

Californians sharply divided over hiking state gas tax

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California voters think the government should spend more money to help maintain crumbling roads, but they offer mixed views on how to fund the upkeep, according to a new statewide Field Poll.

More than 70 percent think state and local officials should dedicate additional resources to existing roadways. By a smaller margin, 48 percent to 35 percent, they believe more money must be set aside for new road construction.

However, the poll found voters split over a proposal to raise the state gasoline tax by 10 cents a gallon to improve roads and highways. Opinions on the tax increase largely fall along party lines, with Democrats in favor and Republicans opposed.

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In [signaling his priorities](#) last month, Gov. Jerry Brown said the state faces \$59 billion in deferred road maintenance. Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins, a San Diego Democrat, has proposed a new [user charge](#) to make up for tumbling gas tax revenue resulting from more fuel-efficient cars.

Voters by more than 2-to-1 reject the idea of installing a device on motor vehicles to detect the number of miles they drive and allow state officials to determine an appropriate road-usage fee. Similarly, they resist the idea of creating more toll roads.

Finally, asked how much more they would be willing to pay each month in taxes, toll charges and other fees associated with driving, 43 percent of drivers said “nothing,” 23 percent said up to \$5 more; 18 percent said \$5 to \$10 more and 13 percent said \$10 or more.

“Looking for dedicated funding sources for transportation, the public clearly has a hard time getting behind one of them,” said Mark DiCamillo, the poll’s director.

Californians pay the second-highest combined state and federal gas taxes in the country at nearly 64 cents per gallon. The national average is 48.23 cents a gallon, according to data culled by the Field Poll.

Mary Solecki, a survey respondent who works as an advocate for a renewable energy nonprofit, told pollsters she opposes boosting the gas tax by 10 cents a gallon because it doesn’t address the use of alternative fuels. Such a tax increase, she said, is regressive and would disproportionately fall on low-income people and benefit those who can afford electric cars.

Solecki, who lives in Santa Cruz and drives a diesel Volkswagen Jetta, believes the government should do more to fund and encourage the use of public transport. As for a road-usage fee, Solecki said she would support it only if the state finds a way to protect drivers’ privacy.

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