WHICH WAY TO TURN: A QUIET REVOLUTION IN TRANSPORTATION FINANCE

by

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Abstract:
For 90 years the principal means of financing transportation facilities in America has been through user fees, mostly motor fuel taxes and tolls. Motor fuel tax revenues have been plummeting in relation to costs for a variety of reasons that will be presented. There is no longer political will to increase motor fuel taxes. Rising costs and decreasing revenues have combined to bankrupt the transportation program, especially at the state level. A few states, led by Oregon, are looking at alternative user fees, mostly based on automated collection of tolls or per mile driving charges. At the same time, local governments all over the country – led by the example of California - have been enacting local option transportation taxes and gradually shifting the locus of transportation decision making to local governments. Looking to the future, should we be renewing our system of user fees or turning to general taxes? Professor Wachs will argue that in the longer term a variety of electronic user fees holds more promise than general taxes, but the transition to them will take decades and should be carefully planned starting now.

Bio
Martin Wachs is Professor of City and Regional Planning and Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of California, Berkeley, and was Director of the University’s Institute of Transportation Studies from 1998 through June 2005. The Institute of Transportation Studies at Berkeley is one of the largest academic transportation research centers in the United States.
Professor Wachs holds a Bachelors Degree in Civil Engineering from the City University of New York, and MS and Ph.D. degrees in Transportation Planning from the Civil Engineering Department at Northwestern University. He was an Assistant Professor at Northwestern University and the University of Illinois at Chicago. From 1971 through 1996, he was Professor of Urban Planning and Director of the Institute of Transportation Studies at UCLA, where he served three terms as Head of the Urban Planning Program. He has been a visiting professor at Oxford University, Rutgers University, The University of Iowa, and The Technion.