowa, Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Nebraska. Americans cross these structures in disrepair 185 million times a day.

Congested and Deficient Infrastructure

Eric Beech 2014 (Reporter for Reuters) 12 February 2014 “U.S. business, labor leaders urge Congress to raise gas tax” <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-transportation-tax-idUSBREA1B2B020140212>

Donohue pointed to a San Jose State University survey in 2012 that found 58 percent of Americans would support a gas tax increase if the money would be used to build and maintain roads and mass transit. The American Society of Civil Engineers in a 2013 report said the country's infrastructure was in a woeful state from lack of investment, with one in nine bridges structurally deficient and 40 percent of its major highways congested.

Congestion and Deficient Roads Cost

Becky Moylan 201 4 (MA in Public Communication from American University ;Senior Manager of Public Affairs and Media Relations at the American Society of Civil Engineers. The American Society of Civil Engineers represents more than 150,000 members of the civil engineering profession in 177 countries.) 3 June 2014 “10 Myths About the Highway Trust Fund” <http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/10-myths-about-the-highway-trust-fund/>

The notion that we simply cannot find a long-term, sustainable revenue source is false. The costs of inaction and allowing the Highway Trust Fund to cease funding for needed repairs and maintenance are immense. Americans are already paying for the cost of our nation’s D+ infrastructure. American families and businesses are losing money and time. Congested roads cost an estimated $101 billion per year in wasted time and fuel, and driving on roads in need of repair costs motorists an average of $324 per year in vehicle repair and operating costs. We can either invest now or pay a whole lot more in the years ahead. The lesson is clear: We can’t afford not to act.

Congestion Costs $121 billion

Peter G. Peterson Foundation 2014 (non-partisan organization dedicated to addressing America’s long-term fiscal challenges to ensure a better economic future. Led by Founder and Chairman Pete Peterson and President and CEO Michael Peterson, the Foundation works with leading policy experts, elected officials, and the public to build support for solutions to put America on a sustainable fiscal path.) 5 Sept 2014 “BUDGET EXPLAINER: HIGHWAY TRUST FUND” <http://www.pgpf.org/budget-basics/budget-explainer-highway-trust-fund>

Regardless of the source of funding, safe and efficient infrastructure is a driver of economic growth. Yet, by many measures, the current system is not meeting America’s 21st century needs. According to the World Economic Forum, the U.S. ranks 18th in road quality, and 19th in overall infrastructure quality. Considering the importance of infrastructure in transporting goods and people in the economy, this puts the U.S. at an economic disadvantage. Traffic congestion alone costs Americans over $121 billion in wasted time and fuel in 2011, according to a study by Texas A&M University.

Americans Harmed

Andrew J. Hawkins 2015 (transportation reporter at The Verge; formerly with Crain's New York Business and the New York Daily News.) 25 November 2015 “The fund to repair America's crumbling infrastructure is almost out of cash” <https://www.theverge.com/transportation/2015/11/25/9794800/highway-trust-fund-crumbling-infrastructure-roads-bridges>

What bad infrastructure is, though, is a cash sinkhole: not just for the economy, but for drivers as well. Bad road conditions in Washington, DC cost individual drivers an extra $1,042 each year in extra vehicle operation and maintenance costs, according to TripNet, a national transportation research group. California drivers pay an extra $742 a year, New Jersey drivers $685, and Oklahoma drivers $763.

National Economy Devastated

The American Society of Civil Engineers 2016 (ASCE represents more than 150,000 members of the civil engineering profession in 177 countries. Founded in 1852, ASCE is the nation’s oldest engineering society) May 2016 “FAILURE TO ACT CLOSING THE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT GAP FOR AMERICA’S ECONOMIC FUTURE” <http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2016-FTA-Report-Close-the-Gap.pdf>

If none of these infrastructure gaps are addressed, the U.S. is expected to lose nearly $4 trillion in GDP by 2025 and $18 trillion in GDP over the 25 year period of 2016 to 2040, averaging over $700 billion per year. From 2016 to 2025, each household will lose almost $3,400 each year in disposable income due to infrastructure deficiencies; and if not addressed, the loss will grow to an average of $5,100 annually from 2026 to 2040. From 2016 to 2025, households will average a cumulative loss $34,000 in disposable income; and if infrastructure deficiencies are not addressed, households will average an additional cumulative loss of $76,000 in discretionary income from the years 2026 to 2040. Even though net job impacts are counted in millions of jobs lost from the U.S. due to insufficient infrastructure investment, overall economic impacts in dollars lost in the economy, measured by business sales and GDP will be even more dramatic than impacts on overall number of jobs. Job losses in part will be mitigated by more people working for less money. Many of these jobs will be in replacement for technology based and education-driven industries that are the basis of long-term economic development.

