

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

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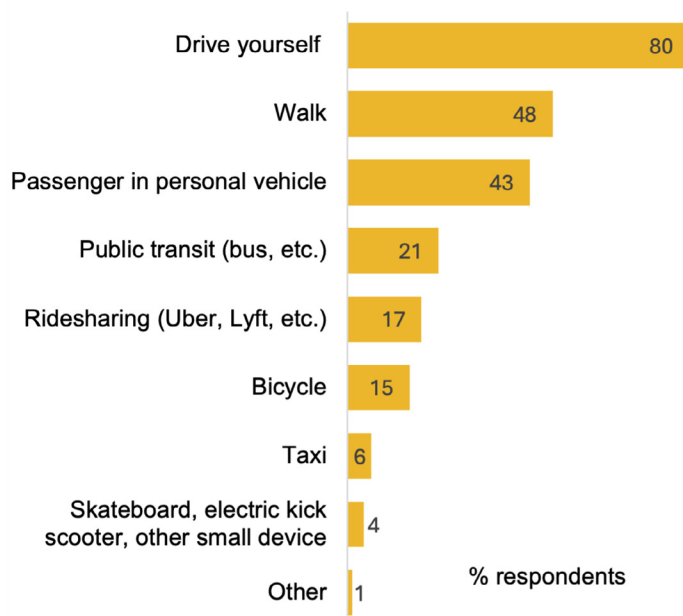
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Study Methods

A nationally representative sample of 2,522 respondents completed the online survey in February and March 2024. The survey collected data on respondents’ opinions about gasoline taxes and mileage fees, views on the quality of their local transportation system, priorities for federal transportation spending, travel behavior habits, and sociodemographic characteristics.

Findings

Travel Experiences: Travel by personal vehicle was the most common mode, though 63% of respondents reported that at least one member of their household used a mode other than driving or getting a ride in the previous month.



Travel modes used in the respondent's household in the previous month

Fuel was a large monthly transportation expense for most households. Eighty-eight percent of

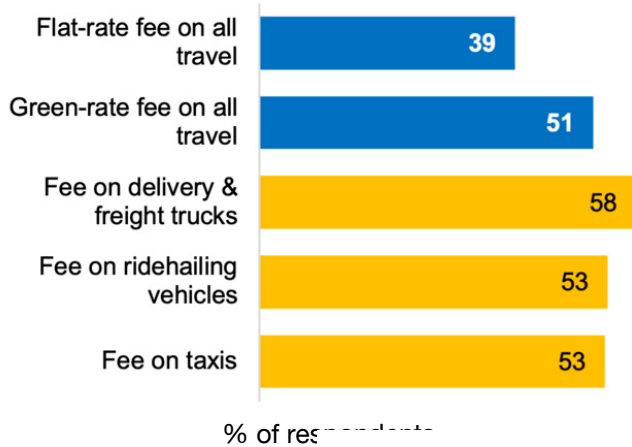
respondents reported that their households spent money on fuel in the preceding month, with \$100 as the median amount spent. Also, 29% of respondents reported that their household spent money in an average month on ride-hailing or taxi services, with a median expenditure of \$30 per month.

A majority of respondents (51%) supported replacing the gas tax with a mileage fee where the rate would vary according to the vehicle's pollution emissions.

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.

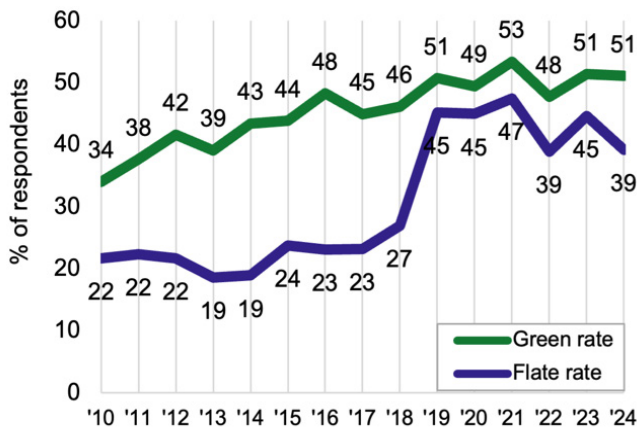
Mileage Fees: Few Americans know much about mileage fees. Only 10% of respondents reported that they had heard “a lot” about the fees, while 60% had never heard of mileage fees.

Support for the mileage fee options presented in the survey varied according to the details of the tax option. A majority of respondents (51%) supported replacing the gas tax with a mileage fee where the rate would vary according to the vehicle’s pollution emissions, a variant referred to in the figures on the next page as the “green” rate fee. Also, more than half of respondents supported creating a new “Business Road-Use Fee” that would be charged to delivery and freight trucks (58%), taxis (53%), or ride-hailing vehicles (53%). By contrast, the least popular mileage fee option was a flat-rate fee on all travel. Support for this option was only 39%.



Support for Five Mileage Fee Options (2024)

Support for implementing a mileage fee on all travel has risen since 2010. Support for the flat-rate mileage fee grew from just 22% in 2010 to 39% in 2024. Similarly, support for the green version grew from 33% in 2010 to 51% in 2024.



Trends in Support for Adopting the Flat-Rate or Green-Rate Mileage Fee on All Travel (2010 – 2024)

Gas Taxes: The majority of respondents supported raising the federal gas tax rate if the revenue is dedicated to a specific transportation purpose. For example, 74% supported raising the gas tax if the revenue were dedicated to maintaining the transportation system, and 70% supported raising the rate if the revenue were dedicated for safety improvements. In contrast, only 35% supported the rate increase if the money were spent more generically “for transportation.” The majority also supported the concept of using some gas tax revenue to support public transit (71%).

Policy Implications

The survey findings suggest that the public may be willing to support both higher fuel taxes or the adoption of mileage fees. However, the specifics of the proposal will significantly impact support.

Program design strategies that will increase support for mileage fees include 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.

Proposals either to raise gas tax rates or adopt a new 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. Other popular spending options include improving travel opportunities for low-income households and supporting multi-modal travel options, including public transit.

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/2428



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