

Travelers expected to hit the road for Turkey Day

By Scott Mayerowitz, AP

A stronger economy and lower gas prices mean Thanksgiving travelers can expect more congested highways this year.

During the long holiday weekend, 46.9 million Americans are expected to go 50 miles or more from home, the highest number since 2007, according to travel agency and car lobbying group AAA. That would be a 0.6 percent increase over last year and the seventh straight year of growth.

While promising for the travel industry, the figure is still 7.3 percent short of the 50.6 million high point reached in 2007, just before the recession.

Like on every other holiday, the overwhelming majority of travelers – almost 90 percent – will be driving. And they will be paying much less at the pump.

AAA says the average retail price for gasoline is now \$2.15 per gallon, 74 cents cheaper than the same time last year. With the average car getting 18.5 miles per gallon, that means a family driving 300 miles will save \$12 in fuel this holiday.

Airlines for America, the lobbying group for several major airlines, forecasts 25.3 million passengers will fly on U.S. airlines, up 3 percent from last year. (AAA's forecast shows fewer numbers of fliers because it looks at a five-day period while the airline group looks at the 12 days surrounding Thanksgiving.)

Airfare is basically flat compared to last year, with a mere 0.3 percent or 69 cent average increase, according to the Airlines Reporting Corp., which processes ticket transactions

for airlines and travel agencies.

Traveler counts are little fuzzier when it comes to other forms of transport.

Bus use will continue to grow, according to the Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development at DePaul University. The school expects 1.2 million to take buses, up 1 percent to 2 percent from last year. However, AAA says travel by cruises, trains and buses, will decrease 1.4 percent this Thanksgiving, to 1.4 million travelers.

Since flying can often cause the most disruptions and leave travelers feeling helpless, here are some tips to cope with any delays. Flights are packed around the holidays and if there is any hiccup, the difference between getting home and not can come down to asking the right questions and acting fast.