

Few Road Projects Completed in First 20 Months of Gas-tax-hike Law

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By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

Less than 4% of the nearly \$1 billion in road and bridge projects in South Carolina identified by the state Department of Transportation was completed in the first 20 months of the gas-tax-hike law, newly released DOT records show.

Lawmakers promised that the law, which raised the gas tax 12 cents per gallon over six years, and increased other vehicle taxes and fees, would go toward fixing the state's crumbling roads and bridges where their constituents live and work.

DOT has said 80 percent of the state's approximately 42,000 miles of roads needs to be resurfaced or rebuilt, and identified 465 of 750 "structurally deficient" bridges to be replaced.

But despite lawmakers' pledges that gas-tax-hike revenues would be used to fix the state's pothole-riddled roads, nearly \$246 million is designated for interstate widenings, according to DOT's recently revamped [website](#).

The agency is now clearly acknowledging those plans after The Nerve [revealed](#) in January, citing a DOT document presented at a road contractors' conference in 2018, that the agency was planning to spend well more than a third of projected revenues by 2027 on widening or repaving interstates.

Since the gas-tax-hike law went into effect on July 1, 2017, \$34 million in projects, or 3.4% of the total \$997.3 million in identified projects, had been completed through the end of February, according to DOT's latest [online](#) records.

The Nerve's review found that of 3,029 miles of identified projects statewide, a total of 89 miles in 18 counties, or just under 3% of the total project miles, fell into the completed "pavements" category.

The total reported cost of the completed "pavements" projects was \$29.2 million. Another \$4.8 million was spent on completed "rural road safety" work, which includes, according to DOT's website, such things as widening shoulders and installing guardrails.

Through February, DOT had spent \$82 million, or 14 percent, of the \$579.4 million in total collected revenues under the gas-tax-hike law, agency records show. The Nerve's review found that of the \$82 million, about \$2.3 million, or less than 3%, was spent on reconstruction projects, defined by DOT as the "complete removal and replacement of the existing pavement structure."

Another approximately \$19.2 million, or about 23.4 percent of the total amount spent, was for road "preservation" projects, which include such things as "chip sealing" and "crack sealing," according to DOT's website, which notes, "Moving from a worst first strategy to one of preservation will ensure that we are getting the most from the limited resurfacing dollars available."

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In addition, \$7.6 million, or about 9.3%, was spent on “safety improvement” projects.

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DOT announced in January it was launching a “Pothole Blitz” to repair what it claimed was a growing number of potholes statewide brought on by recent heavy rains. The agency claimed it patched about 43,000 potholes from Jan. 10 to Feb. 3, though DOT chief Christy Hall at a DOT Commission meeting in February – two days after The Nerve submitted an open-records request for details on the filled potholes – acknowledged that the number was just an [estimate and a temporary fix](#).

The Nerve’s latest review found that of the \$82 million in gas-tax-hike revenues spent through February, nearly \$50.2 million, or about 61.2%, was for “rehabilitation” projects, defined by DOT as the “removal or replacement of deteriorated pavement surface,” or the increasing of “pavement thickness to strengthen existing pavement sections.”

More than half of the \$82 million was spent collectively through February in the following 10 counties, according to DOT records: Greenville (\$9.58 million), Berkeley (\$6.14 million), Jasper (\$5.64 million), Marion (\$3.97 million), Aiken (\$3.84 million), York (\$3.82 million), Oconee (\$3.55 million), Pickens (\$3.19 million), Dillon (\$3.04 million), and Richland (\$2.69 million).

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