



*"Improving the Quality of Life  
by Enhancing Mobility"*

*University Transportation Center for Mobility*

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# **Development of a Mileage-Based User Fee Research Website**

## ***Final Report***

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***Performing Organization***

University Transportation Center for Mobility™  
Texas Transportation Institute  
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# **Development of a Mileage-Based User Fee Research Website**

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**Final Technical Report**  
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**University Transportation Center for Mobility™**

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## Executive Summary

For the past three years the University Transportation Center for Mobility (UTCM) has sponsored various research efforts and provided other support in the study of mileage-based user fees (MBUFs), a funding mechanism currently being evaluated as a possible long-term alternative to the fuel tax. In its support of these efforts, UTCM helped to develop a website for aggregating and disseminating research and other related information on the topic (<http://utcm.tamu.edu/mbuf/>). Since its initial development, the website has acted as a valuable resource for parties interested in exploring the MBUF concept.

This report documents recent updates made to the website in order to develop it into a more comprehensive resource on the subject. These updates include:

- Updating the current list of available research reports on the topic
- Updating the current list of resources related to general transportation funding and financing issues
- Developing a system for making bi-weekly mailings to current MBUF website subscribers
- Developing an Internet forum function





## Introduction

For the past three years, the University Transportation Center for Mobility (UTCM) has sponsored research into the use of mileage-based user fees (MBUFs) as a possible long-term funding mechanism for infrastructure development. These research efforts include:

- Project 11-0064, “Mileage-Based User Fee Symposium, 2011”
- Project 10-25-50, “Use of Performance Measurement to Include Air Quality and Energy into Mileage-Based User Fees”
- Project 09-00-16, “Mileage-Based User Fees—Defining a Path toward Implementation, Phase 1”
- Project 09-39-07, “Mileage-Based User Fees—Defining a Path toward Implementation, Phase 2”
- Project 08-11-06, “Feasibility of Mileage-Based User Fees: Application in Rural/Small Urban Areas of Northeast Texas”

Also known as vehicle mileage fees, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) fees, and time/distance/place (TDP) charging, an MBUF is essentially a fee that is levied per mile driven. MBUFs are currently being evaluated as a long-term transportation funding mechanism because they are structured to address many of the issues threatening the long-term sustainability of fuel taxes, namely that revenues are expected to decline as fuel consumption declines in the long term.

MBUFs are a relatively new topic in transportation research, and there have only been a handful of pilots, demonstrations, and related studies of the topic. As a result of this, a comprehensive resource for up-to-date news and research on this topic has yet to be developed. In its support of the aforementioned MBUF research efforts, UTCM developed a rudimentary website that featured completed research reports on the subject and, when possible, news stories that featured the MBUF concept. This website can be found at <http://utcm.tamu.edu/mbuf/>.

This project represents an effort to further develop the existing MBUF website into a more comprehensive resource for use by researchers, practitioners, and other interested parties. This has involved:

- Updating the catalog of research related to MBUFs and transportation funding and financing reform
- Developing a forum for discussion and exchange of information on MBUFs and transportation funding and financing issues
- Developing an information collection methodology to be deployed in conjunction with a mailing list for disseminating information on MBUFs

## Updates to Ongoing Research

The current MBUF website features a collection of studies and reports related to MBUFs and transportation funding and financing in general.

### ***Mileage-Based User Fees***

When the current UTCM MBUF website was initially developed, there had only been three pilot studies of the MBUF concept. These include:

- The Oregon Department of Transportation’s “Oregon Mileage Fee Concept and Road User Fee Pilot Program”
- The Puget Sound Regional Council’s “Traffic Choices Study”
- The University of Iowa’s “National Evaluation of a Mileage-Based Road User Charge”

There were also numerous other reports related to the concept, such as reports by the RAND Corporation, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Texas Transportation Institute, and the University of Minnesota.

