## Unpopular - General

**Raising the gas tax is both politically unfeasible and doesn’t solve the root of the trust fund’s problems**

**Hurst and Boyd ’12** (Nathan Hurst and John D. Boyd, CQ Staff. "Which Way to Turn on Transportation Issues?" CQ WEEKLY – COVER STORY. N.p., june 9, 2012. Web. <http://public.cq.com/docs/weeklyreport/weeklyreport-000004103026.html>. Alyssa)

No Trust in the Fund Story Photo Shifting the Burden to the States: Click here to view chart All evidence suggests that Congress once again will defer difficult decisions about highway financing that it has been ducking for a decade. Experts charged with finding solutions have spelled out the options. But talk of raising gasoline taxes or moving to a conceivably more sustainable mode of transportation financing is entirely missing from the current debate. Plainly, despite repeated efforts to put new ideas on the table, Congress has no appetite for the subject. “It’s a disaster,” says Robert D. Atkinson, president of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, who says lawmakers are acting in ways that will only make the situation worse. For two years, Atkinson chaired the congressionally chartered National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing Commission. Its February 2009 final report called for major changes in the way national transportation programs are financed, including a switch to a mileage tax. “They simply don’t understand or are unwilling to confront the problem,” Atkinson says. Such criticisms aside, there is broad agreement about the need to overhaul the Highway Trust Fund — which spent $44 billion more from 2001 to 2011 than it took in through tax receipts — just no consensus about how to accomplish it. A Congressional Budget Office estimate last month lent new urgency to the call for action, projecting that the gap between highway revenue and spending will grow to about $147 billion over the next decade and that new fuel efficiency mandates will make the hole even deeper. Once fully implemented, CBO says fuel economy rules will reduce gasoline tax receipts by 21 percent. Raising the existing taxes on gasoline and diesel purchases would be the most straightforward way to boost revenue quickly, but that’s a non-starter in a weak economy and anti-tax political climate. Gasoline taxes also give the owners of electric cars and high-mileage hybrid vehicles a free ride, undercutting the “user pays” principle that has been the foundation of the federal highway program since it was created in 1956. At the same time, a mileage tax raises concerns that the electronic devices installed to record road use — and conceivably even assess higher charges for travel on the most congested roads or at peak times — also might allow the government to track a motorist’s every movement. A small but growing group of conservative Republicans would like to get the federal government out of the business of building roads and bridges entirely and turn the responsibility over to the states — including the need to pay for infrastructure improvements. So far, that idea lacks broad support, and many Republicans who are small-government advocates still regard transportation spending as one of the few things Washington should be doing. It was, after all, Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower who sold the construction of a nationwide Interstate Highway System as a national security imperative. The resulting stalemate has paralyzed efforts to enact another multi-year authorization since the last highway bill expired in 2009 and has frustrated the broad coalition of business and labor groups advocating big investments in transportation infrastructure. Times have changed since Eisenhower was promoting the Interstate system. “We’re past that point and the goals aren’t as clear,” says Jack L. Schenendorf, a transportation lobbyist who was a Republican chief of staff on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and served on a second commission charged with looking into the issue in the past decade. Schenendorf worries that the financing issue is “so toxic that none of the real solutions are viable right now.” That doesn’t mean Congress should continue to defer the debate, he says. “It’s crystal clear that the gas tax is not going to be a viable way to pay for infrastructure going forward.”

**Raising the gas tax is a political non-starter**

**Thomasson ’12** (Scott Thomasson, President, NewBuild Strategies LLC. "Encouraging U.S. Infrastructure Investment: Policy Innovation Memorandum No. 17." Council on Foreign Relations. N.p., april 2012. Web. 08 July 2012. <http://www.cfr.org/infrastructure/encouraging-us-infrastructure-investment/p27771>. Alyssa)

. Even if Congress passes a new highway bill, the country's infrastructure debacle is hardly resolved. Transportation is only one part of the problem, and the pending bills do not even raise investment in this sector from previous, insufficient levels. Nor do they address the biggest long-term problem for transportation—inadequate funding from the Highway Trust Fund. Since the mid-1950s, federal gas tax revenues have been deposited into the Highway Trust Fund and then allocated to states for transportation improvements. But the gas tax is not tied to inflation and has not been raised since 1993. At current spending and revenue levels, the trust fund will be insolvent within two years. Raising the gas tax would alleviate the funding problem, but both parties consider that and other new taxes to be political nonstarters. Unlocking Progress There is no shortage of good proposals to encourage infrastructure investment. For example, President Obama has endorsed the idea of creating a national infrastructure bank to leverage federal funds and encourage PPPs. Bipartisan negotiations in the Senate produced a bill for a scaled-down version of the bank, focused on low-cost federal loans to supplement state financing and private capital. The bill is not supported by House Republican leaders, however, and is unlikely to pass this year. There are also important transportation reforms in both pending highway bills where Republicans and Democrats are on common ground: expanding the popular Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loan program, streamlining the Department of Transportation bureaucracy to speed approval of new projects, and eliminating congressional earmarks—a huge step toward smarter project selection based on merit rather than political interests. But if the highway bill does not pass, none of these reforms will happen.

**Raising the gas tax would spark political uproar – overwhelming Republican opposition**

**Loveday ’11** (Eric Loveday. "Next Congressional Battle: Renewing the Federal Gas Tax." AutoblogGreen. N.p., aug 11th 2011. Web. 03 July 2012. <http://green.autoblog.com/2011/08/11/next-congressional-battle-renewing-the-federal-gas-tax/>.)