Example of crumbling infrastructure: I-35 bridge in Minneapolis collapse, killed 13, injured 145

Kristen Doerer 2015 (digital reporter-producer for PBS NewsHour’s Making Sen$e.) 27 October 2015 “The Highway Trust Fund keeps bridges from falling down, but will Congress reauthorize it?” <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/making-sense/highway-trust-fund-keeps-bridges-falling-will-congress-pay-bill/>

On Aug. 1, 2007, the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis collapsed, pitching cement slabs, twisted metal and cars 10 stories down into the Mississippi river. Thirteen people died in the disaster; 145 were injured. For 17 consecutive years, the bridge had been rated in poor condition by inspectors from the Minnesota Department of Transportation. In 2006, the agency also classified the bridge as “structurally deficient.” But it was never shut down for repairs. When it did collapse, it fell across a rail yard, severed utility lines, blocked the waterway and disrupted traffic to Saint Paul and the nearby airport. The estimated economic impact was about $17 million in 2007 and $43 million in 2008.

SOLVENCY / PLAN ADVOCACY

Gas Tax is fair because it’s a user tax, and now is the right time to raise it, since gas prices are down

James Surowiecki 2015 (staff writer at The New Yorker; has contributed to the Wall Street Journal, Wired, the Times Magazine, the Washington Post, and Lingua Franca) 24 July 2015 “Raise the Gas Tax Already” <http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/raise-the-gas-tax-already>

What’s especially infuriating about the bill is that we already have, in the gas tax, an ideal tool for raising money to pay for highway repairs. It’s a user tax: if you don’t drive you don’t pay it, and if you drive less it costs you less. It helps to correct, at least mildly, a clear market failure: people who drive don’t pay the full costs of the externalities they create, including the wear and tear they put on roads, the pollution they emit, and the congestion they help produce. And while certain taxes disincentivize, to some degree, things we like (such as work or investment), the gas tax, by raising the cost of driving, gets us less of things we don’t like (pollution, carbon emissions, and road wear). That’s why even conservative economists, like Gregory Mankiw, have been ardent advocates of gasoline taxes. This is also an excellent moment to raise the gas tax, since oil and gas prices are so much lower than they were, making any price increase at the pump more palatable to drivers.

HTF shortfalls can be solved by increasing and then indexing the gas tax

Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget 2014 (nonpartisan, non-profit organization committed to educating the public on issues with significant fiscal policy impact. Their bipartisan leadership comprises some of the nation's leading budget experts, including many past heads of the House and Senate Budget Committees, the Congressional Budget Office, the Office of Management and Budget, the Government Accountability Office, and the Federal Reserve Board) 23 June 2014 “Restoring Highway Solvency by Increasing Current Revenue” <http://www.crfb.org/blogs/restoring-highway-solvency-increasing-current-revenue>

One of the most straightforward fixes would be to simply increase the gas and diesel fuel taxes, currently set at 18.4 cents/gallon and 24.4 cents/gallon respectively, that already comprise almost 90 percent of dedicated HTF funding. As fuel efficiency continues to improve, gas tax revenue is expected to remain roughly flat in the coming years, opening wider the structural gap between highway spending and revenue. Neither tax has been increased since 1993, and had they simply been indexed to inflation at the time, the HTF would not currently be facing a shortfall.

User Fee System is the Most Logical Solution

Tom Price and Ray Lahood 2015 (Price – Secretary of Health & Human Services; previously U.S. Representative for Georgia's 6th congressional district; former chairman of the House Budget Committee. LaHood - former United States Secretary of Transportation from 2009 until 2013; former congressman from Illinois's 18th congressional district ) 29 Sept 2015 “America’s pothole — the Highway Trust Fund” <http://thehill.com/opinion/op-ed/255379-americas-pothole-the-highway-trust-fund>

A user-fee system is the most logical way to ensure permanent revenue for our highways. As conservatives, we believe the government generates plenty of revenue but spends too much. Citizens are rightly skeptical when they pay their taxes but cannot account for where the money goes in the vast federal bureaucracy. The beauty of the gas tax is that the revenue goes directly into the Highway Trust Fund, which is spent on roads and bridges.

