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CAPITOL BUSINESS BEAT

## Proposed state ballot measure would boost car tax to improve roads

A former Caltrans leader proposes an initiative for the 2014 ballot that would more than double the state vehicle license fee to raise funds for rebuilding roads and bridges and boosting mass transit.

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California motorists spend more than \$600 a year fixing flat tires, aligning wheels and repairing other damage caused by potholes and bad pavement, according to Will Kempton, who ran the state Department of Transportation from 2004 to 2009. Above, the 5 Freeway in Sun Valley. (Lawrence K. Ho / Los Angeles Times / October 9, 2013)



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- Health measures to dominate 2014 voter ballot



By Marc Lifsher  
December 1, 2013 | 6:43 p.m.

SACRAMENTO — A former head of Caltrans wants to save drivers more than the average of \$600 a year he says they now spend fixing flat tires, aligning wheels and repairing other damage caused by potholes and bad pavement.

Will Kempton, who ran the state Department of Transportation from 2004 to 2009, has submitted a proposed voter initiative for the 2014 ballot that would raise money to rebuild roads and bridges and boost mass transit. If

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it qualifies for the ballot and is approved by voters, such an initiative would more than double the state vehicle license fee — known as the car tax — to 1.65% from 0.65% of the value of an auto or truck.

The tax hike, if it were in effect today, would increase the annual tax on the average car by \$102 a year, according to the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger slashed the car tax shortly after winning office in the 2003 recall election.

Current transportation spending is inadequate, said Kempton, because lawmakers have raided a traditional funding source, the gas tax, and people are driving more fuel-efficient cars that generate less revenue

"It's cheaper to pay to fix the system than to pay the extra cost of driving on rough pavement," he said.

But selling a car tax increase won't be easy, Kempton

conceded, even though polling shows that people want better roads.

California should be spending more on transportation maintenance, said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Assn., but not if it means higher taxes.

"We already have some of the highest taxes in America," Coupal said.

### Helpful tax collectors

Tax collectors are riding to the rescue of omnipresent food trucks.

Vendors are having trouble keeping track of sales tax rates that vary among Los Angeles County's scores of cities.

"We just wanted it simpler," said Matt Geller, president of the Southern California Mobile Food Vendors Assn.

The Board of Equalization is coming up with a plan to allow vendors to charge the same price for a menu item — no matter in which city they park. They then can easily figure out how much tax to pay by checking the sales from each location on an online map-calculator.

### Internet sales tax

Today is Cyber Monday, and state officials report that sales taxes now being collected on Internet purchases are boosting California's coffers.

The state has received an extra \$263.4 million since the so-called Amazon sales tax bill took effect Sept. 15, 2012. The money is shared by the state and local governments.

The board is working with about 200 out-of-state, Internet-sales companies to determine whether they must comply with the California law.

Amazon.com, the world's biggest Internet retailer, at first opposed the sales-tax collection requirement. But the Seattle firm reached an agreement with Gov. Jerry Brown, which led to Amazon opening large distribution centers in San Bernardino, as well as east of the Bay Area in Tracy and Patterson.

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