



Massachusetts legislators mull gas tax indexing



Massachusetts House Speaker Robert DeLeo smiles prior to a tour at Greentown Labs in Somerville, Mass., Friday, Feb. 22, 2019. DeLeo has unveiled a plan to invest \$1 billion over the next 10 years aimed at helping local cities and towns adopt new technologies designed to cut greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen infrastructure projects and reduce municipal costs. (AP Photo/Charles Krupa)

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PUBLISHED: March 12, 2019 at 10:36 pm | UPDATED: March 13, 2019 at 8:24 am

Legislators are eyeing the hotly debated issue of gas tax indexing, which made its way to the surface during a Chamber of Commerce breakfast Tuesday.

Gas tax indexing, previously considered as a way to generate funding for transportation, would change the flat 24 cent tax on gasoline and instead tie the rate to inflation.

The tax would be dependent on the Consumer Price Index and would increase by a few pennies each year. Voters favored a ballot initiative to repeal indexing in 2014, but they could soon be voting again.

“Some members have already approached me on it, they feel that they could support,” House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo said. “It’s never an easy issue to take up, but again, I think we’re at a stage where if we’re going to get serious about addressing this issue then everything and anything has to be on the table.”

Former state Rep. Geoff Diehl, who led the 2014 repeal of gas tax indexing, said progressive house members are “ignoring the will of the people.”

“It’s not surprising that certain members would approach the speaker indicating a desire to sock it to the taxpayers again,” Diehl said.

He said the gas tax is a “tough sell” to voters, posing a risky move for legislators. “They are making a major mistake come election time if they get behind this.”

Holly Robichaud, former strategist with Tank the Automatic Gas Tax coalition, echoed Diehl, saying, “The people spoke very loudly four years ago and they said no and this is another prime example of the State House not listening to the people of Massachusetts.”

But Stacy Thompson, executive director of Livable Streets Alliance, said voters may change their tune in the name of solving transportation issues.

“The gas tax means we will have more resources in the state because everyone is suffering right now,” Thompson said. “Taxpayers are going to be much more interested in paying into solutions that will meaningfully impact this problem.”

Thompson also pointed to the need for other “creative and comprehensive solutions” in addition to gas tax indexing.

Chris Dempsey of Transportation 4 Massachusetts commended DeLeo for his willingness to consider all solutions to the state's transportation problems.

"This is a system that is just not working for people and he's taking that problem seriously," said Dempsey. "We need to have an honest conversation about how to fix that and it's totally appropriate for gas tax indexing to be a part of that conversation."