



April 1, 2009

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING FINAL POLL RESULTS

The Common Interest's poll of its members has now concluded. We had a total 219 citizens—Republicans, Democrats, and Independents from across Idaho—weigh in. They each spent an average of more than 1 ½ hours reviewing our transportation funding brief and answering our questionnaire.

SUMMARY OF OUR FINDINGS

Most of our members think that our roads, roads they all drive every day, are not in such dire condition that significant increases in taxes or fees are justified in these difficult economic times.

There is no tax or fee increase that received the two-thirds support we require to take a position in support. A few of the most modest proposed increases did receive narrower majority support. Specifically, fairly narrow majorities supported a 2 cent per gallon fuel tax increase and a 5% increase in vehicle registration fees if it's applied to all categories of vehicles.

On many of the more ambitious proposed increases, we had more than the two-thirds opposition required for us to take an official opposition position. Opposition was especially strong to significant increases in car and pickup registration fees, particularly if heavy truck registration fees are not raised by equal or greater percentages.

Our members recognize that Idaho's roads could use improvement, that their condition will deteriorate somewhat without additional funding, and that deferred maintenance is more expensive maintenance. However, our results also reflected a recognition that our roads are in as good a condition as they have been most of the last 15 years and are in about the same or better condition than in most other states.

The full results are described in detail below.

OVERALL AMOUNT OF NEW REVENUE THAT SHOULD BE RAISED

We first asked our members how much new revenue overall should be raised. For these, and most other questions in the survey, we asked the question once for what they would support this year and once for what they would support when the economy has recovered.

	This Year		When Economy has Recovered	
	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
\$10 million	63%	37%	65%	35%
\$10 - \$50 million	52%	48%	64%	36%
\$50 - \$100 million	40%	60%	54%	46%
\$100 - \$150 million	30%	70%	47%	53%
\$150 - \$200 million	14%	86%	29%	71%
\$200 - \$250 million	10%	90%	21%	79%
\$250 - \$300 million	Not asked		14%	86%

MECHANISMS FOR ADDRESSING GAPS BETWEEN INCREASES FOR THIS YEAR AND FOR WHEN ECONOMY HAS RECOVERED

We asked members what they thought about passing increases that would be phased in to fill gaps between how much new revenue they support this year and when the economy has recovered.

	Support	Oppose
2-year phase in	37%	63%
3-year phase in	43%	57%
5-year phase in	44%	56%
Additional increases passed only after economy has recovered	51%	49%

\$6 MILLION FOR ENHANCED ITD INFORMATION AND PLANNING SYSTEMS

Setting aside the question of how it would be paid for, we asked our members whether they thought that the \$6 million for new information and planning systems that was recommended by the OPE audit was a wise investment. We have an official position in support.

	Support	Oppose
\$6 million for enhanced ITD information & planning systems	76%	24%

FUEL TAX INCREASES

Many states (and the federal government) address the need for heavy trucks to pay more because they cause more wear and tear on the highways by taxing diesel at a higher rate than gas. Consequently, we asked about increases on gas and diesel separately.

		All this Year		When Economy Has Recovered	
		Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
Gas	2 cents/gallon	56%	44%	60%	40%
	5 cents/gallon	42%	58%	52%	48%
	7 cents/gallon	27%	73%	41%	59%
	10 cents/gallon	22%	78%	40%	60%
	12 cents/gallon	13%	87%	23%	77%
	15 cents/gallon	15%	85%	20%	80%
Diesel	2 cents/gallon	63%	37%	58%	42%
	5 cents/gallon	52%	48%	54%	46%
	7 cents/gallon	36%	64%	43%	57%
	10 cents/gallon	34%	66%	44%	56%
	12 cents/gallon	20%	80%	28%	72%
	15 cents/gallon	20%	80%	28%	72%

We also asked about support for indexing fuel taxes.

	Support	Oppose
Indexing to Consumer Price Index (broad inflation measure)	51%	49%
Indexing to the Producer Price Index for Highway & Street Construction	56%	44%

VEHICLE REGISTRATION FEE INCREASES

In contrast to the fuels tax increases that have been proposed, our membership is decidedly opposed to all the vehicle registration fee increase bills that have received a hearing thus far. **The level of opposition exceeds our two-thirds threshold so we are officially opposed to all three bills.** Part of the higher opposition is due to the fact that registration fees are a less pure user fee than fuel taxes and that, like property taxes, payment comes in bigger chunks.

The far more significant factor in explaining the greater opposition to these registration fee bills, however, is that each raises car and pickup registration fees substantially while raising heavy truck registration fees little or not at all. Because the best available evidence suggests that heavy trucks are, if anything, already underpaying relative to the wear and tear they impose on our roads, there was substantial consensus among our members that it is misguided and unfair to ask car and pickup owners to subsidize heavy truck owners. Having reviewed our brief on the issue, our members also found that the arguments that have been offered to justify why so much less is being asked of heavy truck owners lack factual support.

Here are the results for each of the three vehicle registration fee bills that have had a hearing.

