

Opinion

Editorial: Americans staying off gas

While it's great that gasoline usage will drop significantly over time, lawmakers must consider how to make up lost tax revenue.

By The Denver Post

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So it's true: Americans really are buying less gasoline.

Advances in fuel economy and increases in hybrid and electric automobiles mean that even with more cars on the road, by 2030 our gasoline purchases will drop by 20 percent, experts say.

It is astonishing to consider that even with millions more cars on the road, gasoline purchases in 2030 will look more like levels seen in the 1960s.

While that's tremendous news in terms of lowering greenhouse gases and lessening our dependence on foreign oil, it will mean the weakened gas taxes that keep up our nation's transportation infrastructure will be too anemic to do the job.

When Congress reconvenes, it must begin the debate on how to pay for roads and transit, since providing adequate transportation ought to be one of government's central responsibilities.

Yes, it is possible that if the economy improves wildly, or electric cars fail to perform, or gas prices plummet, the trend won't bear out as predicted. But we think the trend is certain enough that lawmakers ought to plan for it. The national tax on gasoline has been stuck for years at 18.4 cents a gallon.

Lawmakers must decide whether raising the tax is prudent, or if finding another way to support infrastructure — say, through using technology to charge for miles traveled — or a combination is the right fix.

Meanwhile, we can revel in the fact that better cars by 2020 will mean a reduction in greenhouse gases of 400 billion pounds — the equivalent of putting 32 million cars out of commission.

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