

# Highway Trust Fund

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AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS INITIATIVE

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# Executive Summary



Messages on the Highway Trust Fund received a very high level of support, with nearly 8 in 10 Americans agreeing with each. Furthermore, exposure to the messages increased the proportion who think Congress should scale back the Fund, with a majority supporting returning funding and authority to the states in the post test.

## Initial Views on the Highway Trust Fund

- Slightly more believe the federal government should play a large role in transportation policy (43%) than believe it should play a minimal role (39%).
  - This attitude is especially prevalent in the Northeast, where more than half (53%) believe the federal government should play a large role, compared to only one-third in the Midwest (33%).
- Similarly, more than half (54%) identified with a statement that the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) is crucial to keeping America moving and Congress has a responsibility to keep it funded over a statement that the HTF is broken and outdated, and Congress should return funding and decision-making to local levels.

## Recommendation to Congress

- However, confronted with the funding dilemma Congress faces, more thought Congress should hand over funding and decision-making authority to the states (45%) than fully fund the HTF by raising gas taxes or pulling from the general fund (30%).

## Top Messages

- All messages received strong support with 3 in 4 Americans or more agreeing with each.
- Messages on cronyism received the most support.

## Post-Test Results

- After hearing the messages, the majority of Americans said Congress should scale back the Highway Trust Fund and give authority to the states.
- This position received a 14% increase due to the messages heard, with half coming from those who were unsure and half from those who originally thought it should be fully funded.

Source: Online survey using a national representative sample of 1,024 Americans conducted June 3, 2015 with a margin of error of ±3.1%.

## Messaging Tips

Keep terms forward-looking – “hand over” won more support than “hand back”.

Be sensitive to cost – messages on raising the federal tax lower support for full funding and those implying state tax increases show a drop off in agreement.

Utilize cronyism messages – the concern that those far away in Washington are benefitting at the expense of taxpayers resonated.

Focus on day-to-day effects – top messages referenced roads, bridges, and traffic.



# Federal Role in Transportation

## Slightly More Believe the Federal Government Should Play a Large Role

A Large Proportion, Nearly 1 in 5, Are Unsure

**39%**

**A minimal role** – It should only be involved in decisions and funding for projects that span state lines – all other decisions and funding should occur on the state and local levels.



**43%**

**A larger role** – It should be involved in large-scale funding and decisions, from public transportation in cities to bridges and walkways to major and interstate highways.

18%

Not sure

What role would you say the federal government should play in transportation policy?



# Highway Trust Fund Funding

## Americans Think the Federal Government Should Scale Back the HTF By 3 to 2

**45%**

It should scale back the Highway Trust Fund and (hand over / hand back) transportation funding and decision-making authority to the states

**+11%** "hand over" language



**30%**

It should fully fund the Highway Trust Fund, increasing gas and other transportation-related taxes or pulling from the general fund if necessary

25%  
Not sure

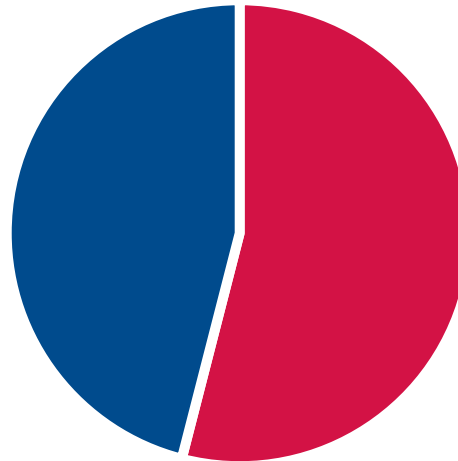
What action do you think Congress should take regarding the Highway Trust fund?

# Highway Trust Fund Messages



## A Slim Majority Think Congress Has a Responsibility to Keep the HTF Funded

**46%** think the Highway Trust Fund is a broken and outdated system that no longer does what it was created to do. The best people to make decisions about transportation are the local and state representatives that can see firsthand the daily needs of their taxpayers. Congress should return funding and decision-making to local levels, where it can be handled by those most responsive to our needs.



**54%** think the Highway Trust Fund is crucial to keeping America moving. States depend on the funding it supplies to keep their transportation systems running and would face severe hardship without it. The current system suits everyone, and Congress has a responsibility to keep it funded.

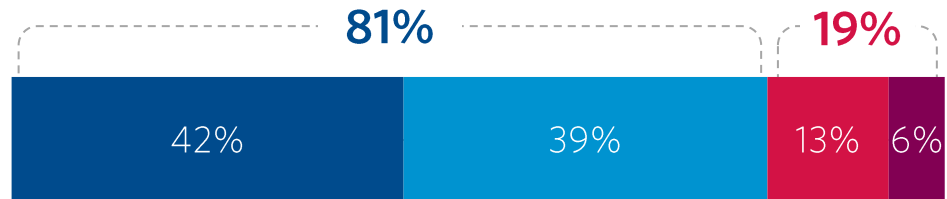
Below are two opinions about the Highway Trust Fund. Please read each opinion and indicate which one comes closest to your own. Is your opinion...?



