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## Governor wants to scrap gas tax, fund roads with higher sales tax

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By [Rodger Jones](#)/Editorial Writer  
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That's not our governor. It's Virginia's governor, Bob McDonnell, who [wants to quit collecting the motor-fuels tax to build and maintain his state highway system](#). The plan would mean bumping up the state sales tax, from 5 percent to 5.8 percent, to fund Virginia's transportation needs. The 17.5 percent gas tax would go by the wayside.

Would that be a good approach for Texas, with its 20-cent motor-fuels tax? Every state is in a similar pickle — the gas tax is not growing with highway needs, since cars are more fuel efficient and are using less gasoline to tax. And the federal gas tax isn't helping, for the same reasons.

The struggle for transportation finance is finding a user fee that grows with use and system needs.

One idea that gets kicked around is the so-called VMT tax — for vehicle miles traveled. It would be the purest way to tax a person's road usage, perhaps tied to odometer readings or chips in cars or gasoline sales. It's a nice concept, but try getting that through a Legislature prone to seeing Big Brother lurking. Also, would you levy VMT taxes against someone who primarily uses toll roads for the daily commute? Wouldn't that be double taxation? I'm sure experts could allow for that, but the point is one about complications.

Transportation experts have also talked about levying a gasoline sales tax instead of a per-gallon gas tax. That would yield more money as the price of gas goes up. It assumes, however, that the price of gas goes up. But it's been on a plateau for a few years now.

Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst and other top leaders have talked about tapping the state's be a limited-life proposition, though, and not a growing funding source available for d critical to the state's future. Why not broaden the sales tax for overall infrastructure?

That would make sure that basic needs have a dedicated stream of money that grow

You could argue that the sales tax is too regressive and that Grandma, who's retired Yes, but her doctor uses the roads and her grocery store needs goods trucked in. H having a good roadway system.

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That would breath as

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**Ken Duble** · Top Commenter · Title Coordinator at Banking and Finance

Now that Texas has a potential surplus of as much as \$12 billion, much talk is going into how to allocate the funds. Cutting taxes based on a temporary surplus is not only a bad idea, but it's cynical to its core. Cutting taxes wouldn't leave a cushion of funds to carry over. This means that, in the future, most likely when the other party is in power and is forced to raise them back up again, political finger pointing resumes. What would make more sense would be to increase the rainy day fund to maximize size allowable under law, and apply any other funds left over toward restoring the education cuts.

Spending the surplus on roads and bridges would be another particularly bad idea. If our current levies are too low to build and support the infrastructure we need, then we need to address the revenue problem. Merely using a temp...[See More](#)

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Funding our roads and bridges by taxing per dollar rather than per gallon actually makes sense. Other nations do this, and as a result, they haven't had the infrastructure funding issues we've had here in the U.S. Of course, there is always the potential of loss to be experienced when prices are going down. Yet, we currently experience revenue loss when motor fuels go up in price, as people drive less.

My solution: Let's hedge. Let's leave our current Texas motor fuels tax as it is at 20 cents per gallon. Don't change it. But, let's have the additional revenue come from a cents-per-dollar levy. This way, the cents-per-dollar levy will actually bring in more revenue as prices rise and dampen motor fuels sales. But, in those rare and short-lived periods when the price of motor fuels are declining, the increased driving will partially offset this as people drive more.

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**Ken Duble** · Top Commenter · Title Coordinator at Banking and Finance

"Do light users of state roadways not benefit from others paying prodigious amounts of the gas tax?"

In a word, no. As some truckers seem prone to advertize by the postings on their vehicles, truckers are heavy payers of road and bridge tax assessed on the weight of their vehicles. Hence, the weighing stations one sees about the state.

The reason light users aren't free riders: The cost of that road and bridge tax is passed onto the consumer when the consumer purchases the final product.

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**Ken Duble** · Top Commenter · Title Coordinator at Banking and Finance

The gas tax is not growing with highway needs, so let's get rid of it? Let's apply this logic to the rest of life: I don't get enough exercise, so I'll quit exercising entirely. I don't drink enough water, so I'll give up drinking water. I don't read enough, so I'll quit reading.... What kind o logic is this?

The real reason the motor fuels tax hasn't kept up with our needs is because it's at the same level today as it was 20 years ago. Duh!

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**Alex Rodriguez** · Top Commenter · Flower Mound, Texas

Sales tax is the way to go for government funding, period. Dump the entire national income tax code while you are at it, and institute a national sales tax.

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