

*January 16, 2008*

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### **Transportation panel: Triple U.S. gasoline taxes**

WASHINGTON - Federal gasoline taxes should be almost tripled over five years, a special commission urged yesterday in calling for drastic changes to fix aging bridges and roads and reduce traffic deaths.

The two-year study by the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission is the first to propose broad changes after the devastating bridge collapse in Minneapolis that took 13 lives in August shone a spotlight on the deteriorating national infrastructure.

The commission proposed increasing the gas tax, now 18.4 cents a gallon, by 5 cents to 8 cents annually for five years and then indexing it to inflation to help fix roads and bridges, expand public transit and highways, and broaden railway and rural access.

The recommendation, supported by nine of the commission's 12 members, is expected to reignite debate over raising gasoline taxes. The gas tax has not been increased since 1993, and recent efforts by Congress to increase it have faltered, due in part to objections from the Bush administration.

House Republican leaders said they would oppose a hike. "A dramatic increase in the gas tax does not stand a snowball's chance in hell of passing Congress," said Rep. John Mica (R-Fla.) the top Republican on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which will receive the commission's report tomorrow.

The commission, which was created by Congress, called for immediate action, warning that "applying patches" is no longer acceptable. It said the nation risks tens of thousands of highway casualties each year and millions of dollars in lost economic growth.

"The crisis is now," the report said.

But the commission's chairwoman, Transportation Secretary Mary Peters, and two other members wrote a dissent that sharply criticized the proposal for higher gasoline taxes. They are calling instead for reliance on tolls and private investment.

Peters said raising the gas tax would send millions of dollars to Washington that could end up as congressional pork.

Jack Schenendorf, the commission's vice chairman, contended that the tax increase would amount to "less than a cost of a candy bar and a fifth of the cost of a cafe latte" for the average U.S. motorist.