

Are There Transportation Taxes that People Support? A Review of Evidence

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MTI's National Transportation Finance Center

Overview

1. Sources of information
2. Not all taxes have the same support—and some are acceptable to the public
3. Support for taxes/tax increases if they are . . .
4. Summary

Sources of Information

1. Local and state ballot measures
2. Surveys

Surveys – many types

- Local govts & interest groups testing support for specific ballot measures
- Polls looking at more general opinions
 - Interest groups (e.g., construction industry, environmental groups)
 - National pollsters (e.g., Gallup)
 - Academics & research-oriented nonprofits

The 4 MTI surveys

Year	Loc.	Topic
2006	CA	Variety of taxes/tolls
2009	CA	“Green” tax options
2010	US	Gas tax, mileage fee, sales tax
2011	US	“ “

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Local and state ballot measures

1. In 2010, 77% of 57 “transportation” ballot measures approved nationally (CFTE data)
2. Californian voters have approved:
 - Local-option sales taxes in 19 counties
 - Toll increase on Bay Area bridges
 - Local vehicle registration fee surcharges

Support levels: 2006 CA survey

Tax/Toll	Support (%)
HOT lanes	55
Gas tax (10¢ in 10 yrs)	40
Sales tax (1/2¢)	40
Vehicle registration fee	32
Mileage fee	28

Support levels: 2009 CA survey

Tax	Support (%)
Feebate	65
Vehicle registration fee	41
Mileage fee	28

Support levels: 2011 US survey

Tax	Support (%)
Sales tax	55
Gas tax	24
Mileage fee	22

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Lessons from ballot initiatives

Taxes are more popular if they are:

- Local
- Support specific projects

Lessons from surveys

Taxes are more popular if they:

- Have a specific purpose
- Support themes of maintenance, safety, environment
- Are supported with education (?)

Green taxes more popular (2009)

Fee	Support (%)		Green option boost
Vehicle reg'n fee			
Flat	41	→	22 points
Green	63		
Mileage fee			
Flat	28	→	22 points
Green	50		

Maintenance popular (2011)

Gas tax type	Support		Boost
General	24%	→	38 points
Maintenance	62%		

Safety popular (2011)

Gas tax type	Support		Boost
General	24%	→	32 points
Safety	56%		

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Summary

1. Raising transportation taxes/fees can be acceptable to the public, if carefully crafted.
2. Increase support with taxes that are:
 - a. Local
 - b. Support specific projects
 - c. Have a specific purpose
 - d. Support themes of maintenance, safety, env't
 - e. (Come with some education?)

Want to learn more?

- Survey reports at <http://www.transweb.sjsu.edu/MTIportal/research/Publications.html#TransportationFinanceRR>
- Email: asha.weinstein.agrawal@sjsu.edu



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