



State of Washington

## TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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September 27, 2019

The Honorable Patty Murray  
United States Senate  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

We are pleased to submit to you a joint letter signed by the Chairs of the Washington, Oregon and California Transportation Commissions. The three West Coast Commissions have met every year or two since 2009, to share information, identify opportunities to work collectively together, and to learn how transportation issues common to the three states are being addressed in each state.

The three bodies convened in Stevenson, Washington on September 16, 2019 with an agenda focused on rural transportation issues, challenges and opportunities. At this meeting, it was agreed to send the enclosed letter to the three West Coast states' combined Congressional delegations, urging an increase of the federal gas tax and beginning an assessment of a national Road Usage Charge as a possible replacement to the federal gas tax in the future.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of this request and we stand ready to provide more information on the research and assessment work that has gone on in each of our states, funded in part with federal grant dollars provided under the Surface Transportation System Funding Alternatives (STSFA) Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry Litt".

Jerry Litt, Chair  
Washington State Transportation Commission

Enclosure



September 17, 2019

Dear: State of Washington Congressional Delegation  
State of California Congressional Delegation  
State of Oregon Congressional Delegation

The Transportation Commissions of California, Oregon and Washington State prepared this letter to urge immediate action to address our national transportation system needs and set forth a path to achieving long-term funding sustainability. According to the Congressional Research Service, the current five-year transportation law which expires in September 2020 has required an additional \$70 billion in general fund revenues to keep the Highway Trust Fund solvent.

We recommend the following actions should be considered to ensure the long-term viability of the Highway Trust Fund:

1. **Increase the federal gasoline tax and index the tax to inflation thereafter.** The federal gasoline tax is currently 18.4 cents per gallon and has not been increased since 1993. Increasing the federal gasoline tax and indexing the new tax rate for inflation thereafter is necessary to raise revenues needed to maintain existing infrastructure in the near-term. Over the past 26 years, highway construction costs have more than doubled, and vehicle fuel efficiency has improved by approximately 20 percent\*. Together, this has eroded the value of the existing gasoline tax by over 60 percent. As a result, funding for the nation's transportation infrastructure has not kept pace with needs as roads and bridges continue to deteriorate.
2. **Begin an assessment of a national Road Usage Charge as a possible replacement to the federal gasoline tax.** We need to identify a long-term transportation funding solution as vehicles become more fuel efficient and alternative fuels become more viable. To prepare for a future reduction and eventual end to current fuel tax revenues, the nation must take steps to prepare for a transition to a new form of taxation to fund our transportation infrastructure. The complexities of such a transition cannot be underestimated. Careful and deliberate planning are key to avoiding unintended consequences. To this end, Congress should conduct a thorough assessment of a national Road Usage Charge system including assessing its feasibility, scalability, and

policy implications. Given the prior experience of California, Oregon and Washington on Road Usage Charge issues and testing, it is important to ensure our three states are included in a possible demonstration program.

Taking action to carry forward the two recommendations above achieves the following benefits:

- Raising the gasoline tax will provide an immediate infusion of critical capital investment into the nation's deteriorating infrastructure, and indexing the tax to inflation will help prevent further loss of purchasing power.
- Assessing a Road Usage Charge system that enables an eventual transition from the current gasoline tax structure will provide a more fair and transparent funding mechanism that ensures revenues are sustained, and drivers pay their "fair share" to maintain the nation's transportation infrastructure.

Along with many other states, California, Oregon and Washington State have recently increased state fuel taxes to address severe transportation funding shortfalls. We urge the federal government to acknowledge the important role of federal transportation funding for our Nation's infrastructure and address the Highway Trust Fund funding shortfalls.

Our three states have also conducted lengthy, statewide Road Usage Charge pilot projects that demonstrate the feasibility and capability of replacing the existing per gallon gasoline tax with a Road Usage Charge. Oregon provides an example for other states of how a Road Usage Charge program could be operated, implementing the nation's first program that is actively collecting a per-mile fee from participating drivers today.

While advancing gasoline tax increases and making significant changes in how we fund transportation are challenging and difficult, they are achievable if driven by a clear purpose and plan. We appreciate your consideration of our recommendations.

Sincerely,

  
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Jerry Litt, Chair  
Washington State Transportation Commission

  
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Fran Inman, Chair  
California Transportation Commission

  
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Bob Van Brocklin, Chair  
Oregon Transportation Commission