The Right Solution to a Big Problem

Tom Price and Ray Lahood 2015 (Price – Secretary of Health & Human Services; previously U.S. Representative for Georgia's 6th congressional district; former chairman of the House Budget Committee. LaHood - former United States Secretary of Transportation from 2009 until 2013; former congressman from Illinois's 18th congressional district) 29 Sept 2015 “America’s pothole — the Highway Trust Fund” <http://thehill.com/opinion/op-ed/255379-americas-pothole-the-highway-trust-fund>

This is a revenue-neutral proposal. It does not generate money for Washington; it generates money to fix the potholes in your neighborhood. This proposal might scare Congress. But it is the right solution to a big problem. And let’s be clear about the alternative. If we fail to meaningfully fund our highway system, it will continue to fall into a state of disrepair. Our bridges will continue to become structurally deficient and unusable. We will fall further behind our competitors.

Higher gas tax: The obvious and only answer to fix the broken HTF

Russell Berman 2014 (senior associate editor at The Atlantic, where he covers political news; previously a congressional reporter for The Hill and a Washington correspondent for The New York Sun.) 7 December 2014 “The Tax That Dare Not Be Hiked” <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/12/the-tax-that-dare-not-be-hiked/383428/>

Fuel prices are plunging to their lowest level in years. The Highway Trust Fund is broke, and Congress faces a spring deadline to replenish it. The obvious answer—the only answer, according to many in Washington—is to raise the 18.4 cent-per-gallon gas tax, which hasn't gone up in more than 20 years. Since prices at the pump have dropped more than a dollar per gallon in some areas, drivers would barely notice the extra nickel they'd be forced initially to pay as a result of the tax hike. That wasn't true until recently: For years, the pocketbook punch of the Great Recession combined with gas prices that peaked above $4 made an increase both politically and economically untenable.

Hybrids and Electric Cars are not the problem: It’s the gas tax rate being set too low

Carl Davis 2015 (senior analyst at the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP), a non-profit, non-partisan research group based in Washington, DC. formerly worked as part of the State Economic Issues team at AARP; Bachelors Degrees in Economics and Political Science from Virginia Tech;Masters in Public Policy from George Washington Univ.) 29 January 2015 “Should We Raise The Gas Tax?” <http://www.ourenergypolicy.org/should-we-raise-the-gas-tax/>

The gas tax hasn’t been decimated by hybrids or made obsolete by electric cars. The reason the gas tax is falling short is that the tax rate is simply too low. It’s encouraging that more and more lawmakers are realizing this. Six states enacted gas tax increases or reforms in 2013, two more states followed suit in 2014, and now a dozen states are seriously considering gas tax increases in 2015. On top of that, we’re now at a point where most Americans live in a state with a reformed, “variable-rate” gas tax that can grow over time. Now that lower gas prices have freed up some room in drivers’ budgets, it’s a great time for the federal government to follow the states’ lead and raise the gas tax. The improvements we need to make to our infrastructure have been on hold long enough.

Vehicle Miles Traveled Taxes Not the Answer

Carl Davis 2015 (senior analyst at the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP), a non-profit, non-partisan research group based in Washington, DC. ; formerly worked as part of the State Economic Issues team at AARP; Bachelors Degrees in Economics and Political Science from Virginia Tech;Masters in Public Policy from George Washington Univ.) 29 January 2015 “Should We Raise The Gas Tax?” <http://www.ourenergypolicy.org/should-we-raise-the-gas-tax/>

It’s unquestionably a good thing that analysts and lawmakers are studying Vehicle Miles Traveled taxes (VMT taxes) and thinking about the long-term future of transportation finance. We seem to be headed toward a future where a sizable share of us will eventually be driving electric cars, and if we get to that point then clearly a replacement (or more likely, a supplement) to the gas tax will be needed.But it’s important to emphasize that we’re not there yet. As I stated in my earlier post, most of our current gas tax revenue shortfall is attributable to inflation, not vehicle fuel-efficiency gains. It is also the case that inflation is by far the easier of the two problems to address: indexing the gas tax rate involves much less effort, expense, and time than setting up a national system for tracking drivers’ mileage.

