



Green Sense 12/01/2013

Holiday Roads

Are you planning to travel by car this season? Here are some tips for traveling more efficiently:

Pack carefully. Remove any extra-weight items out of your vehicle. And don't overdo on the luggage. Plan your outfits to reuse items like jeans or cardigans. If you're staying with friends or family, consider whether you can do laundry partway through your stay, allowing you to pack half as much. Less luggage means less weight and better gas mileage.

Tune it up! If you are traveling by car, be sure to schedule a tune-up ahead of time. When properly tuned, your car can get better fuel economy, saving you money on gas. Check for proper tire inflation.

Consider renting. Depending on the gas mileage your own vehicle gets, particularly if you are going a long distance, you may be able to rent a more fuel efficient vehicle for your trip. This also is a consideration when you're buying a vehicle - choose the one that best fits your day-to-day needs and if you occasionally need a larger vehicle, it may be cheaper to rent it once or twice a year, than to drive it every day.

Exchanging gifts? If you shop online, think about shipping the gifts to your destination. That way, you don't have to include them in your packing. Just be sure to tell your friends and family not to open the box before you get there!

Load efficiently. Try to keep all of your luggage **INSIDE** your vehicle - in the trunk or cargo area. This not only helps with fuel efficiency by not disrupting the aerodynamics, but keeps added weight low, avoiding making your vehicle more "tippy".

Map it! Check out your routing options before you hit the road. The most direct route may not be the most efficient in terms of time and fuel. Adding a few miles of travel may be a better choice if it helps you avoid sitting in stop-and-go traffic.

Research travel services. Check along your route for travel plazas or exits with nearby traveler services. Internet map aerial views are great for determining how far things might be from the highway, and customer review sites can help you find clean, dependable places to stop. Relying on highway signs might have you driving miles off your route to find a gas station and snacks. Also, not every exit has public restrooms available. Identifying exits that serve your needs can help save you time, gasoline and frustration.

Time your route. Can you leave a day earlier or later than the most common travel days? This could reduce your gasoline expenses by avoiding stop-and-go traffic. How about driving in the very early morning? If you have a particularly long route, identify the most congested areas along the way, and aim to hit those at off-peak times.

Have a plan for dealing with traffic. Make a list of traffic radio stations near any cities you might pass. Buy or print hard copies of maps in case you need to plan a detour. GPS is nice for general directions, but it helps to have a broader view when detours are needed. If you are traveling past several cities, and can't avoid hitting at least one at rush hour, that might be a good time to schedule a break. Have breakfast or dinner while you wait for rush hour to subside. Or visit a historic site, museum or even a friend who lives in the area.

Stopping for the night? If your driving route is too long to complete in a day, plan your stop to avoid morning traffic. Go just past a large city, major interchange or popular destination before pulling off the road. A hotel that serves breakfast can save you another side trip in the morning. When planning to get a very early start, be sure to choose carefully when stopping near a time zone boundary.

Careful packing and planning ahead can save you time, money and gasoline. Happy trails!

A column by Reading Climate Committee members Stephanie Anderberg, Gina Snyder and Michele Benson