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Fuel tax increase may be painful necessity in Iowa

by The Gazette Opinion Staff :: **UPDATED: 19 October 2011 | 11:46 am** :: in [Editorial Roundup](#) :: [No Comments](#)

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By Mason City Globe Gazette

Things appear to be setting up for a showdown over a potential gas tax increase.

On the pro side are those who say the increase is badly needed to cover \$215 million in critical infrastructure needs.

On the other are those, including tea party members, who oppose it. In fact, tea party members are urging lawmakers to pledge not to vote for the increase.

We're not crazy about an increase. But it seems like one might be an unfortunate necessity.

Iowa drivers now are assessed taxes of 21 cents per gallon for regular gasoline, 19 cents per gallon for ethanol-blended gasoline and 22.5 cents per gallon for diesel fuel.

Asked about a potential increase recently, Gov. Terry Branstad cautioned lawmakers not to rule out the gas tax increase or other options until a study panel he appointed made its recommendations.

Well, that study came later in the week. The Transportation 2020 Citizens Advisory Committee, which held seven public hearing around the state, recommended an 8- to 10-cent hike in the fuel tax and a 1 percent increase in the cost of vehicle registrations.

It formed its recommendation from recurring comments at the hearings by road construction interests, county engineers, business leaders and others.

The committee's recommendation isn't final but the Department of Transportation will include it in a report to the Legislature.

That's bound to put anti-tax efforts by tea partyers, among others, into overdrive.

Before the commission's recommendation was made public, a tea party leader, Ryan Rhodes, said his group was going to send letters to all 150 state legislators urging them to pledge to oppose a gas tax increase for at least 12 months. Rhodes said the state has to make better use of the money it is collecting rather than seeking to generate more.

For his part, Branstad said he supports a system where transportation users fund the cost of maintenance and improvements on a pay-as-you-go basis.

Tags

Gas tax increase, infrastructure, Mason City Globe-Gazette, Public Safety, Tea Party

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However they're funded, road improvements seem essential.

Iowa, like every state, preaches economic development — keeping companies here and attracting others from around the nation and even around the world.

But good roads and a strong transportation system are considered essential cogs in any economic development plan and they're not going to happen without adequate funding.

What's more, improving our transportation system will mean more jobs, thus giving the economy a boost that way — more salaries pumped into the economy leading to more sales and more sales tax income.

And we dare not overlook the safety factor: Some Iowa roads are in such bad shape that they border on unsafe much less uncomfortable.

And that's just roads: What about bridges that are aging and deteriorating. One North Iowa official said a bridge in his county is being supported "by air." That's a bit of a stretch but it makes a vivid point.

Again, we're not crazy about a tax increase, and we're not sure what the amount should be. We'll leave that up to the experts.

But it's clear that Iowa's roads and the transportation system overall need help — help that in some cases is long overdue. There is not much sense in delaying the inevitable, which would drive up costs even more by delaying work for another year (or years) and potentially risk public safety.

Iowa's lawmakers should give a fuel tax increase serious consideration when they convene in January.



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