58% of Americans support gas tax increase

Thomas Donohue 2014 (president and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Previously president and CEO of the American Trucking Associations, the national organization of the trucking industry; former deputy assistant postmaster general of the United States; master’s degree in business administration from Adelphi University.) 12 February 2014 “It's Time to Raise the Federal Gas Tax” <https://www.uschamber.com/above-the-fold/its-time-raise-the-federal-gas-tax>

Second, we need to educate the public. Polls show opposition to a gas tax increase is overblown. A San Jose University researcher found that 58% of the public would support a gas tax increase if they knew it would be applied to building and maintaining roads, bridges, and transit systems. Voters want to know where the money is going and that it is not going to be wasted. Far too many people are unaware of important reforms that eliminated earmarks and “pork barrel” spending long associated with infrastructure funding.

Industry leaders support gas tax increase

Aggregates Manager 2014 (news and e-commerce Web site for crushed stone, sand & gravel operators, equipment manufacturers and dealers, and providers of services and supplies to the aggregates industry.) 19 June 2014 “Senators propose raising gas tax by 12 cents per gallon” <http://www.aggman.com/senators-propose-raising-gas-tax-by-12-cents-per-gallon/>

Additionally, just in the past year, other industry leaders have also pushed for a gas tax increase. In October, Former Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood suggested a 10-cent-per-gallon gas tax hike; less than a week later, Thomas Donohue, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, also called for an increased gas tax; and in December, Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) introduced a bill that would have raised the gas tax by 15 cents per gallon.

US Chamber of Commerce, AAA, and the American Trucking Association Support

Keith Laing 2015 (journalist who has covered government and politics at the national, state and local levels; works for The Detroit News in their Washington, D.C. bureau, where he covers automotive regulation and lobbying.) 26 January 2015 “AAA, Chamber, truckers: Raise the gas tax now” <http://thehill.com/policy/transportation/230725-lobbying-heavyweights-back-gas-tax-hike>

A trio of influential lobbying groups is pushing lawmakers to increase the 18.4 cents-per-gallon federal gas tax to pay for a new transportation bill. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, AAA auto club and American Trucking Association said in a letter to members of Congress on Monday that raising the gas tax would be the easiest way to close a transportation funding shortfall that has reached an estimated $16 billion per year. “There are many challenges that Congress must address this year, but we believe that finding a solution for funding the Highway Trust Fund is at the top of that list,” the groups wrote. “While no one wants to pay more, we urge you to support an increase to the federal fuels user fee, provided the funds are used to ease congestion and improve safety, because it is the most cost efficient and straightforward way to provide a steady revenue stream to the Highway Trust Fund.”

Murphy-Corker proposal for gax tax hike has industry-wide support

Aggregates Manager 2014 (news and e-commerce Web site for crushed stone, sand & gravel operators, equipment manufacturers and dealers, and providers of services and supplies to the aggregates industry.) 19 June 2014 “Senators propose raising gas tax by 12 cents per gallon” <http://www.aggman.com/senators-propose-raising-gas-tax-by-12-cents-per-gallon/>

The Highway Materials Group — which consists of the National Stone, Sand and Gravel Association (NSSGA); the National Asphalt Pavement Association (NAPA); the Portland Cement Association (PCA); the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association (NRMCA);the American Concrete Pavement Association (ACPA) and the Concrete Reinforcing Steel Institute (CRSI) — announced on Thursday that is supports the proposal. A written statement from the group states that “this proposal finally addresses the longer-term revenue issues.” American Road and Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) President and CEO Pete Ruane noted that the association supports “the common sense, fiscally-sound and bipartisan proposal” at a time when the HTF faces a deficit of $16 billion each year. “It is time to stop pretending this problem will solve itself,” Ruane said in a prepared statement. “Senators Murphy and Corker have provided one potential path forward.”

A/T “Higher tax = less driving” – Driving won’t go down much and revenue goes up $170 billion and close the HTF shortfall

Alan Cole 2014 (economics degree from Yale Univ.; Economist with the Center for Federal Tax Policy at the Tax Foundation) A Straightforward Gas Tax Proposal from Murphy and Corker, 19 June 2014 <https://taxfoundation.org/straightforward-gas-tax-proposal-murphy-and-corker/>

We can also determine pretty well that the tax would raise the necessary revenue to close the shortfall. Gas tax revenue is highly predictable because demand for gas is very inelastic with respect to taxes – in other words, people mostly won’t change their behavior as a result of a 12 cent tax increase on a $3.75 gallon of gas. We can see this empirically from previous rises in the gas tax. The last two gas tax increases happened in the 1990s. The first was a 55% increase in the tax that created a 53% increase in revenue. The second was a 30% increase in the tax that created a 33% increase in revenue. With this sort of simple revenue math, we can affirm with a reasonable degree of certainty that the tax will create the intended revenue. The Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Committee on Taxation have [projected](http://www.cbo.gov/budget-options/2013/44853) the results of a much larger gas tax increase of 35 cents, with the same inflation indexing. Their results were a $452 billion increase in revenue over the ten-year budget window. This tax increase would be a little over a third of the tax hike from that CBO scenario, and would produce a little bit over a third of the revenue – probably about the right amount to close the $170 billion shortfall.