If the U.S. economy wasn't in shambles, renewing the federal excise tax on gasoline would be routine. But, as Congress intensely debated the national debt recently, the gas tax got moved to the back burner. This is a potential problem. With most of the 18.4-cent per gallon gasoline tax set to expire at the end of September, renewing it could spark political uproar and further divide Congress. According to Politico, the level of "partisan vitriol and anti-spending sentiment" has hit an all-time high. This, is some sort of twisted political way, means that the gas tax – the primary source of the nation's road funds – could fall victim to budget cuts. Doug Heye, former spokesman for the Republican National Committee, told Politico: The White House is going to make a move to renew it. We'll see – but there will be Republicans who will be resistant to that. Heye says gas prices are "really affecting families" and that Republicans may vote against renewing any tax that furthers the pain felt at the pump. One thing is certain, with the gas tax set to expire in less than two months, Congress had better get crackin', or else minor procedural delays could cause the tax to lapse. Infrastructure is already ailing in the U.S., and we don't need political shenanigans to make it worse

**Gas tax is a political non-starter**

**Plumer ’11** (Plumer, Brad. "Gas-tax Aversion Is Tying Congress in Knots." Washington Post. The Washington Post, 08 Nov. 2011. Web. 02 July 2012. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/gas-tax-aversion-is-tying-congress-in-knots/2011/11/08/gIQA5qrt1M\_blog.html>.)

Right now, the House and Senate are trying to extend federal transportation funding — the money that goes to build and rebuild roads and bridges — for the next few years. Both chambers are grappling with the same dilemma. Americans have been cutting back on driving lately. That means there’s not enough gas-tax revenue to pay for the highway bills. Yet no one wants to raise the gas tax. And that means that legislators have to devise ever-more byzantine — and often problematic — ways to rustle up funds. (David Paul Morris/Bloomberg) In the House, the Republican leadership has been hunting around for more money after its initial six-year, $230 billion highway bill was blasted for cutting spending 33 percent below existing levels. Recently, Speaker John Boehner hinted that Republicans had found a solution: They’d use royalties from new oil and gas drilling to help bankroll a bigger infrastructure bill. (Boehner’s office hasn’t released details, but two House members have introduced proposals along these lines.) The problem, critics say, is that this could make a mess of infrastructure spending. For one, oil and gas royalties are currently used to fund other parts of government. “This is revenue that’s supposed to go to the general fund,” says Steve Ellis of Taxpayers for Common Sense. So if the bill just uses existing royalties, it will increase the deficit. Granted, it’s possible that tying energy production to infrastructure will foster more drilling than would otherwise be the case — let’s say it somehow spurs Florida to open up its coasts to oil and gas development, bringing in more revenue than anticipated. But, Ellis notes, that’s a big if. “They’re taking revenues way down the road, speculative at best, to pay for roads and bridges we’re building right now.” The Senatedoesn’t get off lightly, either. Senate Democrats are hunting around for about $12 billion to supplement gas-tax revenue and fund their highway bill, which would maintain spending at current levels for two years. (Originally they were going to use some agreed-on savings in the health reform law, but those were swiped away to pay for a contractor withholding provision.) But even if the Senate does find this extra money, the Senate’s bill would bring the balance of the Highway Trust Fund down to zero over the next two years. And that, Ellis explains, is a risky move. Congress did the same thing in its 2005 highway bill, despite ample warnings that existing gas-tax revenue could come in below expectations. In the end, the worriers were right and Congress had to chip in an extra $34.5 billion from the general fund to maintain highway spending. The current bills, Ellis notes, also leave no margin for error. If, say, the price of oil shoots up unexpectedly and Americans start driving less, there won’t be money to fund all the planned infrastructure. And true, Congress could avoid many of these elaborate contortions if a gas tax hike were on the table and the Highway Trust Fund could get replenished. But it’s not.

**There is growing opposition amongst Republicans against the gas tax – fails to cover all costs**

**Cowan ’11** (Cowan, Richard. "Congress Faces Tough Decisions on Gasoline Tax." Reuters. Thomson Reuters, 12 Aug. 2011. Web. 02 July 2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/12/us-usa-taxes-gasoline-idUSTRE77B5PL20110812>.)

(Reuters) - A multibillion-dollar gasoline tax to maintain U.S. highways and mass transit will be in jeopardy when Congress resumes in early September in the wake of bruising budget and aviation funding battles. An 18.4-cents-per-gallon gasoline tax paid by consumers at the pump is set to expire on September 30, but Democrats and Republicans have been unable to advance legislation ensuring a fix. While chances are good for a temporary extension of the tax, according to congressional aides, conservative Republicans aim to use the debate to open another front in their battle to shrink the size and scope of the federal government. "Instead of burdening states and micromanaging local transportation decisions from Washington, states like Oklahoma should be free to choose how their transportation dollars are spent," Republican U.S. Senator Tom Coburn said. Coburn and some of his fellow conservatives want to let states opt out of the federal highway program, giving them more control over how the tax revenue is spent on transportation projects. According to a spokeswoman, Coburn intends to offer up such legislation as an amendment to the gasoline tax extension when it is considered in the Senate. While it's not likely to succeed, the Senate votes will "set markers" for building support for the initiative, said anti-tax, conservative advocate Grover Norquist, head of Americans for Tax Reform. Besides giving states more control of transportation projects, Norquist wants to choke off federal funds that he says go to "unionized guys in New York and Boston" for work on mass transit projects and the "ridiculous pensions" he said those retired workers are paid. His argument echoes the ongoing dispute between the two major political parties on aviation funding, with Republicans trying to roll back a federal rule making it easier to organize labor unions at airlines. NORQUIST SAYS OK In the meantime, Norquist said that an extension of the current gasoline tax would not necessarily draw fire from his group. "As long as it's not a tax increase ... it doesn't break the pledge" Republican lawmakers have signed against new taxes, Norquist told Reuters. Lawmakers also will have to solve another problem that could push the gasoline tax to the brink of failure: the tax no longer covers the government's transportation maintenance and construction costs. Although the tax is expected to generate approximately $245 billion over the next six years, Americans are driving less due to the 2008 economic downturn and the cars they own use less gasoline -- which means that revenues aren't keeping up with construction costs for the first time in the program's 55-year history. With lawmakers loathe to add to U.S. budget deficits hovering around $1.5 trillion a year, they are struggling to find savings in other programs to plug the funding gap and keep highway and subway construction projects -- and the jobs that go with them -- running. Meanwhile, Democrats like U.S. Senator John Kerry and U.S. Representative Peter DeFazio are hoping to beef up Washington's investment in infrastructure projects. "We know that every $1 billion invested in just transportation infrastructure, creates or sustains over 34,000 jobs and produces $6.2 billion in economic activity," DeFazio wrote President Barack Obama in June. Kerry is hoping to find a way to expand investment in highways and other infrastructure, but to do so with minimal use of taxpayer dollars. He hopes to be able to attach to the gasoline tax bill legislation creating an infrastructure bank using revolving funds to spur investment. But even that would require some new domestic spending -- an idea that could find tough opposition from members of Congress aligned with the conservative Tea Party movement.

