

# PILOT STUDY EXPLORES ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION FUNDING OPTIONS

Nearly stagnant gasoline taxes across the U.S. have led to growing shortfalls in budgets for maintaining and enhancing transportation systems. An extensive study into alternative funding sources will inform future policies.



# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT LEADS TO MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK

Through intentional recruitment, public education and strategic communications, pilot participants are investing their time and providing responsive insight.

## PROJECT STATS

### CLIENT

The Eastern Transportation Coalition

### LOCATION

Eastern Seaboard

# 1.5K+

PILOT PARTICIPANTS

The transportation infrastructure utilized each day to get to grocery stores, hospitals or jobs requires funding for maintenance and improvements. Today, the majority of the funding used to maintain roads and bridges comes from taxes paid on each gallon of fuel. Gas taxes in most states have not increased at a pace that meets the needs of transportation systems, leading to a growing gap in funding. Advancements in fuel efficiency have also decreased the amount motorists pay to utilize transportation systems.

To address this issue, the federal government is funding pilot studies around the U.S. to explore alternative transportation funding sources. Since 2018, The Eastern Transportation Coalition — a partnership of 17 states along the Eastern Seaboard and the District of Columbia — has been exploring mileage-based user fees (MBUFs) as an alternative to gas taxes. This work is bringing an Eastern Seaboard perspective to the national conversation around alternative funding options for transportation systems.

The MBUF concept is simple: Motorists pay for miles traveled. Until a few years ago, MBUFs had been studied primarily in Western

states. The Eastern Seaboard brings several interesting characteristics to the discussion, such as significant cross-state travel, numerous toll facilities and several major truck corridors. These factors make it a natural and important testing ground for the potential challenges and benefits of implementing a national MBUF system.

As policymakers consider sustainable funding alternatives, it is essential to see that these decisions are informed by those who will be impacted. The coalition's study seeks to understand how an MBUF could be implemented and learn how public education and engagement could facilitate a transition to future policy changes. Transportation planning and policies can be obscure. It's important to make these policies more tangible for pilot participants by telling the larger story of the proposed approach, how it compares to current policies, how it could work and what it means for them.

Our team was selected to lead the communications and outreach for the various pilot studies, which range in size, location and demographics, as well as focus area. We are dedicated to the recruitment, outreach and communications efforts.





In partnership with the coalition, our team works closely with pilot participants to simplify the process and support their investment in the study. From the moment a participant learns about the pilot study, our team focuses on streamlining processes, such as signing up for the study, using the mileage-tracking device attached to the vehicle, reviewing a simulated statement and asking questions. This approach leads to more invested participants and more meaningful feedback.

The first phase of this study began in 2018 and engaged fewer than 100 individuals from Delaware and Pennsylvania who drive passenger vehicles and work in the transportation sector. The objective of this phase was to gain a better understanding of how an MBUF might work on the East Coast. It looked at how fees would be captured and

what synergies might exist between an MBUF and tolling. It also included an in-depth analysis of several MBUF-related issues, including privacy, equity and administrative costs.

In 2019, the second phase engaged nearly 1,000 members of the public from Delaware and Pennsylvania who drive passenger vehicles. This phase brought the insights and concerns of the public into the national discussion on how to establish a sustainable and equitable transportation funding approach. Our team conducted surveys, led focus groups and gathered data about participant perceptions of an MBUF.

These early phases demonstrated a need for baseline education around transportation system funding. Many pilot participants were unaware of the amount they paid in a gas tax and how it related to transportation

maintenance. When participants understood an MBUF and how it relates to what they pay now, they were often quite responsive.

Our team is currently supporting the study's third phase, which expands the passenger vehicle pilot into additional states along the East Coast. The focus of this phase is on how an MBUF system could affect different communities. It will also further test the interoperability of MBUFs with tolling. This phase also includes the launch of the first nationwide truck pilot, increasing the understanding of how an MBUF system could affect the trucking industry.

Throughout each of these phases, our team is intentionally educating and engaging with pilot participants, which is resulting in valuable data that will inform future transportation policy and planning.



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