

Nation needs marketing campaign to reduce vehicle fuel use, says new paper

December 17 2012, by Jeff Falk

(Phys.org)—A new paper from Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy proposes a national marketing campaign to better inform consumers about measures that they can take to decrease fuel use, particularly during a rapid increase in fuel prices. A relatively modest publicity campaign could create substantial savings for consumers, the authors said.

The paper, "A [Marketing Campaign](#) to Reduce Vehicle Use," was co-authored by Joe Barnes, the Baker Institute's Bonner Means Baker Fellow, and James Coan, a former research associate in the Baker Institute's Center for Energy Studies who is now a consultant at Houston-based PacWest Consulting Partners.

"The federal government should initiate a marketing campaign, either in conjunction with the Ad Council or as a separate public-private partnership," the authors said. "Its objective would be to inform consumers how they can alter the manner and frequency of their driving. The cost of such a campaign would be modest in comparison to its potential role in mitigating the effects of higher [transportation costs](#) and empowering consumers to take greater control of their expenditures on fuel."

The authors said there are a number of steps that consumers can take to limit the [deleterious effects](#) of high and quickly rising [fuel prices](#). Measures include so-called "smart driving," such as accelerating gradually and adhering to the speed limit to maximize fuel mileage;

routinely maintaining cars; using new technologies such as those providing real-time feedback on [fuel consumption](#); ridesharing (carpooling) to reduce vehicle use; and telecommuting and/or compressed work schedules to decrease the number of commutes. These also yield other benefits such as improved safety, better air quality, lower [carbon dioxide emissions](#) and reduced congestion.

"There is no shortage of information about these measures or even programs to promote them, but the information is mainly found on websites that can be difficult to find unless consumers are specifically searching for them," the authors said. "A number of countries, notably in Western Europe, have already undertaken more concerted efforts. Additional market research should be conducted before rolling out the campaign. Such research would also focus on the development of a consolidated, user-friendly website."

The need for such a campaign is very real, the authors said. "The United States is ill-prepared for another 'oil shock' driven by instability in major petroleum-producing regions, notably the Middle East," they said. "Given the importance of oil to the transportation sector, the effects of such shocks are both widespread and substantial. An oil shock has preceded all but one recession since World War II. A release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) can only play a limited role in restraining short-term unexpected volatility in the price of gasoline and diesel. Together, the measures discussed here could be thought of, conceptually, as 'a demand-side SPR.'"

The authors believe that a relatively modest publicity campaign—an average Ad Council campaign, for example, receives \$25 million-\$30 million of donated media—could create substantial savings for consumers. Americans spent more than this on gasoline in just one hour in 2011, when their annual gasoline expenditures totaled more than \$475 billion. "Studies generally show a reduction in oil consumption of 5-15

percent from smart driving. Ad Council partners who run ads exert substantial control over which advertisements are shown, and we expect that more will want to show ads about ways to lower fuel use during an oil shock," the authors said.

More information: [bakerinstitute.org/publication ...
leFuelUse-121212.pdf](https://bakerinstitute.org/publication...leFuelUse-121212.pdf)

Provided by Rice University

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