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Panel backs gas tax hike to fund Iowa road work

Story Discussion

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Mike Wiser | Posted: Thursday, October 13, 2011 9:39 am | No Comments Posted

ANKENY, Iowa — A state advisory commission has recommended an increase of 8 to 10 cents in the fuel tax and a 1 percentage point increase in the cost of vehicle registrations to help pay for the state's roadway needs.

The recommendation isn't final, but officials at the Iowa Department of Transportation will include the commission's decision in a report they are compiling for the Legislature. That report will get reviewed once more by the commission Oct. 26 and then go to lawmakers.

Commissioners went with the 2-cent range after they got bogged down during discussions over how much money they needed to raise to meet the state's future infrastructure needs. Transportation officials say it would take \$215 million just to cover the state's critical infrastructure needs. The

\$215 million turned out to be the baseline for commissioners. Some said the state should be looking to cover only those critical projects, with others saying that would be short-sighted.

Each 1-cent increase in the fuel tax is expected to bring in \$22 million in revenue and the 1 percentage point increase in vehicle registration fees is expected to bring in \$50 million in additional revenue.

"I personally would prefer a specific amount," said Nancy Richardson, co-chair of the advisory commission and former director of the Iowa Department of Transportation. "Maybe the Department of Transportation will come up with a specific amount or we will change it when we meet on the 26th."

Other commission recommendations:

* The department undertakes a study on how to ensure that owners of hybrid and high-mileage vehicles pay a comparable share of the cost of maintaining roads because they stop at fuel pumps less frequently than other drivers. Results of that study are due in December.

* The department undertakes a study of what types of vehicles are exempt from various transportation taxes or pay different rates based on their use than similar vehicles.

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