

Industry group rallies for higher Kentucky gas tax

[Marcus Green](#) | Mar 10, 2020



FRANKFORT, Ky. (WDRB) – A group of business, industry and government leaders flooded the state Capitol on Tuesday, urging Kentucky lawmakers to increase transportation revenue by raising the state’s gas tax.

The Kentucky Infrastructure Coalition is pushing for [House Bill 580](#), which proposes a 9-cent-per-gallon jump in the fuel tax and higher fees on license plates and vehicle registrations. The measure would pump an estimated \$483 million a year into the state’s road fund.

“This is not a partisan issue. This is a Commonwealth of Kentucky issue,” said Nick Rowe, chairman of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce and president of Kentucky American Water. “There really is a need and a broad support for funding our transportation system across both sides of the aisle.”

The measure is primarily sponsored by Rep. Sal Santoro, a Republican from northern Kentucky, but Democrats also are among the sponsors.

Santoro did not speak at the rally. But Sen. Ernie Harris, chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, said the bill is the most important piece of legislation in this year’s session.

“Make me king for a day and we’ll get this passed immediately,” said Harris, a Republican from Prospect.

Similar bills failed to pass in 2018 and 2019.

HB 580 was introduced last week and assigned to the House Appropriations and Revenue Committee, where it hasn’t yet

received a hearing. After today there are 16 days of the legislative session left.

The bill is backed by dozens of powerful business and government groups, including UPS, AAA, Kentucky Farm Bureau, as well as trade associations for highway-related industries such as crushed stone and asphalt.

A handful of opponents watched the rally, some with signs that read, “STOP 580” and “INCREASING TAXES IS NOT THE ANSWER TO EVERY PROBLEM.” Another sign called gas taxes regressive taxes that disproportionately hurt middle-class workers.

One man, who identified himself as Howard Roark of Lexington, said it's "yet another tax. The problem is it's never enough."

He said he’d prefer “better utilization of the money we’re already spending.”

The rally came hours after supporters of the bill released a report that claimed 29 percent of Kentucky’s major roads and highways are in poor or mediocre condition “due to inadequate state and local funding.”

The report by TRIP, a national transportation research agency, argued that insufficient funding will make it difficult to improve and maintain the state’s transportation network. The wide-ranging analysis evaluated traffic congestion, road safety and the condition of Kentucky’s bridges.

It provides a point-in-time snapshot but doesn’t show changes over time, including how the condition of Louisville’s roads and bridges overall compares with the period before the completion of the \$2.3 billion Ohio River Bridges Project.

Rebecca Wood, chief operating officer and vice president of investor development for the Greater Louisville Inc. chamber of commerce, said infrastructure investment is a major push from the region’s business community. The chamber is part of the Kentucky Infrastructure Coalition.

“We need policy makers to understand the significant need for increased support of roads and bridges – not only for moving commerce and improving bottom lines, but as an important tool for business and job attraction.

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