

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 have 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.**