**Raising the gas tax is a political non-starter – Republicans and the Tea Party oppose all tax increases**

**Shesgreen ’11** (Deirdre Shesgreen. "Next Congressional Crisis: The Federal Gas Tax?" The Connecticut Mirror. N.p., august 23, 2011. Web. 02 July 2012. <http://www.ctmirror.org/story/13661/gastaxfight>.)

WASHINGTON -- Talk about a bumpy road ahead. When Congress gets back to Washington next month, lawmakers face a possible legislative pile-up over the federal gas tax, an important source of funds to Connecticut and every other state with transportation infrastructure needs. That 18.4-cent levy on every gallon expires on Sept. 30. And it could quickly become a focal point for a fresh fight over taxes and spending, as lawmakers rev up the debate over debt reduction this fall. At the end of last year, President Barack Obama's bipartisan fiscal commission recommended a gradual 15-cent hike in the federal gas tax starting in 2013. Other debt-reduction groups have similarly looked at ways to shore up funding for the federal Highway Trust Fund, which currently does not take in enough revenue to cover the nation's transportation spending levels. But raising the gas tax is a non-starter in this Congress, where House Republicans, filled with Tea Party fervor, have opposed any tax increases. And indeed, some conservative groups have even signaled that they would like to see the gas nixed all together, and they see the looming deadline as an opportunity to move in that direction. "In general, we support the concept of eliminating the federal gas tax and letting the states fund transportation," said Barney Keller, a spokesman for the Club for Growth, an influential conservative group. Keller said the Club has not taken any position on legislation to extend the current gas tax yet, because they first want to see what kind of long-term transportation bill Congress comes up with. That legislation will map out federal highway spending for the next several years, to be paid for by any extension of the gas tax. Meanwhile transportation advocates are scrambling to shore up support for the gas tax and nervously eyeing the crunched congressional calendar. "There are 11 legislative days in September before the current extension expires," noted Tony Dorsey, a spokesman for American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). "That gives you a sense of the urgency of this. They've got to move." Donald Shubert, a spokesman for Keep CT Moving, a transportation advocacy coalition, said he's asked Gov. Dannel Malloy's administration to consider pushing for a "safety valve" provision at the state level that would increase Connecticut's gas tax to compensate in case the federal gas tax lapses. He noted that Tennessee has a statute on its books that automatically adjusts the state tax upwards if the federal tax declines or ends, so the state can maintain its transportation revenue stream. "I'm hoping our governor's office will consider something like this," Shubert said, in case Congress deadlocks over the tax.

**Gas tax is incredibly unpopular – Tea Party and public backlash**

**Rafey, 10** – student at Harvard University and writer for the Harvard Political Review

[William, 6/1, “How to Pass a Gas Tax”, Harvard Political Review, <http://hpronline.org/united-states/how-to-pass-a-gas-tax/>, AL]

The Anti-Tax Establishment Perhaps the most fundamental reason why a higher gas tax is so controversial is because it hits everybody, and hits them in a very public way. William Gale, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and co-director of the Tax Policy Center, told the HPR that the anti-tax movement “will seize on every tax,” and the gas tax is an easy target. Represented by vocal advocacy groups such as Americans for Tax Reform and the various Tea Parties, the anti-tax movement “does not make a distinction between distortionary and distortionary-correcting taxes,” Gale said. “They just hate all taxes,” he continued, “and every attempt at an increase in taxes becomes an opportunity for [their] political gain.” Looking closer at the particulars of the gas tax raises an equally problematic obstacle: the culture of low energy prices. According to Henry Lee, director of the Environment and Natural Resources Program at Harvard’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, America’s energy policy has been governed by a single goal for the last 40 years. “Americans for almost two generations have lived under the idea of cheap energy,” he explained, making it almost impossible to pass laws involving price increases. At this point, **such laws could seem almost un-American.**

**Plan is a political firestorm- empirically proven**

**Hurst and Boyd 12**

[ Nathan and John are transportation reporters for CQ. “Which way to turn on Transportation Issues?” <http://public.cq.com/docs/weeklyreport/weeklyreport-000004103026.html>] H. Kenner

