



February 2, 2012

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
2988 Jackson Federal Bldg.
915 Second Avenue
Seattle, WA 98174

Dear Senator Murray:

Now that the administration and automakers have agreed to increase the corporate average fuel economy standards (CAFE) for 2025 to an average of 54.5 miles per gallon, the nation's policy now clearly mandates less petroleum consumption. While necessary from perspectives of reducing our nation's reliance on foreign oil and also reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, this policy undermines the funding structure for our nation's roadways. While the state commissions strongly support raising the CAFE standards, the commissions concurrently support developing an alternative to the fuel tax as the fundamental basis for road finance in the United States.

Further, Oregon and Washington State have joined efforts to develop an electric vehicle charging network to encourage market penetration of electric vehicles in these states. These EV fast charging stations will be in use in 2012. The states therefore join the nation in endorsing the move to a highly fuel efficient vehicle fleet that, at the same time, undermines both states' highway funding source.

We urge Congress to enact funding alternatives that provide the greatest potential for augmenting or replacing the gas tax. For example, a national Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)-based fee system could provide a transition from the gas tax to a revenue mechanism more directly linked to transportation system use and impacts. Many experts in this nation—including two congressional commissions—recognize that a VMT-based fee system is the best alternative to the fuel tax as the long term revenue source for our highway system. To this end, **we ask Congress to embrace the implementation of a multi-state VMT pilot program as you work toward the next authorization of the federal surface transportation authorization act.**

In the absence of federal action, states have taken the lead in developing a future VMT system and have made strong progress in recent years.

Oregon

The Oregon State Department of Transportation concluded a pilot program in 2007 exploring an electronically collected fee based upon miles driven. This test demonstrated the mileage fee raises substantial revenue in a way that is relatively simple to pay, collect and administer – without revenue erosion resulting from fuel efficiency. Though the pilot was successful, Oregon continues to research solutions to concerns raised by the motoring public. As a result, Oregon is now preparing a new pilot program to demonstrate a collection system based on providing motorists choices from among multiple methods for reporting miles driven. This will not involve a mandate for use of a GPS device nor any other government technology. Rather, motorists will be able to use devices they choose from the marketplace.

Washington

A Traffic Choices Study conducted by the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) in Seattle, Washington during 2005-06 had a similar outcome to Oregon's pilot program. The PSRC Study placed GPS tolling meters in the vehicles of about 275 volunteers, electronically deducting road use charges from pre-paid driver accounts based on time of day, day of the week and type of road traveled. Driving patterns were observed before and after meter installation to determine the level of travel pattern alterations once the fees were imposed. Like the Oregon study, the PSRC Study showed that a mileage based fee directly impacts travel decisions and reduces the opportunity for congestion, while raising transportation revenue while minimizing infrastructure costs by utilizing GPS type technology.

Furthermore, the Connecting Washington Task Force, which was convened in 2011 to recommend a 10-year transportation investment and financing strategy for the state of Washington, recently recommended that the state explore a direct user fee system that is capable of providing a stable revenue source for transportation's roadway needs.

Minnesota

This November, Minnesota began a six month pilot program for collection of a mileage based user fee using smart phones. This test expects to prove to the motoring public that individual motorists will be able to use their own smart phones to report miles driven.

Nevada

Nevada has begun preparations for a pilot demonstration for collection of a mileage fee at the fuel pump without use of a GPS device.

A key conclusion that can be drawn from these studies is that a Vehicle Miles Traveled fee structure appears to nicely compliment several priorities shared amongst the Western States – namely increasing the use of alternative transportation modes, and identifying a sustainable and a long-term transportation funding source.

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We hope you will take this opportunity, as you work toward the next authorization of the federal surface transportation authorization act, to include funding for states to develop and test a VMT system that embraces multi-state applications.

Sincerely,



Dario Frommer, Chairman
California Transportation Commission



Pat Egan, Chairman
Oregon Transportation Commission



Richard Ford, Chairman
Washington State Transportation Commission