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Taxpayers Association calls for a 25¢ per gallon boost in Utah

By [Josh Loftin](#)

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A usually virulent anti-tax lobbying group is advocating a significant increase in Utah's gas tax.

The Utah Taxpayers Association, which is primarily funded by business and manufacturing companies, detailed a proposed 25-cent-per-gallon bump in the gas tax during its annual conference Friday at the Little America Hotel in Salt Lake City. That would more than double Utah's current 24.5 cent per gallon rate and, the association says, potentially generate more than \$350 million.

Despite the rare call for a tax increase of any sort, the association is not advocating an increase in the overall tax burden. Instead, the group is urging an equal drop in the state income tax. That could be accomplished either with expanded credits or an overall rate reduction.

The primary reason to raise the gas tax is so that the transportation infrastructure can be adequately developed using money that is generated through the use of that system, the association argues. Currently, the state is being forced to shift money from other pots of money, especially the overall sales tax, to pay for road and transit construction.

The biggest problem with using the overall sales tax to pay for roads is that people do not understand the true costs of their driving, said Mike German, the association's vice president.

"It is basic economics," he said. "When something is underpriced, it is overused."

Another proposal promoted during the conference was "congestion pricing," which would charge people more for using roads and transit during peak travel times. Ideally, that would raise more money for transportation but also reduce congestion because it would encourage people to look at alternatives to commuting alone during rush hours, with alternatives ranging from car pools to telecommuting.

David Horner, chief counsel for the U.S. Department of Transportation, said various methods to implement congestion pricing have already been put into use in places such as St. Paul-Minneapolis and California, where drivers are charged

a per-mile fee for using specific lanes. It is also used in some major cities, such as London, where drivers are charged to enter the busiest areas.

He admitted that instituting a congestion pricing system can be politically difficult, and that almost always the public is initially opposed to the plans.

"But after the policies are implemented," he said, "opinions swing radically and people come to really like it."

The conference was a daylong event attended by a majority of Utah's legislators, including many of the leaders.

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