Less than a month after his 2009 confirmation, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood in one step embraced President Obama’s promise to change the way Washington worked and at the same time ran headlong into the reason change is so elusive. LaHood, a Republican who represented Illinois in the House for 14 years, already had said he was open to new ways of financing highway construction, a perennial issue that is becoming increasingly acute as Americans buy ever-more-efficient cars and gasoline tax collections slump. But when he mused about switching to a mileage-based highway tax, LaHood instantly stoked fears that the Obama administration was plotting to boost taxes and spy on the travels of motorists. That prompted an immediate admonishment from the White House, and the mileage tax idea was shelved. The episode underscored the perils of even discussing ways to reverse chronic transportation revenue shortfalls and helps explain why a vehicle mileage tax — or even a simple increase in current fuel taxes — is missing from the current highway bill debate. The absence of discussion about the revenue issue is all the more surprising because the architect of a five-year extension of highway programs, House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman John L. Mica, says he first planted the idea of a mileage-based tax with LaHood. But the Florida Republican never so much as floated the idea of a new taxing scheme in his legislation. And a scaled-down, two-year highway bill that House-Senate conferees are trying to wrap up this month will need billions of dollars in budget transfers to maintain its spending levels because the subject of money isn’t being addressed. All evidence suggests that Congress once again will defer difficult decisions about highway financing that it has been ducking for a decade. Experts charged with finding solutions have spelled out the options. But talk of raising gasoline taxes or moving to a conceivably more sustainable mode of transportation financing is entirely missing from the current debate. Plainly, despite repeated efforts to put new ideas on the table, Congress has no appetite for the subject. “It’s a disaster,” says Robert D. Atkinson, president of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, who says lawmakers are acting in ways that will only make the situation worse. For two years, Atkinson chaired the congressionally chartered National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing Commission. Its February 2009 final report called for major changes in the way national transportation programs are financed, including a switch to a mileage tax. “They simply don’t understand or are unwilling to confront the problem,” Atkinson says. Such criticisms aside, there is broad agreement about the need to overhaul the Highway Trust Fund — which spent $44 billion more from 2001 to 2011 than it took in through tax receipts — just no consensus about how to accomplish it. A Congressional Budget Office estimate last month lent new urgency to the call for action, projecting that the gap between highway revenue and spending will grow to about $147 billion over the next decade and that new fuel efficiency mandates will make the hole even deeper. Once fully implemented, CBO says fuel economy rules will reduce gasoline tax receipts by 21 percent. Raising the existing taxes on gasoline and diesel purchases would be the most straightforward way to boost revenue quickly, but that’s a non-starter in a weak economy and anti-tax political climate. Gasoline taxes also give the owners of electric cars and high-mileage hybrid vehicles a free ride, undercutting the “user pays” principle that has been the foundation of the federal highway program since it was created in 1956. At the same time, a mileage tax raises concerns that the electronic devices installed to record road use — and conceivably even assess higher charges for travel on the most congested roads or at peak times — also might allow the government to track a motorist’s every movement. A small but growing group of conservative Republicans would like to get the federal government out of the business of building roads and bridges entirely and turn the responsibility over to the states — including the need to pay for infrastructure improvements. So far, that idea lacks broad support, and many Republicans who are small-government advocates still regard transportation spending as one of the few things Washington should be doing. It was, after all, Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower who sold the construction of a nationwide Interstate Highway System as a national security imperative. The resulting stalemate has paralyzed efforts to enact another multi-year authorization since the last highway bill expired in 2009 and has frustrated the broad coalition of business and labor groups advocating big investments in transportation infrastructure. Times have changed since Eisenhower was promoting the Interstate system. “We’re past that point and the goals aren’t as clear,” says Jack L. Schenendorf, a transportation lobbyist who was a Republican chief of staff on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and served on a second commission charged with looking into the issue in the past decade. Schenendorf worries that the financing issue is “so toxic that none of the real solutions are viable right now.” That doesn’t mean Congress should continue to defer the debate, he says. “It’s crystal clear that the gas tax is not going to be a viable way to pay for infrastructure going forward.”

**Plan is unpopular and creates a larger political divide**

**Hurst and Boyd 12** [Nathan and John are transportation reporters for CQ. “Which way to turn on Transportation Issues?” <http://public.cq.com/docs/weeklyreport/weeklyreport-000004103026.html>] H. Kenner

