

Pot of Unspent Gas-Tax-Hike Revenues Grows to Nearly \$361 Million

As of the end of October, nearly \$361 million in collected gas-tax-hike revenues had not been spent – 16 months after the law authorizing the increases went into effect, recently released records show.
By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve
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The \$360.9 million balance represented about 45 percent of the \$802.2 million in “project commitments” identified by the state Department of Transportation – an [online list](#) that grows monthly though it doesn’t give specifics on the work to be done. The unspent funds grew by more than 6 percent from the end of September, records show.

As of Oct. 31, \$38 million, or less than 9 percent, of the \$433.6 million in collected revenues had been spent on “external” projects, according to DOT and state comptroller general records. No money was spent from the “Infrastructure Maintenance Trust Fund” (IMTF) in nine of the state’s 46 counties as of the end of October, DOT records show.

In passing the gas-tax-hike law, lawmakers promised those revenues would go toward fixing the state’s pothole-riddled roads and deteriorating bridges in their constituents’ communities. The law, which took effect July 1, 2017, raised the gas tax 12 cents over six years, and increased other vehicle taxes and fees, including hiking the vehicle-sales-tax cap by \$200.

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

Yet of the \$802.2 million in IMTF projects identified by DOT as of Oct. 31, nearly \$246 million, or about 31 percent of the total, was designated for “interstate upgrades” on I-85 and I-20. Less than \$3.2 million was specifically earmarked for bridge projects, though DOT has a 10-year, \$1.5 billion bridge-replacement program.

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 bond debts of the State Transportation Infrastructure Bank (STIB), which over the years funneled several billion dollars for large construction projects in select counties.

In June, DOT chief Christy Hall [told The Nerve](#) that the STIB could use IMTF revenues for earlier-approved interstate-widening projects. She told DOT commissioners in April that pending lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of the gas-tax-hike law and a related 2016 statute have forced the agency to seek other funding sources for interstate projects.

The DOT Commission in October approved a new rural interstate-widening program that agency records show would be funded in part with revenues that would be freed up by 2024 after a gas tax credit expires.

The Nerve [revealed](#), however, citing projections from the state Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office, that over the next five years, DOT will have to transfer a total estimated \$300.1 million to cover

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expected shortfalls in a state account that will be used to fund the credits until they expire.

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Following is a breakdown of the total amounts spent on "external" projects in counties as of Oct. 31 under the gas-tax-hike law, according to DOT records. In several cases, DOT combined counties while listing other projects separately in those counties.

- Abbeville: \$112,707
- Aiken: \$394,854
- Anderson: \$1,159,728
- Anderson, Oconee: \$57,440
- Berkeley: \$3,418,884
- Charleston: \$964,976
- Cherokee: \$111,180
- Chester: \$1,517
- Chesterfield: \$2,038,454
- Chesterfield, Lancaster: \$60,577
- Colleton: \$125,731
- Darlington: \$1,474,751
- Dillon: \$1,803,209
- Dorchester: \$1,168,145
- Edgefield: \$269,479
- Florence: \$575,202
- Georgetown: \$45,777
- Greenville: \$4,072,299
- Greenwood: \$332,790
- Horry: \$109,667
- Jasper: \$2,853,834
- Kershaw: \$207,674
- Kershaw, Sumter: \$33,363
- Lancaster: \$139,971
- Laurens: \$48,574
- Lee: \$600,621
- Lexington: \$1,341,005
- Marion: \$1,640,345
- Marlboro: \$797,354
- McCormick: \$60,020
- Newberry: \$493,912
- Oconee: \$1,909,623
- Orangeburg: \$1,596,965
- Pickens: \$669,493
- Richland: \$621,209
- Saluda: \$1,696,314
- Sumter: \$1,703,744

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York County showed the biggest jump in spending – \$2.1 million – from September, followed by Berkeley (\$1.4 million), Jasper (\$1.2 million) and Lexington (\$1.1 million) counties. DOT’s online “IMTF Disbursements” [list](#), however, doesn’t give specifics on the work that was done, instead classifying expenses primarily under broad categories of “preservation,” “rehabilitation” and “safety improvement.”

DOT listed no money spent for “external” projects in these nine counties as of Oct. 31: Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Beaufort, Calhoun, Clarendon, Fairfield, Hampton and Spartanburg.

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