VMT Tax:
Towards Overcoming Public Concerns

April 21, 2010
Mitigating:
“Backdoor Tax Increase” Concerns
“This is just a fancy new way to increase our taxes.”

• Guarantee revenue neutrality of proposal

• Cultivate and spotlight tax foe champions
Mitigating:

Environmental Concerns

“The gas tax is better at discouraging pollution and inefficiency than a VMT tax.”

- Use variable rates based on pollution
- Find and spotlight environmental champions
Mitigating:

“Lack of Choice” Concerns

“They're unfairly forcing this down our throats, and that's not the American way”

- Pilot on an opt-in basis
- Reward early adopters, so others envy them
- Conduct a post-pilot poll, and promote support of early adopters
Mitigating:

“Devil You Don’t Know” Concerns

“I hate the gas tax, but don’t trust that VMT tax.”

- Continually spotlight the urgent crisis associated with the gas tax
- When piloting, conduct research designed to calm public’s top concerns
- Remember: A charge unrebutted is a charge believed
Mitigating: 

“Hindenburg” Concerns

“The technology looks nice, but I worry it might crash.”

• Pilot small with more patient early adapters

• Immediately fix any tech problems

• Promote tech achievements (e.g. low error rate)

• Show, don’t tell.
Mitigating:

“Big Brother” Concerns

“This is just a way for the government to track my every move.”

- Pilot on an opt-in basis
- Involve credible privacy champions in design and measurement
- Third party audit of privacy system
Mitigating:

**Complexity Concerns**

“I don’t really understand it. I don’t trust it.”

- Keep system design simple and linear
- Keep communications simple, linear and visual
Building Your Outreach Team

- THE RIGHT CHAMPIONS. Need to cultivate a champion with thick skin, credibility and communications talent.

- INVEST IN PR. If 90% of the barrier is public acceptance, you might need more than 1% of the budget for PR.

- ACTIONS, NOT JUST WORDS. This must be about more than just wordsmithing. Must having PR/marketing involved in operational decisions, not just technical staff.

- PROACTIVE, NOT JUST REACTIVE. Must be a proactive promotion plan, not just reactive crisis mop up work.
Discussion.