Gasoline taxes were last increased in 1993 to 18.4 cents a gallon and diesel taxes to 24.4 cents, and, because they weren’t indexed to rise with consumer prices, the tax receipts paid into the Highway Trust Fund have lost ground to inflation ever since. But two other trends are amplifying the erosion of the trust fund: Americans are driving less and their vehicles are more efficient. Total annual miles driven peaked at 3.03 trillion in 2007 before falling to 2.98 trillion in 2008, when gasoline prices surged and the economy imploded. In 2011, miles driven slipped further to 2.93 trillion, the fewest since 2003. Meanwhile, the EPA reports that 2011 model year cars and light trucks got an average of 22.8 miles per gallon, an 18 percent increase over the 2004 model year. John Horsley, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, says habits began to change in 2008 when gasoline prices broke the psychological barrier of $4 a gallon. Before 2007, Horsley says, total miles driven “was increasing at 2 or 3 percent a year for nearly 30 years, which meant perpetually higher gas tax revenue.” But, he says, “That’s no longer the case.” New fuel-economy standards that Obama, with the support of automakers, unions and environmental groups, rolled out in July 2011 promise to speed up the trend. By 2025, the rules will require a fleetwide average mileage of 54.5 miles a gallon, almost double what is in place today. That’s a far cry from the 13.1 miles-per-gallon fleetwide average in 1975, when President Gerald R. Ford signed the first fuel economy standards into law. Consumer demand is encouraging automakers to roll out more fuel-efficient vehicles ahead of the mandates. General Motors has reported better-than-projected sales of its Chevrolet Volt plug-in hybrid and introduced its American-made Chevrolet Sonic subcompact in the current model year. Toyota, meanwhile, is expanding the lineup of its flagship hybrid Prius model, while Ford plans all-electric and clean diesel versions of its popular Focus small sedan. Korea’s Hyundai announced in January that the cars it sold in 2011 already attained a fleetwide average of 36 miles a gallon, which beats the requirement for 2016. This is good news for anyone who cares about greenhouse gasses and pollutants. The EPA reports that carbon dioxide emissions from passenger cars and light trucks fell 15 percent from the 2004 to 2010 model years. Improved fuel economy is also helping the United States reduce its dependence on imported oil. Petroleum imports fell in 2011 to the lowest level since 1999. CBO’s projections show an inexorable decline in fuel-tax receipts, although the budget office estimates it will take as long as 30 years for the full effect to be felt. Still, there’s a long history behind calls for closing the gap between highway spending and revenue. One of two commissions created by the 2005 law reauthorizing federal highway programs recommended a 10-cents-per-gallon increase in the federal gasoline tax and a 15-cents-per-gallon increase in diesel taxes. The other commission proposed a gasoline tax increase of as much as 40 cents over five years. And a year after those commissions reported in 2009, a presidential deficit reduction commission led by former Republican Sen. Alan K. Simpson of Wyoming and former Clinton White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles recommended a 15-cent gasoline tax increase. Lawmakers and administration officials rejected those recommendations out of hand. Obama took a motor fuels tax increase off the table shortly after moving into the White House, arguing it would be counterproductive to raise the burden on consumers during a recession. Congressional Republicans have generally opposed tax increases of all types, and the election of tea party-backed freshman lawmakers in 2010 only strengthened that opposition. Still, the shortfall is already acute, and has forced lawmakers to scale back their ambitions for a transformative highway authorization bill for the next five years. Mica had initially wanted to spend $1.5 trillion over that period on surface transportation infrastructure improvements, but the bill being negotiated in a House-Senate conference committee is likely to assume a small fraction of that level of spending. Expectations are for a short-term extension of existing highway programs that hew close to the Senate’s two-year, $109 billion blueprint. Even that will require lawmakers to find an estimated $13.9 billion in revenue from spending offsets to cover the trust fund shortfall, according to CBO. Rather than look to a gasoline tax increase, however, lawmakers have been exploring a variety of financing patches, including many that have little or no connection to highway usage. These include draining $4.7 billion from a trust fund intended to cover cleanup costs for leaking underground fuel storage tanks and withholding the passports of tax scofflaws to make them pay up. Many of those measures are one-shot revenue sources, and some would pay for two years of highway spending with money collected over a decade. The net effect is to avoid addressing the financing shortfall directly, an approach that the conservative Competitive Enterprise Institute has said amounts to using “every last-ditch funding trick available.” Making Users Pay Improved Efficiency ... and Less Driving ... Reduces Fuel Use: Click here to view chart Many opponents of using increased fuel taxes to finance the rising cost of road construction raise concerns that electric-car owners wouldn’t be assessed for their highway use and that hybrids and other high-efficiency vehicles would benefit from a big discount because their fuel use is so low. It’s an argument that cuts to the heart of the highway program and harks back to its creation. And it also speaks to the transition toward higher fuel economy that CBO and other experts warn about. As long ago as 2009, the congressionally mandated National Surface Transportation Financing Commission said reliance on fuel taxes for highway improvements “is not sustainable in the long term and is likely to erode more quickly than previously thought.”

**Raising the federal gas tax has lost all legislative and public support – over-politicization and non-highway diversions**

**Istook ’12** (Ernest Istook. "Congress Wrecked America's Road System." Newsmax. N.p., 20 jun 2012. Web. 03 July 2012. <http://www.newsmax.com/ErnestIstook/Congress-fuel-tax-traffic/2012/06/20/id/442921>.)

Why are our roads so congested? It’s because of a wreck. By spending fuel tax money on things other than roads, Washington has wrecked the way we pay for highways. With dedicated revenue now drained away, roads are clogged due to wasteful practices by government. traffic-in-california-2012.jpg A Treasury Department report finds that Americans are wasting close to 1.9 billion gallons of gasoline each year sitting in traffic. (Getty Images) Congested roads hurt our entire economy by slowing people and goods from getting where they need to go. This creates new forms of road rage. Contractors, state and local governments are angry because new transportation plans were due from Congress over 30 months ago. October of 2009 was the deadline to renew the legislation that governs roads, highways, rail and mass transit. The latest extension (#9) runs out on June 30. Lawmakers are stalemated. This became inevitable years ago when Congress violated the trust of drivers who pay fuel taxes. What began in 1983 as a trickle of diversion is now a flood. Over a third of gas tax money is siphoned off for the insatiable appetites of those who want free or subsidized travel. As noted by The Heritage Foundation’s Ron Utt: “only about 65 percent of federal surface transportation spending is used to support general-purpose roads, while the remaining 35 percent is diverted to high-cost, underutilized programs like trolley cars, transit, covered bridges, hiking trails, earmarks, administrative overhead, streetscapes, flower planting, hiking and bicycle paths, museums, ‘transportation enhancements,’ tourist attractions, and archaeology.” One alternative that’s gathering support is to give fuel tax dollars back to the states so they can allocate the money. States might also politicize how it’s spent, but they can’t do worse than Washington has. Our once-viable Highway Trust Fund is effectively broke while roads remain crammed, in disrepair, or both. Any talk of raising fuel taxes is beaten down by consumers. Drivers will pay higher prices if they must; but they rebel at higher gasoline taxes because they know the system misuses that money. With trust funds almost empty, most Senators and Democrats are ready to break the logjam by borrowing billions so they can continue to shove money out the door in the same old manner. But a phalanx of House Republicans stands in the way. They insist on at least partial reforms before a new transportation bill is passed — reforms that won’t fix all the problems but at least will address some of the waste. Here’s how bad the drainage of the trust fund has gotten: The U.S. Department of Transportation for years tracked federal subsidies to different forms of travel. Recognizing that different vehicles carry different numbers of people, and for trips of differing lengths, USDOT measured the subsidies per passenger per each 1,000 miles travelled. The results: Highway users paid $1.91 per thousand passenger-miles. “Passenger rail received . . . $186.35 per thousand passenger-miles. “[Mass] transit received $118.26 [per thousand passenger-miles].” The abuse became so embarrassing that the Transportation Department quit calculating the subsidies a few years ago. And Amtrak has stopped filing its monthly disclosures of per passenger subsidies on each train route. (They claim it’s caused by a “financial system conversion” that curiously has taken a year so far.) The diversion of fuel taxes into non-road projects destroyed public confidence and public support for transportation taxes. The move away from the principle of “user pays” began in 1983 with applying some of the fuel tax dollars toward public transit. That trickle has become a flood of projects and non-drivers who ride at the expense of road users. That’s why transit fares are so cheap. Fares paid by transit users typically are less than half of a system’s operating costs and zero of its construction and capital costs. Transit advocates deceptively claim they reduce congestion by not driving. They never mention that they enjoy subsidized rides even while they take away the money that could have improved the roads and eased the flow of traffic. The diversion did more than create our backlog of needed highway projects. It also destroyed possible public support for raising fuel taxes — because people know the money would go into a tank that is riddled with holes. Some of those leaks are the waste: Ever-rising construction costs are worsened by red tape such as environmental regulations, “prevailing wage” laws, union-protecting “project labor agreements” and the like. When the governing principle of “user pays” is removed, our transportation system stalls and breaks down. Congress is mired in a political dogfight because too many want to receive while somebody else pays. It’s a prime example of what happens if we follow the credo of the Occupy movement. So when you’re stuck in traffic, remember that somebody has been hurt in a wreck. That somebody is you, the driver who carries the load for everyone else. Read more on Newsmax.com: Congress Wrecked America’s Road System Important: Do You Support Pres. Obama's Re-Election? Vote Here Now!

