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**About This Blog**

Transportation writer Michael Lindenberg, reporter Theodore Kim and editorial writer Rodger Jones cover the subject from tollways to traffic, roads to rail. They invite tips and feedback from decision-makers and commuters alike.

**May 2009**

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**Critics quick to hit gas-tax plan**

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**Opinion**

Here's the type of criticism that will dog the **proposed voter-approved gas tax plan** -- from hard conservative groups that are quick on the draw. From the **Texas Public Policy Foundation** this evening:

AUSTIN - The new transportation tax proposals passed by the House Transportation Committee were met with significant opposition from several research and taxpayer groups, including the Texas Public Policy Foundation, Texas Eagle Forum, Texans for Fiscal Responsibility, Americans for Prosperity, and the Free Market Foundation.

Legislation approved by the committee during the past 24 hours--House Bill 9 and Senate Bill 855--permits a 15-cent statewide increase of the gas tax within 10 years, as well as a new 10-cent-per-gallon local gas tax. This represents a potential 25-cent increase per gallon, on top of the current 20-cent gas tax--a whopping 125 percent increase within 10 years. While these measures require voter approval, the organizations listed above reject the flawed notion that requiring voter approval makes this measure acceptable.

OK. The percentages are scary. But consider that the gas tax has been at 20 cents for 18 years. It has been losing buying power and has been unable to counterbalance the fact that cars are becoming more efficient. If the gas tax is a user fee, that means drivers, through their higher-mpg cars, are actually charged less individually for using roadway.

Lawmakers generally agree that the state is not keeping pace with the cost of infrastructure. Stopping diversions would be progress but won't close the gap.

I can feel Rick Perry getting heartburn right about now, with low-tax groups breathing hard.

People who turn pale at an extra \$3 a fill-up should compare that with the cost of tollroad commutes today. Many people pay that same \$3, and often more, just getting to or from work. But it'll get worse, with even more toll roads, since gas tax revenue is just not getting it done.

Keep reading for the full version of the conservative groups' joint statement:

Groups oppose bills permitting 125% gas tax hike

Flawed approach could permit gas tax to skyrocket from 20 cents to 45 cents per gallon

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"The legislature and several local leaders cannot look taxpayers in the eye and say they took even commonsense steps to avoid a tax increase. As these tax bills are heading for passage, lawmakers are putting the finishing touches on a budget that will continue to divert billions of dollars in transportation taxes to non-transportation purposes," said Justin Keener, Vice President for Policy and Communications for the Texas Public Policy Foundation. "Furthermore, many cities in the regions seeking increased taxes have chosen not to use their sales-tax authority for transportation projects. Whatever happened to setting priorities with our existing tax dollars before going to the taxpayers and seeking more?"

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