



Government Looks to Mandate Black Boxes for Vehicles

Federal and state governments are working on a plan that would mandate all vehicles feature a black box tracking device capable of reporting real-time vehicle location, speed, and mileage directly to federal authorities. It is being promoted as a means to fund road maintenance and maintain "highway safety," though the proposal is clearly a means for various levels of government to extract yet more tax dollars from hard-working Americans, and keep track of citizens.



The *Los Angeles Times* [reports](#), "The devices, which track every mile a motorist drives and transmit that information to bureaucrats, are at the center of a controversial attempt in Washington and state planning offices to overhaul the outdated system for funding America's major roads."

The push behind the black box technology comes as the Highway Trust Fund, paid for by taxes at the gas pump, is out of money. Owing to inflation and the fact that Americans are not buying as much gas as they used to, because of a sluggish economy and increased vehicle fuel efficiency, the fund has ultimately gone broke. The federal tax, 18.4 cents per gallon, has not been raised in years as lawmakers are hesitant to do so while gas prices remain so high.

"The gas tax is just not sustainable," said Lee Munnich, a transportation policy expert at the University of Minnesota. His state recently put tracking devices on 500 cars to test out a pay-by-mile system. "This works out as the most logical alternative over the long term," he said.

According to the *LA Times*, libertarians and environmental groups are in favor of the boxes, while Tea Party conservatives and the American Civil Liberties Union are opposed to the proposal, asserting that the black box technology poses serious threats to privacy.

Though members of Congress have not agreed on the black box mandate, state governments are already forging ahead and exploring how they can move to a system wherein drivers pay per mile of road. "[Several state governments are] exploring how, over the next decade, they can move to a system in which drivers pay per mile of road they roll over. Thousands of motorists have already taken the black boxes, some of which have GPS monitoring, for a test drive," reports the *LA Times*.

"This really is a must for our nation. It is not a matter of something we might choose to do," said Hasan Ikhata, executive director of the Southern California Assn. of Governments, which is planning for the state to start tracking miles driven by every California motorist by 2025. "There is going to be a change in how we pay these taxes. The technology is there to do it."

Naturally, such a proposal has garnered the approval of liberals and environmentalists who like the idea of a tax system that would impact the driving patterns of Americans.

Organizations such as the Reason Foundation contend that the mileage-based user fee is the most viable alternative to the failing Highway Trust Fund.

"This is not just a tax going into a black hole," said Adrian Moore, vice president at Reason. "People are



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paying more directly into what they are getting.”

Planners in California are in pursuit of a system that will help the state reach the goals set in its ambitious global-warming laws.

In Oregon, 5,000 drivers have already been enlisted to participate in a large-scale experiment to test the system, while Illinois is testing the system with trucks. The state of Nevada has already completed a pilot program, while the city of New York is currently considering one.

The I-95 Coalition, which includes 17 state transportation departments, is exploring methods by which it may implement the changes.

U.S. Rep. Bill Shuster (R-Pa.), chairman of the House Transportation Committee, views mileage-based user fees as an appropriate long-term solution to the issues plaguing the Highway Trust Fund.

The federal government has considered the notion of pay-per-mile for some time. Last year, the U.S. Senate approved a \$90-million pilot project that would have involved 10,000 cars, but the proposal was ultimately killed by the House. Representatives from rural communities argued that the system unfairly impacted residents of rural areas who often have to embark on lengthier drives to get to work or go into town.

And many citizens are not thrilled at the possibility of such vast government overreach.

In Nevada, where 50 volunteers' vehicles were fitted with the black box equipment, drivers indicated worries about the system.

“Concerns about Big Brother and those sorts of things were a major problem,” said Alauddin Khan, who directs strategic and performance management at the Nevada Department of Transportation. “It was not something people wanted.”

Likewise, the American Civil Liberties Union of Nevada observed concerns regarding the susceptibility to privacy intrusions that the technology creates.

The organization posted the following warning on its website: “It would be fairly easy to turn these devices into full-fledged tracking devices.... There is no need to build an enormous, unwieldy technological infrastructure that will inevitably be expanded to keep records of individuals' everyday comings and goings.”

Mike Adams of Natural News [shares](#) concerns that such technology can be utilized for far more sinister purposes.

“The government could use this information to target you for punitive tax audits, surprise armed raids, government shakedowns or other nefarious schemes that have now been revealed as routine extortion activities carried out by a criminal government,” Adams writes.

What is ironic, but perhaps not accidental, about the lack of funds in the Highway Trust Fund is that some of the contributing factors toward the absence of funds are the increased fuel efficiency of vehicles and the rise of electric vehicles, two items of which the federal government has been a major proponent. Yet now it is because of those factors that the government is seeking alternatives to replenishing the lost revenues. The proposed new system virtually turns every road driven into a toll road.

As noted by Adams, if the new system were to be embraced by the American people, it would likely be accepted under the guise that it would be a cheap tax, perhaps a penny per mile, and then “get



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ratcheted up to \$1, \$2, or even \$5 per mile in some areas.” Like always.

In addition to all these concerns, perhaps the most significant cause for fear is the fact that black boxes are capable of receiving commands from government authorities. Adams notes that such commands may include shutting down the vehicle, locking a driver inside the vehicle until authorities arrive, or even causing the vehicle to drive off the road.

The dangers of such a system increases when one takes into consideration the possibility of hackers seizing control.

The proposal to introduce the black box system to replenish the taxes that the federal government is losing through the fuel tax reaffirms that the federal government believes it has a right to Americans’ money and has the power to access it by any means it determines.



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