DISADVANTAGE RESPONSES

A/T “Taxpayers hurt”

15 Cent gas tax increase would have insignificant impact on taxpayers

Dr. Alison Premo Black 2015 (Senior Vice President and Chief Economist at the American Road and Transportation Builders Association. PhD. in economics at George Washington University, M.A. in International Economics and Latin American Studies from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies) June 2015 “How a Gas Tax Increase Affects the Retail Pump Price” <http://www.artba.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/How-a-Gas-Tax-Increase-Affects-the-Retail-Pump-Price-June-2015-ARTBA-Study-FINAL-2.pdf>

Based on these findings, it is projected that a 15 cents-per-gallon gas tax increase at the federal level would likely result in a 5.9 cents-per-gallon increase in the pump price the week of enactment plus an additional 2.4 cents-per-gallon within four weeks of enactment. Thereafter, it would be a relatively insignificant pricing factor. In fact, the impact of a 15 cent increase in the federal gas tax would likely be “lost” in the week-to-week price fluctuation that has occurred at the gas pump for the last 10 years.

A/T “Wasteful federal spending / States more efficient” - States waste money just like the federal government

Tennessee

J. Owen, C. Butler, R. Turbeville, and contributors K. Lawson and M. Thompson, with the Citizens Against Government Waste 2011 (CAGW is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to educating the American public about waste, mismanagement and inefficiency in various levels of government—primarily federal) 2011. “2011 Tennessee Pork Report,” commissioned by the Tennessee Center for Policy Research. <https://www.cagw.org/archives/state-piglet-books/2011/2011-tennessee-pork-report.pdf> [Brackets added]

In all, the 2011 Pork Report uncovers $371 million that state and local governments wasted over the past year.

[**END QUOTE. They go on to report later in the same context QUOTE:]**

The 2011 Tennessee Pork Report identifies $371 million in government waste, including the fat in Tennessee’s state budget and wasteful spending at the local level. From perennial losers to newfound waste and largesse in 2011, Tennessee’s governments are very poor stewards of taxpayers’ money.

Rhode Island

Citizens Against Government Waste 2011 (CAGW is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to educating the American public about waste, mismanagement and inefficiency in various levels of government—primarily federal) 2011. “2011 Rhode Island Piglet Book,” created with the Ocean State Policy Research Institute <https://www.cagw.org/archives/state-piglet-books/2011/ri-piglet-2011-final.pdf> [Brackets and their ellipses added]

As the hundreds of examples and more than $600 million in wasted tax dollars exposed in the 2011 Rhode Island Piglet Book illustrate, the state of Rhode Island has a spending addiction, as do our lawmakers in Washington, DC. For their part, state and local leaders have a unique opportunity to get serious about bridling government spending and prove to taxpayers that elected officials in Rhode Island view them as more than just ATMs ready to be tapped for the next pork project or pricey scheme.

[**End quote. Later, in the conclusion, they continue, quote:]**

First, as the Piglet Book points out, wasteful spending and questionable programs are rampant in Rhode Island. Simply shuttering ineffective programs and cutting the wasteful projects exposed in this publication would save federal, state and local taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars with little or no noticeable impact on the quality of services received by Rhode Island residents.

Illinois

Citizens Against Government Waste 2012 (CAGW is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to educating the American public about waste, mismanagement and inefficiency in various levels of government—primarily federal) 2012. “ILLINOIS PIGLET BOOK” published with the Illinois Policy Institute <https://www.cagw.org/archives/state-piglet-books/2012/2012_Illinois_Piglet_digital.pdf> [Brackets added]

The 2012 Illinois Piglet Book highlights nearly 200 examples of wasteful spending, which robs taxpayers of about $350 million in hard-earned income. This is a real problem that hurts real people.

[**End quote. Later, in the conclusion, they continue, quote:]**

Unfortunately, politicians in Illinois don’t know how to set priorities. The money they are wasting is real, the lost economic activity is real and the families in Illinois struggling to keep up with the state’s ever-increasing taxes are real. The waste means lost opportunities, wasted energy and foregone prosperity.

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