**Congress is at a standstill with raising taxes – it’s politically infeasible**

**Hybrid Cars ’11** (August 12, 2011. "Forget Raising the Federal Gas Tax, Congress May Let It Lapse." New Hybrid Reviews, News & Hybrid Mileage (MPG) Info. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 July 2012. <http://www.hybridcars.com/news/forget-raising-federal-gas-tax-congressional-republicans-may-let-it-lapse-30665.html>.)

For years, many transportation and fuel efficiency advocates have called for a hike in the federal gas tax that would put fuel prices in the United States on a more even ground with countries like Germany and the UK, where taxes are several times higher than the 18.4 cents tacked onto every gallon of gas sold here. If fuel costs were higher the argument goes, Americans would be more reluctant to buy gas guzzlers, and look more to vehicles that can get them from point A to point B while using as little gas as possible. Indeed, surveys and consumer behavior both strongly indicate that fuel efficiency becomes a higher priority for car buyers the more expensive gas gets. Earlier this year, the presidents of the AFL-CIO and U.S. Chamber of Commerce—usually natural enemies in Washington—came together to encourage the Senate to raise the national gasoline tax for the first time since 1993. Though participants at the hearing acknowledged the limited political feasibility of such a measure, it was clear that quiet support for new tax hike that would increase revenue to the federal Highway Trust Fund to rebuild road infrastructure, has been building. In January, General Motors CEO Dan Akerson told The Detroit News he favors raising the tax by as much as $1 per gallon to help encourage consumers to buy more efficient vehicles. Now, in the aftermath of a national debt ceiling battle that saw anti-tax advocates victorious in their call that no new tax revenue be raised to help balance the federal budget, a new fight over the nearly 80-year-old federal gas tax seems to be on the horizon. Grover Norquist, the influential president of Americans for Tax Reform—who has seen a new wave of Republican lawmakers take up his fight to drastically slash both taxes and federal spending—told Politico last week he'd like to see the tax expire, and favors leaving the funding of transportation infrastructure to individual states. Though few elected officials are on the record calling for an outright elimination of the gas tax, the idea of reducing it or temporarily suspending it has been raised several times over the years when gas prices have spiked. And with Congress at a standstill on a range of funding and taxation issues, rumors have been circulating that Republicans may dig their heels in yet again over extending the tax, which expires on September 30. If the tax is reduced or allowed to lapse, states would be left to increase their own gas taxes and take on a greater role in funding their own infrastructure repairs. But in states like Georgia, where Gov. Nathan Deal has chosen to block a scheduled increase in the state fuel tax in an effort to hold down gas prices, that could prove to be politically difficult in itself. The fight re-raises an issue that has come up time and time again in battles over the expansion of domestic oil production, Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards, and even labeling schemes for vehicle tires: do small, short-term cost savings outweigh the need to improve the longterm efficiency of American vehicles? Would establishing a gas price floor (with the difference made up by the gas tax) help bring stability to the economy and vehicle market? Those debates may be coming down the road, but for the time being, the question on the minds of many transportation advocates is whether the gas tax will even exist anymore come October.

## Obama Opposes

**Both Congress and Obama are against the gas tax**

**Freigenbaum ’12** (Baruch Feigenbaum - Transportation Policy Analyst. "Reason Foundation." - ATA Wrong on Bingaman Amendment. N.p., may 25, 2012. Web. 02 July 2012. <http://reason.org/news/printer/ata-wrong-on-bingaman-amendment>.)

Over the last few years the American Trucking Association (ATA) has not exactly been the best team player in the transportation world. Earlier this month ATA President Bill Graves sent a letter to Congress outlining his priorities for a new transportation bill. Many of the association’s priorities are excellent. ATA wants to preserve the New National Freight Program; the group recommends refraining from using highway funding for non-highway purposes; ATA also recommends a fair compliance program from FMCSA. However, there is one significant area where the group is putting its interests above the rest of the U.S. transportation community. This is ATA’s support for the Bingaman amendment. The trucking group has written several letters to Congress justifying the Bingaman amendment. Opposing the Bingaman amendment is a coalition including Brookings, the Bipartisan Policy Center, Building America’s Future, Reason, former U.S. DOT Secretary Mary Peters, AASHTO, ARTBA, a number of state DOT’s and many others who wrote a joint-letter stating their opposition. Transportation revenue is declining while transportation needs are increasing. The main federal transportation funding resource is the gas tax. The federal gas tax has not been increased since 1992. As a result of inflation and more fuel-efficient vehicles, the gas tax raises less than half the actual revenue it raised in 1992. Currently there is no political will to raise the gas tax. Congress is against it; President Obama is against it. (One of the President’s advisors falsely attacked Governor Romney for raising the gas tax in Massachusetts. Romney increased the environmental clean up fund by two cents not the actual gas tax. And the actual out of pocket increase to drivers was 9% not 400% as Obama’s surrogates complain.) Even if we increased the gas tax 15 cents and indexed it to inflation, (which has a zero percent chance of happening) it would still be only a temporary solution because of increasing fuel efficiency. As the federal government is either unwilling or unable to act, States should be allowed to use any and all resources to improve and maintain their highway networks.

