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## Surprises from lawmakers on highway funding



By Rodger Jones/Editorial Writer  
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The first surprise for me, from a panel of lawmakers on highway funding, was Sen. Kevin Eltife's declaration that he's for raising the gas tax a dime a gallon, just for starters, to generate more highway money. As Tom Benning reported, that drew applause from a pro-transpo crowd listening to a panel of lawmakers at TxDOT's annual Transportation Forum.

A later surprise, though it probably shouldn't have been, was the pessimism about the likelihood of new funding from the two representatives on the panel, House transportation chair Larry Phillips, R-Sherman, and Rep. Larry Gonzales, R-Round Rock.

Asked about the chances of reaching Senate Finance Chairman Tommy Williams' goal of a "robust, new funding mechanism," Phillips and Gonzales said that's going to be a very hard vote in the House. With the big number of freshmen on board this year, it's going to be an educational session for many of them just to understand the challenge, the reps said.

A boost in the gas tax? Forget about it in the House, they said.

Eltife, R-Tyler, and Sen. Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, D-McAllen, were only slightly optimistic, but realistic, saying it's a long, longshot to reach TxDOT's stated need of another \$4 billion in contract lettings a year.

Other tidbits:

- Eltife and Hinojosa, both on the Senate Finance Committee (which works on the vehicle sales tax to transportation over several sessions. But Phillips said he liked
- Every lawmaker seemed to agree — with Eltife vehement — that the state has bc
- The futuristic-sounding vehicle-miles traveled tax is worth talking about but is not converting to a VMT would be enormous and would best be a national movement, h know how much we drive via our annual tailpipe inspections. We could tax against t

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**Ken Duble** 5 hours ago

The problem with a vehicle-miles tax is that an 18-wheeler and a motorcycle shouldn't pay the same. But they wouldn't, you say, because we'd make allowance for that. But, should an F-250 pickup and a Daimler Smartcar pay the same? You assure me, no. We'd make adjustments for that. Does this mean an SUV would pay the same as a Mini-Cooper? Of course not, you say. The heavier vehicle places more wear-and-tear on the road, so we'd adjust the vehicle-miles tax to compensate.

Thus, the more fair we try to make a vehicle-miles tax, the more complex it becomes, and the more closely it resembles our current motor fuels tax, which isn't complicated, and wouldn't cost even a single slim dime to administer because it's already in place. Raise the damn tax!

Here's a simple idea: Simply remove the current exemption motor fuels enjoy from the state sales tax so they'd pay this as well. At current prices, this would double the revenue. And when prices go down, we'd still enjoy the hedge of the 20 cents-per-gallon.

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**Ed** 1 day ago

Ridiculous! Long before we consider an increased gasoline tax we should be enacting increased fees/taxes on large trucks which disproportionately wear out our highways and are responsible for more than their fair share of auto accidents.

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**Ken Duble** 5 hours ago

They pay this already.

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