

# Proposed gas tax could hurt Texas, researcher says

President Carter's proposed gasoline tax could put a dent in the Texas economy, a transportation researcher said at Texas A&M University.

Dr. C. V. Wootan, head of Texas A&M's Texas Transportation Institute (TTI), spoke at the opening session of the 18th Transportation Conference last week.

"The 'gas-guzzler' tax could be a powerful weapon in the fuel-reduction arsenal," Wootan explained. "A recently developed model at TTI shows that if the gasoline tax was imposed in 1979 and continued as proposed, by 1990, gasoline consumption in Texas would be reduced by 3.2 billion gallons over what would otherwise be expected, a reduction of over 30 per cent."

There are obvious implications, he said. (The new tax would go to the federal government while the 30 per cent reduction in gas sales would mean that same 30 per cent reduction from the state's tax revenues which gains five cents for every gallon of gasoline sold.)

"What appears to be a reasonable assumption today can be a very unreasonable assumption tomorrow," Wootan noted. "However, the figures I have quoted represent some of the

best information we have available regarding future energy consumption."

"I consider the single most overriding weakness in the Carter proposal to be the lack of a progressive development policy. It concentrates on saving without providing needed incentives for development of either new finds of existing fuels or entirely new types of energy."

Since the transportation industry uses a lot of fuel, it will be very sensitive to any changes in energy policies, he said.

"In a very real sense, automobile travel is the only mode that currently exists for the large majority of people, particularly those of us in Texas," Wootan said.

"Consequently, any policy or set of policies that fails to realign consumer-motorist incentives and to provide viable alternatives for mobility, is going to have very little beneficial effect upon transportation," he said.

Coal is the great hope for Texas and the nation's future energy needs. However, Tom Berg, chairman of the Board of Trustees of San Antonio's Gas and Electric Utility, said that coal may go the route of natural gas as a cheap energy source.

Zeroing in on the key problem of transportation cost of coal, Berg pointed out that "already the transportation cost of

coal costs 150 per cent of the cost itself and the rate is escalating enormously. The status of coal as a low cost could quickly change."

"Utilities throughout the South are committing Western coal because it is abundant, Berg said. "It occurs in thick seams with good mining ratios, which means proportionately less overburden, making more easily mined."

"However, a rough calculation shows that before 1980's, the utilities of Texas will be using 3,200 million tons of coal a week. There's no telling how many other industries will have to convert to coal that time, but the traffic problems will be very complex and undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges the railroads have ever faced."

"We have found that there are a number of critical bottlenecks on the railroad network which cannot handle the projected 1985 traffic and it will simply be physically impossible to get it done. And, this study was made before President Carter outlined the national goals to increase production of coal from 600 million to a billion tons a year by 1985."

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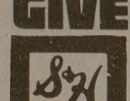
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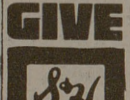
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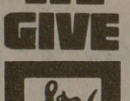
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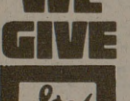
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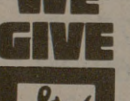
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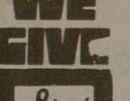
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