

First 13 Months of Gas-Tax-Hike Law: Little Spent, Roads Not Fixed

The S.C. Department of Transportation continues to sit on most of the hundreds of millions of dollars collected since the gas-tax-hike law went into effect nearly 15 months ago.
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By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

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Less than \$9 million, or 2.7 percent, of the \$324.2 million collected between July 1, 2017, and July 31 of this year was spent on “external” projects, according to the most recently available records released by DOT.

As The Nerve first [reported](#) earlier this month, the latest [online](#) records show that DOT has spent no proceeds in 20 of the state’s 46 counties, including larger counties such as Beaufort, Lexington and Spartanburg.

And there is no clear description of the actual work performed in the other 26 counties in the first 13 months of the gas tax hike, according to the “IMTF (Infrastructure Maintenance Trust Fund) Disbursements” list on DOT’s website.

DOT added the list under a separate link after The Nerve in August [pointed out](#) that the agency had posted no online details at the time of first-year expenditures.

DOT’s website also includes an “IMTF Project List,” which gives a breakdown of “project commitments” by county that the agency has identified, though it doesn’t give specifics of the work to be done under the main categories of “Pavements” and “Rural Road Safety,” or a ranking of projects.

That list has steadily grown each month: It identified a total of \$505.4 million in “project commitments” as of July 31, compared, for example, to \$169.8 million as of Jan. 31.

Lawmakers promised that the gas tax hike would go toward fixing South Carolina’s pothole-riddled roads in their constituents’ communities, though DOT’s latest project list includes millions for planned “interstate upgrade” projects on I-20 in Lexington County (\$34.3 million) and I-85 in Cherokee and Spartanburg counties (\$4 million total). Another approximately \$2.5 million is designated for bridge work on I-95 in Jasper County.

Hall told The Nerve in June that that revenues under the gas-tax-hike law could be used by the State Transportation Infrastructure Bank (STIB), which over the years funneled several billion dollars for large construction projects in select counties, for [earlier-approved interstate-widening projects](#). In April, Hall told DOT commissioners that pending lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of the law and a related 2016 statute have forced the agency to seek other funding sources for interstate projects.

The South Carolina Policy Council, the parent organization of The Nerve, has contended that the gas-tax-hike law was written in a way [to allow DOT to divert IMTF revenues](#) to pay STIB bond debts.

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Most of the nearly \$8.8 million spent by DOT on “external” projects through July 31 was listed as “Payment to Road & Bridge Contractors.” Other expenditures included the categories of “Engineering & Architectural Services” and “Printing, Binding, Advertising.”
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Another DOT record shows the agency spent \$17 million in IMTF funds in the first year of the gas tax hike through the County Transportation Committee (CTC) “Donor Bonus” Program, which allows counties to receive rebates of a portion of gas tax collections above revenues allocated to them, based on a formula.

The Nerve in March [revealed](#) that the “Donor Bonus” program was established under previous state law, and that the allocations to counties were based on an amended formula using 2015 gas tax collections in counties – not on the revenue increases that took effect on July 1, 2017.

Following is a breakdown of the total amounts spent on “external” projects in counties as of July 31; in several cases, DOT combined counties while listing other projects separately in those counties.

- Aiken: \$108,316
- Anderson: \$167,648
- Anderson, Oconee: \$43,730
- Berkeley: \$1,525,284
- Charleston: \$159,662
- Cherokee: \$31,905
- Chesterfield: \$45,796
- Chesterfield, Lancaster: \$37,271
- Colleton: \$71,011
- Darlington: \$180,829
- Dorchester: \$905,760
- Georgetown: \$24,193
- Greenville: \$1,516,703
- Greenwood: \$332,133
- Horry: \$57,735
- Jasper: \$793,690
- Kershaw, Sumter: \$20,605
- Lancaster: \$18,195
- Laurens: \$28,559
- Marlboro: \$55,875
- Newberry: \$300,134
- Orangeburg: \$1,448,672
- Pickens: \$157,057
- Richland: \$42,023
- Saluda: \$290,527
- Sumter: \$383,651

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Besides Beaufort, Lexington and Spartanburg counties, DOT listed no expenditures over the first 13 months of the gas-tax-hike law in these counties: Abbeville, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun, Chester, Clarendon, Dillon, Edgefield, Fairfield, Florence, Hampton, Lee, Marion, McCormick, Union and Williamsburg.

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