## AT Transportation Bill

**Raising the gas tax is still a political non-starter even after the transportation bill passed**

**Ross 7-2** (Bruce Ross. "Bruce Ross' BlogÂ Â Â ." Bruce Ross' Blog. N.p., july 2, 2012. Web. 03 July 2012. <http://blogs.redding.com/bross/archives/2012/07/congress-wrecks.html>.)

A correspondent, who might be showing up momentarily to say publicly why I'm full of beans, relays this Daily Caller story as evidence of another "'union' pension bailout" by the federal government. The massive $109 billion highway bill snaking through Congress now includes a measure to disguise pension funding shortfalls. Months of negotiations in the House and Senate have led to a compromise on the massive bill. Section 40312 of Senate Bill 1813 allows "pension smoothing," an accounting trick whereby pension managers downplay funding shortfalls by spreading losses across several years while overestimating projected investment returns. I agree that accounting trick is bad news. This sort of thing keeps up, private pensions soon will be in as bad of shape as perennial "smoother" CalPERS. But what's going on here is actually interesting. Congress has not raised the federal gasoline tax -- currently 18.4 cents per gallon -- since the early years of the Clinton administration. That's a fixed tax, yet the cost of building highways has increased substantially since then. The math is brutal, and federal blue-ribbon panels have been earnestly considering how to solve the "problem" for years now. Of course, Congress could just raise the tax by a penny every few years to keep up with inflation, but one party is kept on a short leash by Grover Norquist and the other is so spineless they refuse to tell the American people the truth that things cost money. So we've pretty much had a free-lunch transportation policy, and the recent delays over approving the new federal highway bill have been based on Congress' attempt to continue to provide free lunch. So what did they find? And what does this have to do with pension plans? Back to the Caller: The move is intended to generate $9.5 billion over 10 years for the Highway Trust Fund by reducing the amount an employer will contribute toward tax-free pension fund assets, in turn increasing the total amount of taxable income, Politico reports. Follow the ball there: Congress is encouraging companies to short their underfunded pensions so that the government can collect taxes sooner. Congress is encouraging companies to take extra risks with their pension funds -- risks that might turn out well if the markets cooperate, or might blow up entirely, leaving the federal Pension Benefit Guarantee Corp. -- read, the taxpayers -- to pick up shortfalls while retired telephone company operators and longeshoremen see their monthly benefits cut. Meanwhile, those communists at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce have been encouraging a gas-tax increase, much like the one that communist Ronald Reagan signed as president. Good thing we have sensible leaders today.

**No political support for raising the gas tax - even if we are short on transportation revenues**

**Wollack ’12** (Leslie Wollack, National League of Cities. "Future of Transportation Legislation Uncertain As Congress Returns." Future of Transportation Legislation Uncertain As Congress Returns. N.p., april 16, 2012. Web. 03 July 2012. <http://www.gmanet.com/BreakingNews.aspx?CNID=70805>.)

Transportation advocates continue to watch for hopeful signs that Congress can enact a long-term transportation authorization bill before the November elections, despite the ongoing difficulty of finding a consensus. When Congress returns from its two-week recess, it must take action before the current and ninth short-term extension expires on June 30. The transportation bill funding federal highway, transit and bridge programs expired in 2009 and the Congressional Budget Office recently projected that funding for the program will run out next year at the current rate of spending. Extensions typically continue current spending levels. With gas tax revenues falling far short of spending levels and no political support for raising the gas tax, Congress is left with trying to fund a long-term bill without the money to fund it. The federal gas tax has remained at 18.4 cents per gallon since 1993, while state and local governments have been scrambling to find the revenues to fund transportation programs. There was some optimism after the Senate adopted a bipartisan, two-year bill, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century. But the House voted down an effort to consider the Senate’s $109-billion measure and opted instead for a 90-day extension of the current program. NLC supports passage of a long-term transportation bill that would rebuild America’s roads and bridges, modernize transit systems and create or save good-paying jobs.

**Gas tax is a political non-starter**

**Plumer ’11** (Plumer, Brad. "Gas-tax Aversion Is Tying Congress in Knots." Washington Post. The Washington Post, 08 Nov. 2011. Web. 02 July 2012. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/gas-tax-aversion-is-tying-congress-in-knots/2011/11/08/gIQA5qrt1M\_blog.html>.)

