

Bad Bridges Still Not Fixed With Gas-Tax-Hike Money

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By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

Despite lawmakers' promises more than three years ago that part of the state gas tax hike would be used to fix South Carolina's bad bridges, only one bridge project has been completed with that money, newly released records show.

The Nerve's review of S.C. Department of Transportation records found that through Oct. 31, the department had identified 16 bridge projects in nine counties totaling \$18 million, though only one of those projects – located in Charleston County – was listed as finished.

Fifteen other bridge projects, located in Aiken (2), Anderson (2), Colleton (2), Greenwood (1), Jasper (3), Lancaster (1), Sumter (3) and York (1) counties, remained unfinished through October, with 13 still in the "preliminary engineering" stage, records show.

Of the \$1.5 billion in road and bridge projects statewide identified by DOT to be funded with gas-tax-hike revenues, only \$18 million is designated for "additional bridge projects," according to the agency's website. The gas-tax-hike law took effect July 1, 2017.

The Nerve last year [revealed](#) that DOT had completed relatively few bridge projects in recent years with other revenues, with less than 9% of 422 projects in the agency's "10-Year-Plan" listed as finished. In a news release in March of this year, the agency said 114 bridge projects have been "addressed with a 10-year target of 465 bridges," though it didn't specify how many of those bridges were actually fixed.

DOT on its website notes that 465 of 750 "structurally deficient" bridges statewide will be replaced as part of its 10-year plan. The agency maintains more than 8,400 bridges in the state.

In passing the gas-tax-hike law, which raised the state gas tax by 12 cents per gallon over six years and increased other vehicle taxes and fees, lawmakers promised those revenues would be used to fix the state's deteriorating roads and bridges. DOT has said 80% of the state's approximately 42,000 miles of roads needs resurfacing or rebuilding.

But The Nerve's latest review of DOT records found that as Oct. 31, the total dollar value of completed "pavements" projects in the state's 46 counties was \$491.4 million, less than half of the estimated approximately \$1.07 billion cost of all such projects in those counties.

Twenty-nine counties fell below the 50% completion rate, The Nerve's review found.

And DOT continues to sit on huge reserves with gas-tax-hike revenues. As of Oct. 31, a special fund created with the 2017 law had a cash balance of \$638.3 million, which represented 42.8% of the \$1.49 billion in total revenues collected over the 40-month period, DOT and state comptroller general records show.

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Total revenue through October represented nearly 99% of the collective estimated cost of all project “commitments” statewide identified by DOT. Those “commitments” include nearly \$258.6 million for interstate widening projects – not repairing bad roads and bridges in local communities.
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Hits: 652

The South Carolina Policy Council, the parent organization of The Nerve, has contended the gas-tax-hike law was written in a way to allow DOT to [divert revenues](#) to the State Transportation Infrastructure Bank (STIB) to pay off bond debts. The STIB over the years funneled several billion dollars to large construction projects in select counties.

Following is a list of counties in which the total dollar amount of completed “pavements” projects was less than 50% of the collective estimated cost of all such projects as of Oct. 31, according to DOT records:

- York: \$18 million (49.7%);
- McCormick: \$3.3 million (48.6%);
- Clarendon: \$7.4 million (47.9%);
- Marion: \$7.6 million (47.1%);
- Spartanburg: \$20.7 million (46.9%);
- Williamsburg: \$9 million (46.6%);
- Greenville: \$21.6 million (45.1%);
- Dillon: \$6.1 million (44.8%);
- Lexington: \$15.9 million (44.4%);
- Richland: \$16 million (44%);
- Florence: \$13.3 million (44%);
- Beaufort: \$8.6 million (43.2%);
- Calhoun: \$4.9 million (42.9%);
- Bamberg: \$4.1 million (42.6%);
- Union: \$5.9 million (42.3%);
- Saluda: \$6.6 million (40.2%);
- Barnwell: \$4.9 million (40%);
- Hampton: \$3.9 million (39.4%);
- Marlboro: \$4.5 million (37.5%);
- Allendale: \$3 million (37.3%);
- Horry: \$27 million (37.2%);
- Oconee: \$8 million (32.4%);
- Aiken: \$9.2 million (32.1%);
- Abbeville: \$5.5 million (29.5%);
- Darlington: \$4.7 million (28.2%);
- Anderson: \$14 million (25.4%);
- Pickens: \$5.5 million (21.7%);
- Newberry: \$4.2 million (20.9%);
- Georgetown: \$2.7 million (9.5%)

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