	Support	Oppose
HB 98 (The Gov's original bill): Raise reg fees on cars and pickups by 133%, on light trucks by 120%, and on heavy trucks by 5% over five years	21%	79%
HB 148: Raise reg fees on cars and pickups by 73% this year and 0% on light and heavy trucks	21%	79%
HB 149: Would raise reg fees on cars and pickups by 56% this year and 0% on light and heavy trucks	31%	69%

Our members also overwhelmingly support requirements for making any registration fee increases fair and equitable.

	Support	Oppose
Require equal or greater percentage increase on heavy trucks if car and pickup fees are raised this year	78%	22%
Require equal or greater percentage increase in heavy trucks if car and pickup fees are raised before ITD's cost allocation study is complete	75%	25%
New statutory requirement that Idaho, like Oregon, do a cost allocation study every 5-7 years and then adjust taxes and fees accordingly	80%	20%

If the increases across categories of vehicle are equitable and modest, our members' opposition to registration fees decline. For the most modest increases, there is narrow majority support but not the two-thirds support required for an organizational position in support.

		This Year		When Economy has Recovered	
		Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
Cars & Pickups	5%	57%	43%	57%	43%
	10%	43%	57%	50%	50%
	25%	34%	66%	41%	59%
	50%	22%	78%	31%	69%
	75%	9%	91%	13%	87%
	100%	Not asked		11%	89%
	125%	Not asked		7%	93%
	150%	Not asked		6%	94%
Light Trucks (8,000 – 60,000 lbs)	5%	53%	47%	57%	43%
	10%	46%	54%	53%	47%
	25%	34%	66%	44%	56%
	50%	27%	73%	35%	65%
	75%	11%	89%	16%	84%
	100%	Not asked		14%	86%
	125%	Not asked		9%	91%
	150%	Not asked		11%	89%
Heavy Trucks (Over 60,000 lbs)	5%	63%	37%	59%	41%
	10%	54%	46%	60%	40%
	25%	38%	62%	50%	50%
	50%	29%	71%	41%	59%
	75%	19%	81%	27%	73%
	100%	Not asked		22%	78%
	125%	Not asked		14%	86%
	150%	Not asked		14%	86%

We also asked about a number of other adjustments that could be made to the way registration fees are assessed.

		Support	Oppose
Cars & Pickups	Flat fee regardless of age of vehicle	36%	64%
	Higher fee the greater the weight	77%	23%
Light Trucks	Solely on weight, eliminate distinction btwn commercial & non-commercial/farm trucks	56%	44%
Heavy Trucks	Convert to a weight/distance tax	73%	27%
	Additional tiers for trucks that travel more than 50,000 miles	73%	27%

GARVEE

A narrow majority of our members opposed the \$125 million in new GARVEE bonding authority requested by the Governor. A narrow majority supported \$75 million in new authority. Given these results, the \$82 million supported by JFAC would likely come out pretty close to 50/50.

	Support	Oppose
\$125 million in new authority	44%	56%
\$75 million in new authority	53%	47%

LOCAL OPTION TAXES

We asked about the three changes to local option vehicle registration fees that have been proposed this session. We are neutral on each, but show clear majority support for HB 155 as amended.

	Support	Oppose
HB 134: Remove limit on the amount of local option car and pickup registration fees that a county can assess with simple majority voter approval	46%	54%
HB 155 (original): Provide cities and highway districts with local option car and registration fee authority for specific projects with simple majority voter approval	52%	48%
HB 155 (as amended): Provide cities and highway districts with local option car and registration fee authority for specific projects with two-thirds voter approval	58%	42%

With respect to local option sales tax authority, our members were clearly supportive in principle.

	Support	Oppose
Local option sales tax authority in principle	75%	25%

Like the Legislature, our members were more divided on the specific parameters of that authority.

The two points on which there was greater than two-thirds consensus were:

- 1. Opposition to a requirement for a constitutional amendment to grant such authority**
- 2. Opposition to extending the authority to counties only**

While not reaching our two-thirds threshold, our results indicated the local option package that receives the most support:

1. Put before voters on primary or general election dates in even or odd years
2. Could be assessed by cities, counties, or regional transportation authorities
3. Approved by simple majority of voters (more support than other thresholds, but not majority support)
4. If approved, could be used for public transit among other uses

Below are the detailed results.

		Support	Oppose
Election Dates	Only on primary or general election dates in even or odd years	61%	39%
	Only on primary or general election dates in even years	38%	62%
	Only on general election dates in even years	50%	50%
Units of Local Govt Authorized to Use	Counties only	27%	73%
	Cities and counties only	44%	56%
	Cities, counties, and regional transportation authorities	56%	44%
Voter Approval Thresholds	50% plus 1	46%	54%
	60%	34%	66%
	Two-thirds	38%	62%
Voter Thresholds for Regional Local Option Tax	For regional planning authorities if 60% voter approval overall, 50% plus 1 voter approval in each county	37%	63%
	For regional planning authorities if two-thirds voter approval overall, and 60% voter approval in each county	32%	68%
Require a constitutional amendment		14%	86%
Option to use for public transit, among other uses		77%	23%

Our full transportation brief is available on our website: www.TheCommonInterest.org

Contact Keith Allred with any questions.

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