In the past several years, numerous additional research efforts and pilot studies related to the concept have been initiated or concluded. These include:

- A technology demonstration initiated by the Minnesota Department of Transportation
- A technology demonstration initiated by the Nevada Department of Transportation
- An assessment of administrative, legal, and other institutional issues by the I-95 Corridor Coalition

Therefore, in order to position the MBUF website as a primary source for completed and ongoing research on the MBUF concept, researchers aggregated all major reports on MBUF trials and pilots and posted them for viewing on the website. Researchers have also cultivated relationships with other researchers to receive updates and other information for projects that have yet to publish results.

### ***Transportation Funding and Finance***

Much of the basis for pursuing MBUFs as a long-range transportation funding option is established in the research related to transportation funding and financing. This includes actual research reports, such as those published by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) and the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP), as well as publications by various commissions and non-research-related entities. For example, the MBUF website currently features reports from the following entities:

- The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission
- The National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing Commission
- Bipartisan Policy Center
- The Council of State Governments

These reports generally examine transportation funding and financing issues and introduce MBUFs as a possible solution. Thus, while these reports do not deal specifically with MBUFs, they are an important resource in that they:

- Establish the long-term funding and financing issues facing state and national infrastructure
- Make observations on trends in funding and financing related issues
- Position MBUFs as one of the more promising alternatives to the fuel tax

In the years since the initial development of the MBUF website, several additional related reports have been published, and others are being continually released. Researchers will continue to monitor these developments and will collect reports issued by these entities and post them to the MBUF website.

## **MBUF Mailing List**

UTCM's sponsorship of MBUF-related research activities has led to the development of a large peer network for the exchange of information between the sponsored researchers and other researchers and practitioners. When the current website was developed, a component was added that allowed visitors to the site to join a mailing list to receive additional information on the topic. These requests, along with the research network developed through other activities, have resulted in a mailing list with over 170 current subscribers.

Mailings to the list have been infrequent and mostly related to development activities related to the annual Mileage-Based User Fee Symposia that UTCM has sponsored since 2008. However, researchers intend, through this effort, to set up a system that would allow for more frequent mailings that relate to a broad array of MBUF-related topics.

Researchers have already developed a system for collecting up-to-date information on MBU-related topics, both in terms of actual research as well as media coverage. Utilizing the current mailing list, researchers will continually compile this information and make bi-weekly mailings to those on the list. These mailings will provide readers with up-to-date information on the MBUF concept including:

- Updates on ongoing research into MBUFs
- A summary of recent media coverage on the topic
- When applicable, discussion on state and national funding and financing trends likely to influence MBUF development

## Discussion Forum

An Internet forum, also known as a message board, is a website (or a component of a website) that allows users to engage in discussions through the form of posted messages. In general, topics are posted to the forum, and members of the forum are then allowed to post responses. These forums generally utilize administrators who monitor content to ensure that it complies with various content requirements. Users of the forum are also generally granted authority to start new discussion topics, also known as “threads.” The advantage of a forum over other information-sharing platforms, such as mailing lists and listservs, is that users can access the forum at their convenience and participate in discussions that they feel are pertinent.

As part of this effort, a forum was developed for users of the MBUF website to discuss MBUFs and related topics. Martha Raney Taylor and Richard T. Baker are currently the forum’s primary administrators, but additional administrators will be designated as warranted.

Discussion on the forum need only be related tangentially to MBUFs. For example, while there are sections dealing specifically with MBUFs and current pilot studies, users may also discuss:

- Fuel tax news and issues
- General road pricing
- Electric and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles
- Trends in fuel economy
- Technology issues such as those related to the use of global positioning system (GPS) technology
- Equity issues related to road user fees

The researchers hope that the MBUF forum will serve as an easily accessible platform for interested parties to engage in discussion on MBUFs and transportation and funding financing. It is likely that these discussions will yield additional resources for incorporation into other aspects of the website, namely in terms of keeping resources related to ongoing research updated and providing material for bi-weekly mailings.

The VMT forum is currently under development. It is expected that the forum website will be completed and activated sometime during fiscal year 2011.





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