

SC Still Has Hundreds of Bad Bridges Despite Gas-tax-hike Law

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By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

Last Friday, President Joe Biden visited Pittsburgh to tout his \$1 trillion infrastructure law – just hours after a 50-year-old bridge there collapsed while a municipal bus and several cars were on it, resulting in injuries though no deaths.

In South Carolina, the S.C. Department of Transportation has identified 465 out of 750 “structurally deficient” bridges statewide to be replaced. But through December, DOT had completed only three bridge projects with more than \$2.3 billion in revenues collected under the 2017 gas-tax-hike law, recently released agency records show.

And the number of finished projects, as well as the total number of bridge projects (16) identified by DOT to be completed with gas-tax-hike revenues, hasn’t changed since last May 31, as The Nerve first [revealed](#) in July. Of the \$2.32 billion in collected revenues through Dec. 31, just \$18.1 million, or less than 1% of the total, was designated for “additional” bridge projects.

Separately, The Nerve’s July review of DOT’s “10 Year Plan” found that of 430 identified bridge projects statewide – 356 of which were listed in records as “closed and load restricted bridges” – only 36 had been completed.

DOT says it maintains more than 8,400 bridges across the state, with modern bridges “typically designed with a service life between 50 to 75 years,” according to the agency’s website. The Nerve in 2018 [revealed](#) that DOT plans to add \$15 million annually to its 10-year, \$1.5 billion bridge-replacement program, though not until 2024 after an income tax credit created under the gas-tax-hike law expires.

Meanwhile, a special fund created with the 2017 law, which raised the state gasoline tax by 12 cents per gallon over six years and increased other vehicle taxes and fees, had a surplus as of Dec. 31 that passed the \$1 billion mark for the first time, DOT and state comptroller general records show.

Compared to Dec. 31, 2020, the surplus jumped by \$285.4 million, or 39.5%, while total collected revenues grew by \$677 million, or 41%, according to records.

The Nerve’s latest review of DOT records found that the total value of completed major repaving or road reconstruction projects in the state’s 46 counties through the end of 2021 was \$783.2 million, which represented 46.5% of the listed \$1.68 billion overall estimated cost of all such projects. That percentage remained largely unchanged throughout last year.

Twenty-eight counties fell below the 50% completion mark, including the larger counties of Richland (44.2%), Charleston (41.6%) and Lexington (28.1%), The Nerve’s review found.

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As of Dec. 31, DOT had identified 5,219 miles of “pavements” projects statewide, which was an increase of 1,378 miles, or 33.3%, compared to a year earlier. But even if the agency completed all of the listed projects, it would represent a relatively small percentage of the total miles of roads that the agency says have to be fixed.

DOT has said 80%, or 33,600 miles, of the state’s approximately 42,000 miles of roads need to be repaved or rebuilt. The Nerve in September [revealed](#) that, based on a review of agency records, major repaving or road reconstruction projects statewide could take on average at least a year and possibly more than two years to complete.

The Nerve also reported then that the American Society of Civil Engineers gave the state’s roads an overall “D” grade in its annual report card.

Gov. Henry McMaster has proposed using \$660 million in federal coronavirus-relief funds for next fiscal year, which begins July 1, to begin construction of Interstate 73 toward Myrtle Beach, and widening I-26 between Columbia and Charleston, as The Nerve [reported](#) in January. In a letter to lawmakers, McMaster also noted widening I-95 in the Lowcountry and additional lane widening of I-85 in the Upstate.

Although state lawmakers promised in passing the gas-tax-hike law that the revenues would go toward fixing existing bad roads and bridges, nearly \$272 million, or about 12.5% of the total \$2.18 billion in project “commitments” identified by DOT as of Dec. 31, was designated for interstate widenings, agency records show.

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