Right now, the House and Senate are trying to extend federal transportation funding — the money that goes to build and rebuild roads and bridges — for the next few years. Both chambers are grappling with the same dilemma. Americans have been cutting back on driving lately. That means there’s not enough gas-tax revenue to pay for the highway bills. Yet no one wants to raise the gas tax. And that means that legislators have to devise ever-more byzantine — and often problematic — ways to rustle up funds. (David Paul Morris/Bloomberg) In the House, the Republican leadership has been hunting around for more money after its initial six-year, $230 billion highway bill was blasted for cutting spending 33 percent below existing levels. Recently, Speaker John Boehner hinted that Republicans had found a solution: They’d use royalties from new oil and gas drilling to help bankroll a bigger infrastructure bill. (Boehner’s office hasn’t released details, but two House members have introduced proposals along these lines.) The problem, critics say, is that this could make a mess of infrastructure spending. For one, oil and gas royalties are currently used to fund other parts of government. “This is revenue that’s supposed to go to the general fund,” says Steve Ellis of Taxpayers for Common Sense. So if the bill just uses existing royalties, it will increase the deficit. Granted, it’s possible that tying energy production to infrastructure will foster more drilling than would otherwise be the case — let’s say it somehow spurs Florida to open up its coasts to oil and gas development, bringing in more revenue than anticipated. But, Ellis notes, that’s a big if. “They’re taking revenues way down the road, speculative at best, to pay for roads and bridges we’re building right now.” The Senatedoesn’t get off lightly, either. Senate Democrats are hunting around for about $12 billion to supplement gas-tax revenue and fund their highway bill, which would maintain spending at current levels for two years. (Originally they were going to use some agreed-on savings in the health reform law, but those were swiped away to pay for a contractor withholding provision.) But even if the Senate does find this extra money, the Senate’s bill would bring the balance of the Highway Trust Fund down to zero over the next two years. And that, Ellis explains, is a risky move. Congress did the same thing in its 2005 highway bill, despite ample warnings that existing gas-tax revenue could come in below expectations. In the end, the worriers were right and Congress had to chip in an extra $34.5 billion from the general fund to maintain highway spending. The current bills, Ellis notes, also leave no margin for error. If, say, the price of oil shoots up unexpectedly and Americans start driving less, there won’t be money to fund all the planned infrastructure. And true, Congress could avoid many of these elaborate contortions if a gas tax hike were on the table and the Highway Trust Fund could get replenished. But it’s not.

**There is growing opposition amongst Republicans against the gas tax – fails to cover all costs**

**Cowan ’11** (Cowan, Richard. "Congress Faces Tough Decisions on Gasoline Tax." Reuters. Thomson Reuters, 12 Aug. 2011. Web. 02 July 2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/12/us-usa-taxes-gasoline-idUSTRE77B5PL20110812>.)

(Reuters) - A multibillion-dollar gasoline tax to maintain U.S. highways and mass transit will be in jeopardy when Congress resumes in early September in the wake of bruising budget and aviation funding battles. An 18.4-cents-per-gallon gasoline tax paid by consumers at the pump is set to expire on September 30, but Democrats and Republicans have been unable to advance legislation ensuring a fix. While chances are good for a temporary extension of the tax, according to congressional aides, conservative Republicans aim to use the debate to open another front in their battle to shrink the size and scope of the federal government. "Instead of burdening states and micromanaging local transportation decisions from Washington, states like Oklahoma should be free to choose how their transportation dollars are spent," Republican U.S. Senator Tom Coburn said. Coburn and some of his fellow conservatives want to let states opt out of the federal highway program, giving them more control over how the tax revenue is spent on transportation projects. According to a spokeswoman, Coburn intends to offer up such legislation as an amendment to the gasoline tax extension when it is considered in the Senate. While it's not likely to succeed, the Senate votes will "set markers" for building support for the initiative, said anti-tax, conservative advocate Grover Norquist, head of Americans for Tax Reform. Besides giving states more control of transportation projects, Norquist wants to choke off federal funds that he says go to "unionized guys in New York and Boston" for work on mass transit projects and the "ridiculous pensions" he said those retired workers are paid. His argument echoes the ongoing dispute between the two major political parties on aviation funding, with Republicans trying to roll back a federal rule making it easier to organize labor unions at airlines. NORQUIST SAYS OK In the meantime, Norquist said that an extension of the current gasoline tax would not necessarily draw fire from his group. "As long as it's not a tax increase ... it doesn't break the pledge" Republican lawmakers have signed against new taxes, Norquist told Reuters. Lawmakers also will have to solve another problem that could push the gasoline tax to the brink of failure: the tax no longer covers the government's transportation maintenance and construction costs. Although the tax is expected to generate approximately $245 billion over the next six years, Americans are driving less due to the 2008 economic downturn and the cars they own use less gasoline -- which means that revenues aren't keeping up with construction costs for the first time in the program's 55-year history. With lawmakers loathe to add to U.S. budget deficits hovering around $1.5 trillion a year, they are struggling to find savings in other programs to plug the funding gap and keep highway and subway construction projects -- and the jobs that go with them -- running. Meanwhile, Democrats like U.S. Senator John Kerry and U.S. Representative Peter DeFazio are hoping to beef up Washington's investment in infrastructure projects. "We know that every $1 billion invested in just transportation infrastructure, creates or sustains over 34,000 jobs and produces $6.2 billion in economic activity," DeFazio wrote President Barack Obama in June. Kerry is hoping to find a way to expand investment in highways and other infrastructure, but to do so with minimal use of taxpayer dollars. He hopes to be able to attach to the gasoline tax bill legislation creating an infrastructure bank using revolving funds to spur investment. But even that would require some new domestic spending -- an idea that could find tough opposition from members of Congress aligned with the conservative Tea Party movement.

## AT Spinning Gas Tax Turn

**No possibility of spinning the gas tax – structure of American politics makes it impossible for a gas tax to be popular**

**Rafey, 10** – student at Harvard University and writer for the Harvard Political Review

[William, 6/1, “How to Pass a Gas Tax”, Harvard Political Review, <http://hpronline.org/united-states/how-to-pass-a-gas-tax/>, AL]

America’s short, two-year election cycle is a major barrier to passing a higher gas tax. Politicians tend to ignore proposals that involve an immediate, perceivable cost and provide less tangible, long-term benefits. Thomas Sterner, former president of the European Association of Environmental and Resource Economists, told the HPR that this is the “big problem” of gas tax politics. In countries with short electoral cycles of two to four years, attempts to increase the gas tax “will only cause protests,” Sterner said. It can be very difficult to promote farsighted, technocratic solutions in a political environment defined by short-term gratification.