

Ohio's Gas Tax Debate: Where Things Stand

September 24, 2026

Contents

- Executive Summary
- Background: The Underlying Fiscal Tension
- Timeline of the Current Debate
- Key Positions and Tensions
- What to Watch

Executive Summary

Ohio is in the midst of an active political debate over a temporary suspension of its motor fuel tax, driven by high fuel prices amid the Iran War. Republican legislative leaders have committed to a floor vote around September 30, 2026, on a plan to suspend the state's gas and diesel taxes for 90 days. The push follows a September call from Republican gubernatorial nominee Vivek Ramaswamy, whose running mate is Senate President Rob McColley, and an earlier call from Democratic gubernatorial candidate Amy Acton, both of whom have urged relief for Ohio motorists. The debate sits atop a longer-running, largely separate concern: state transportation officials and outside analysts have flagged a structural, long-term decline in gas tax revenue that funds Ohio's road and bridge maintenance.

Background: The Underlying Fiscal Tension

Ohio currently levies a motor fuel tax of 38.5 cents per gallon on gasoline and 47 cents per gallon on diesel. The tax is the state's primary revenue source for road and bridge construction and maintenance, administered through the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). The last increase to the gas tax was enacted in July 2019 as part of Gov. Mike DeWine's first transportation budget, according to State Affairs data.

A July 2026 report from the Greater Ohio Policy Center, aligned with ODOT's own outlook, warned that the state is heading toward a long-term fiscal cliff in transportation funding. The think tank pointed to flat gas tax revenues, inflation, and the rising adoption of electric and hybrid vehicles as pressures on the revenue base. The report cited ODOT's 2023 Revenue Alternatives Study, which estimated a \$1.5 billion shortfall to Ohio's motor fuel tax revenue by 2050 due to improved vehicle fuel efficiency and electrification. ODOT Director Pam Boratyn testified during the last transportation budget cycle that continued flat gas tax revenue would cost the agency \$891 million in purchasing power over time. Despite this outlook, key Republican lawmakers have so far been reluctant to revisit the tax rate: Sen. Tom Patton, R-Strongsville, who chairs the Senate Transportation Committee, previously said there was "not a mood" in the legislature for another gas tax increase. Source: [Gongwer Ohio Report via State Affairs](#) ↗.

Timeline of the Current Debate

May 2026 — [HB 850](#) ↗ [introduced](#) ↗

- Reps. [Adam Bird](#) ↗, R-Cincinnati, and [Ty Mathews](#) ↗, R-Findlay, introduce [HB 850](#) ↗: a temporary 50% cut in the motor fuel tax for three months.
- Rates would drop to 19.25 cents/gallon on gasoline and 23.5 cents/gallon on CNG and other motor fuels, with an emergency clause attached. (State Affairs legislative data)

June 2026 — Business pushback, sponsor defends bill

- Ohio Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Steve Stivers calls the [HB 850 ↗](#) concept "long-term foolish," warning it could jeopardize road and bridge funding.
- Rep. Bird defends the bill as calibrated — a 50% cut, not elimination — and floats using state surplus/HB 479 funds to backfill ODOT. Source: [Gongwer Ohio Report ↗](#).

September 21, 2026 — Acton calls for a gas tax holiday

- Democratic gubernatorial candidate Amy Acton calls for a gas tax holiday, citing an "affordability crisis," as Ohio's average gas price hit ~\$4.52/gallon and diesel ~\$6.77/gallon. Source: [Gongwer Ohio Report ↗](#).

September 22, 2026 — Legislative leaders signal action

- House Speaker Matt Huffman and Senate President Rob McColley signal plans to interrupt the pre-election recess to act on a gas tax suspension proposal from GOP nominee Vivek Ramaswamy, McColley's running mate.
- The plan calls for suspending fuel taxes for 90 days amid Iran War-driven price increases. Source: [Gongwer Ohio Report ↗](#).

September 23, 2026 — Floor vote set for September 30

- Huffman and McColley commit to floor votes on Sept. 30, 2026, on a 90-day suspension of the 38.5-cent gasoline tax and 47-cent diesel tax, with an emergency clause.
- Reps. [Andrea White ↗](#), R-Kettering, and Jim Thomas, R-Canton, plan to introduce the bill in the coming days.
- Ramaswamy cites record U.S. diesel prices: \$6.52/gallon national average (AAA), \$6.81/gallon in Ohio.
- Acton's campaign disputes the plan's timing/motivation, noting she called for a holiday first. Source: [Gongwer Ohio Report ↗](#).

Key Positions and Tensions

Short-term relief vs. long-term funding: Proposals for a temporary tax suspension or reduction are being weighed against ODOT's long-term revenue shortfall, which the agency and outside analysts say will require new funding solutions regardless of what happens with any temporary suspension.

Gubernatorial race dimension: Both major gubernatorial candidates — Republican Vivek Ramaswamy and Democrat Amy Acton — called for gas tax relief in September 2026. Republican legislative leaders have moved to act through floor votes while the governor's race is underway, with McColley, the GOP candidate for lieutenant governor, directly involved in shepherding the legislative response.

What to Watch

- The floor vote committed for September 30, 2026, on the 90-day gas and diesel tax suspension.
- Whether the House and Senate agree on a single legislative vehicle to carry the proposal.
- Whether any backfill mechanism for ODOT funding is included alongside a suspension or reduction.