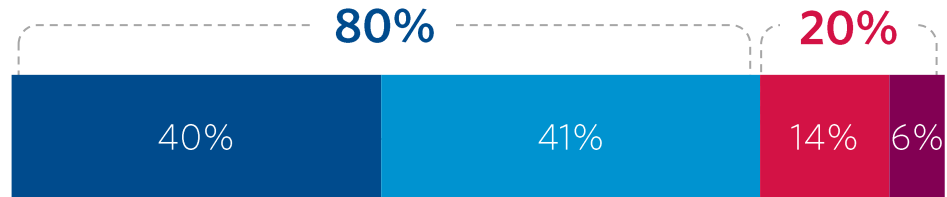
# Top Messages

## High Agreement for Messages

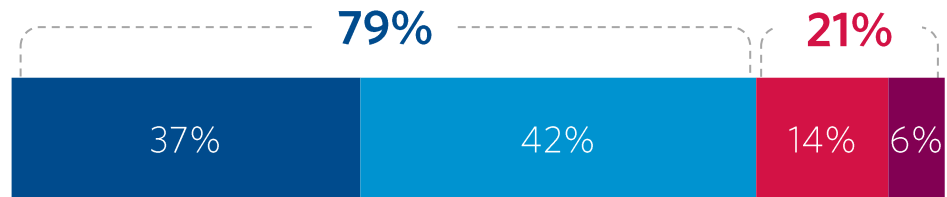
Expecting politicians in Washington to impartially decide which roads and bridges to fund in the states is absurd. It's time to end the practice of sending hard-earned taxpayer dollars to Washington, only to be squabbled over by lobbyists and spent on pet projects while our roads and bridges crumble. State leaders are best situated to know the transportation needs of their citizens.



When bureaucrats in Washington are in charge of our local roads and bridges, it makes it hard for the best work to be done by the right people. The federal government tacks on extra rules and regulations that only insiders can navigate when bidding for jobs. We want the companies doing the best work at the best rate working on our transportation systems, not the ones most experienced at navigating federal red tape.



It's time to put states back in the driver's seat. Funding and decision-making should be handled by the people who drive on the streets, sit in the traffic, and cross the bridges affected by transportation spending, not bureaucrats in Washington.



■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

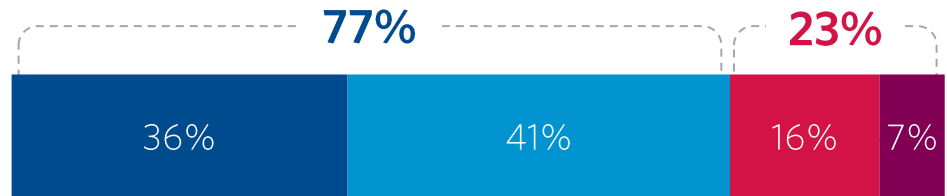
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

# Message Testing

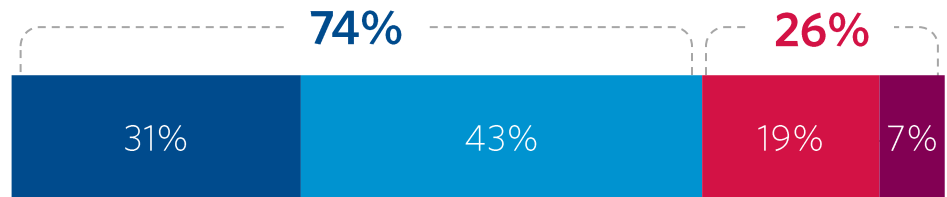


## High Agreement for Messages

Congress should end the top-down approach that breeds inefficiency and special interest handouts at the expense of taxpayers' interests. The states and localities that are more in touch with the needs of their citizens should be empowered to make their own decisions on transportation. Allowing them to tax and spend on infrastructure as they see fit is the fair approach that benefits everyone.



States don't need a middle man brokering their transportation projects. They should collect gas taxes and distribute the funds to the projects they care most about, without the federal government getting in the way.



■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

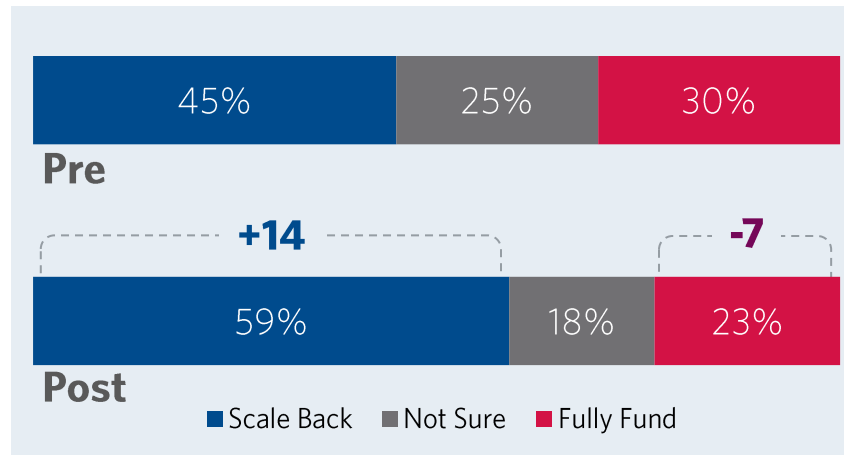
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

# Post-Test Results



## Strong Conversion By Messages

After messages, majority think Congress should scale back the Highway Trust Fund



(Now having read more, please take a minute to reconsider the Highway Trust Fund.) What action do you think Congress should take regarding the Highway Trust fund?