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Wednesday, November 02, 2011

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## Paying for Iowa's road needs

By Lynn Campbell, [IowaPolitics.com](http://IowaPolitics.com)

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JOHNSTON – Gov. Terry Branstad declined Friday to endorse a proposed increase in the state's gas tax, indicating instead that user fees also should apply to vehicles less reliant on gasoline.

"Vehicles are changing dramatically. We're going to more fuel-efficient vehicles. We're going to hybrid vehicles, electric vehicles. We are seeing trucks now that are going to natural gas," Branstad said after a taping of Iowa Press.

"We need to come up with a mechanism to try to deal with those changes. I don't think that there's any particular panacea to how we address it."

Branstad wasn't specific about the amount of the proposed new fee. He said he opposed borrowing money to pay for the \$215 million a year that the Iowa Department of Transportation, or Iowa DOT, says the state needs to meet critical roadway needs.

"It needs to be done on a pay-as-you-go basis, and it needs to be paid for by the users," he said. "I think we need to look at all kinds of different approaches ... and we need to come up with an equitable system for the future. It may be something that has to be phased in over time, but I think we need to respect and recognize that the whole transportation is changing."

The governor's Transportation 2020 Citizen Advisory Commission, an 18-member panel assigned by Branstad to assist the Iowa DOT in reviewing the funding for Iowa's roads and bridges, this week proposed increasing the state's gas tax by 8 to 10 cents a gallon. Iowa charges a tax of 21 cents a gallon on gasoline, 22.5 cents on diesel and 19 cents on ethanol-blended gasoline.

The Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, a statewide rural advocacy group, applauded the recommendation. The lobbying group noted that rural roads make up nearly 90,000 miles of the state's 114,000-mile road system.

"Our roads and bridges have been severely impacted over the years by flooding and neglect, negatively impacting all of Iowa, but especially our rural communities, businesses and farms," said Farm Bureau President Craig Lang. "We believe that an increase in the fuel tax is the fairest way to fund those repairs, because it charges people who actually use the roads whether they live in Iowa or are from out of state."

But Branstad wasn't as quick to lend his support.

"I don't know that I'm going to endorse it," Branstad said of the proposal, which goes before the Iowa DOT on Nov. 8 and then to the Legislature by the end of the year.

Calls Friday by [IowaPolitics.com](http://IowaPolitics.com) seeking additional comment on the proposed gas-tax hike or new fee on fuel-efficient vehicles were not returned from Iowans for Tax Relief, a Muscatine group that lobbies against taxes; the Iowa Taxpayers Association, an Ankeny business-sponsored tax policy organization; and the Environmental Law and Policy Center, a Midwest environmental advocacy organization.

The proposed gas-tax hike would generate an estimated \$184 million to \$230 million. The commission also recommended increasing the registration fee on the sale of new and used motor vehicles and trailers from 5 percent to 6 percent, to be consistent with the state sales tax and raise another \$50 million a year.

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" Typical Branstad view...alternative fuel vehicles are designed to decrease our dependence on foreign oil and help clean the environment. So now we tax them. A "fee" is simply a tax by any other definition. A tax that the good Governor campaigned on not raising in any form. When will Iowan's ever learn? "

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