

California's gas tax increase is ripe for repeal

By Andrea Seastrand

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Every so often, California voters show Sacramento that its power over our lives isn't completely unchecked. We are on the verge of one of those moments.

Next November, California voters will likely have a chance to repeal the gas and car tax increases pushed through the state Legislature on a near party-line vote early this year. The increases are projected to generate \$52 billion over 10 years.

A [recent USC/LA Times poll](#) showed 54 percent of voters support the repeal of this permanent tax, and for good reason.

Reform California, the organization organizing one of the repeal initiatives, (download a repeal petition at www.reformcalifornia.org) calculated the tax increases will cost the typical family [\\$779 per year](#) once increased car registration taxes, fuel taxes and price increases on everyday goods caused by higher fuel prices are all accounted for. Many families stretched thin and living in communities like ours that rely on their cars cannot afford this.

Looking ahead, there is strong reason to believe taxpayers will strike down this flawed transportation tax so corrupt it required a billion dollars in ["side deals"](#) to win over reluctant lawmakers with district specific projects.

To add insult to injury, the plan will spend virtually nothing on expanding lanes and reducing traffic.

There is no disputing our state's roads are in bad shape, but a lack of funding is not the root of the problem. Californians understand that every time they fill up at the gas station.

Like so many other public services, California's propensity for massive bureaucracies and sweetheart deals for unions means projects cost far above what they should, and our transportation dollars fail to be used efficiently. Even before this current tax hike, California drivers were already paying one of the highest gas tax rates in the nation. Drivers are right to wonder where all their money is going.

In the Reason Foundation's [Annual Highway Report](#), California's high costs were on display as we ranked 47th and 43rd in the nation for administrative costs and maintenance costs per mile, respectively. Despite spending so much for per mile, the same report ranks our urban highway conditions as 48th worst and for rural highways we are 45th.

The truth is that California can fix its roads without creating new taxes that hurt the working- and middle-class the hardest. Since 2011, the state general fund has increased by over \$35 billion per year, yet none of that new revenue has been invested into fixing bridges, highways and roads. It's hard to cry poor and ask taxpayers to chip in more tax dollars when the state has been bringing in some much new money.

While San Luis Obispo County's state Sen. Bill Monning supported the gas and car tax increase, our Assemblyman Jordan Cunningham stood up for his community and opposed it. Instead, he was working on a far better alternative.

Cunningham's Republican colleagues in the state Assembly [drafted a bill](#) that would have provided \$7.8 billion for fixing and expanding our roads and highways without raising taxes. To do this, it employed a novel concept of applying transportation taxes to their intended purpose: paying for transportation projects.

State leaders have a long history of siphoning money away to pay for other priorities which is part of the reason our roads have fallen into such disrepair. The Republican plan would have put an end to raiding road funds and also included serious reforms to streamline Caltrans operations and reduce costs on future projects.

Democrats refused to even give their bill a hearing. They also denied including any of the common-sense reforms that were proposed. Instead, they preferred a partisan bill that raises taxes on middle-class, working families and seniors living on fixed incomes by hundreds of dollars per year, yet does nothing to spend money more wisely or reduce traffic. Fortunately in California, voters have the final say and can challenge any law passed by the Legislature with an initiative.

California is flush with tax revenue and government is about setting priorities. Transportation and infrastructure are key functions of government, yet state leaders have made a conscience decision to underfund it and spend the money elsewhere. Now they want you to pay for their mistakes. Next November, I strongly believe voters will repeal the car and gas tax increase and remind Sacramento Democrats that they deserve a better transportation plan. They would be wise to work with their Republican counterparts on a real solution after the voters speak.

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