

Mileage Meters? Texans Could Get Taxed By the Mile

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A tax on the miles you drive could be a way to pay for Texas roads in the future.

Texas transportation planners are studying the idea of a "mileage meter" to help raise money.

Cars built after 1999 have a computer port that can access many types of data about the vehicle.

Progressive Insurance already offers a device that connects to that port for pay as you go rates.

"Mileage does have a lot to do with it," said Mike Leonard, a Progressive insurance agent in Carrollton. "The less the miles, the less exposure Progressive has. So therefore, they're willing to give you a discount on your rates."

The Texas Department of Transportation is investigating whether such a device might also be used to tax drivers for how much they use roads.

"I'm not ready to embrace that technology, but it is a technology we may have to look at," said State Sen. John Carona, of Dallas, a Republican.

Carona said Texas has an estimated \$100 billion worth of unfunded transportation needs.

"The money simply does not exist, and if people are being honest with constituents, they come out and just tell them that," he said. "We don't have the money in Austin, and there isn't the ability locally to raise this money to be able to solve these problems."

Carona said a 20-cent-per-gallon gasoline tax approved 19 years ago no longer covers Texas transportation requirements. The state senator said he believes Texas has resorted to too many toll roads, which he claims cost citizens more in the long run.

"It's not a good public policy," he said. "I would argue continued advancement toward more toll roads is bad for Texas."

Another pay-as-you-go plan might require drivers to electronically record their mileage at the gas pump, which is already required by for some private company cars.

Carona said raising the gas tax by 10 cents per gallon could pay for all the unfunded transportation needs, but Carona has found that option has found that option extremely unpopular among state lawmakers.

One way or another, all of the options require citizens to pay more to solve Texas transportation needs.

“We are substantially behind the times in dealing with this,” Carona said. “We’re going to face substantially greater congestion and air quality issues.”

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