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## Commentary: Why the gas tax is good for Illinois businesses

By Todd Maisch | Chicago Tribune



The state's 19-cent-per-gallon motor fuel tax, last raised in 1990, will double to 38 cents per gallon on Monday, July 1. (Antonio Perez / Chicago Tribune)

We hear a lot about the things Illinois could do differently. This year, however, our legislators successfully passed real policy initiatives to promote business growth in our state.

For the first time in 29 years, a sustainable, bipartisan transportation funding package was approved by the legislature and [signed by the governor](#). It will require each of us to pay a little more, on average about \$12 a month, in increased gas taxes and registration costs, but it will improve safety and reduce the financial toll of poor infrastructure.

The nonprofit research group TRIP [estimates](#) that the average Illinois driver pays about \$600 a year in increased vehicle maintenance costs, like worn tires and suspension parts, and over \$1,500 in congestion and safety costs due to accidents. We expect those costs to decrease as we begin to see improved infrastructure throughout the state.

We understand taxpayers' distrust of the gas tax increase. That's why the Illinois Chamber of Commerce drafted and championed a constitutional amendment that requires all transportation funds to be used solely for transportation, instead of being diverted to other purposes. This ["lockbox amendment"](#) was overwhelmingly approved by voters in 2016.

This year, we went a step further and introduced a measure to move all funds from the state sales tax on gas from the general revenue fund to transportation funding. A version of this proposal was incorporated in the final capital package. Besides applying all state taxes motorists pay at the pump to transportation, the package also requires annual audits to

ensure the money is being spent as promised. If funds are found to be misused, the chamber will be the first to sound the alarm and demand enforcement of our constitution. We strongly believe both measures protect taxpayers by enhancing the transparency of our government.

This final package contains historic pro-business reforms including the Blue Collar Jobs Act, reinstatement of the Manufacturer's Purchase Credit and tabling of a bill that would have added devastating regulations to certain manufacturers in Illinois.

Additionally, it eliminates the antiquated Illinois franchise tax — a tax that business groups have been fighting to repeal for decades — and creates a data center tax incentive to make Illinois more attractive to technology companies. We believe the data center initiative alone is the biggest business incentive to pass in our state in 20 years.

The package's supporters didn't just vote for a gas tax. They voted to fix our roads and transit, enhance our manufacturing sector, protect our truckers and move agricultural goods more efficiently. They voted to help attract tech companies to the Land of Lincoln, remove outdated taxes on business and, most importantly, bring jobs and investment to our state.

In October 1919, the newly ratified Illinois Chamber of Commerce published its first article called "The Why of the Illinois Chamber of Commerce." Its president wrote that the chamber, "will encourage in every way possible the advancement of the commercial, industrial, manufacturing, agricultural and civic interests of the state and will advocate legislation thoroughly considerate of business interests and general welfare of the state and nation."

We know this legislation isn't perfect. But, we believe that it will encourage the advancement of the commercial, industrial, manufacturing, agricultural and civic interests of the people of Illinois. We don't take tax increases lightly, but after thorough consideration we believe this infrastructure package is in the best interest of our business community, our state and our national transportation network.

As you head to the pump this summer, we hope you remember your taxes are going to support stronger infrastructure in your community and a stronger Illinois.

*Todd Maisch is president and CEO of the Illinois Chamber of Commerce.*