

SCDOT Plan Would Make Small Dent in Fixing Bad State Roads

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By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

File: 9.048 Department of Transportation plans to complete about 2,300 miles of road repairs by the end of 2021, records released to The Nerve show, though that number represents a small portion of the major road work the agency says needs to be done statewide.

The department wants to bring about 16,800 miles of state roads up to a “good” rating under its [10-year plan](#), which is based on revenues from the gas-tax-hike law that took effect two years ago. The 16,800 miles represent half of the approximately 33,600 miles of state roads that the agency says have to be resurfaced or rebuilt.

In passing the gas-tax-hike law, which raised the state gas tax 12 cents per gallon over six years and increased other vehicle taxes and fees, lawmakers promised that the money would be used to fix the state’s crumbling roads and bridges in their constituents’ communities.

DOT has said 80% of the state’s approximately 42,000 miles of roads needs resurfacing or rebuilding, and identified 465 out of 750 “structurally deficient” bridges to be replaced.

But in the first two years of the gas-tax-hike law, the state collected enough revenues to cover three-quarters of the \$1 billion in road and bridge projects identified by DOT, yet the agency completed or “substantially” completed just 8% of the total estimated cost, The Nerve [reported](#) last week.

And DOT might not hit its 10-year goals based on scheduled completion dates for 1,424 “pavements” projects covering a total of 2,312.5 miles, The Nerve’s latest review found. The department hasn’t published those completion dates on its website but provided scheduling records last week to The Nerve under the S.C. Freedom of Information Act.

The Nerve’s review of those documents and related [online](#) records found that:

- Of the 2,312.5 miles of “pavements” projects scheduled to be completed by Nov. 30, 2021, 1,735.2 miles, or 75% of the total, are set to be finished by this Dec. 15. In comparison, 92.7 project miles were to be completed in 2018; and 385.1 miles and 99.2 miles are set to be finished in 2020 and 2021, respectively.
- Some of the scheduled road work involves less-involved “preservation” projects, which, according to DOT’s website, includes such thing as “crack sealing” and “chip sealing.” Major repaving or road rebuilding projects typically are categorized as “rehabilitation” or “reconstruction” projects.
- Beside “pavements” projects, DOT plans to finish a total of 32 miles of “interstate upgrade” projects on I-85 in Cherokee and Spartanburg counties by July 6, 2021, and on I-20 in Lexington County by this Oct. 21. The Nerve in January [revealed](#) that DOT plans to spend more than a third of gas-tax-hike revenues on widening or repaving interstates.

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In addition, DOT has scheduled to complete about 237 miles of “rural road safety” projects statewide by Oct. 31, 2020, which, according to its website, include such things as widening shoulders and adding guardrails.

- The department on its website separately lists 657 projects under its 10-year plan, though 64% and 27% of the total are identified as bridge and “rural road safety” projects, respectively; and there are no listed completion dates for more than 64% of the total.
- The amount of identified “pavements” work to be finished by the end of 2021 doesn’t necessarily correspond to the population size of the county. Florence County, for example, home to powerful Republican Sen. Hugh Leatherman, has the 13th-largest population in the state but ranks second in the number of road miles scheduled to be completed.

Below are the 10 counties with the most “pavements” miles scheduled to be finished by no later than the end of 2021, according to DOT records:

- Lexington: 122.49
- Florence: 104.19
- Anderson: 97.36
- Horry: 94.27
- York: 91.60
- Greenwood: 88.04
- Spartanburg: 74.48
- Orangeburg: 74.42
- Aiken: 73.58
- Greenville: 68

The following five counties round out the bottom of the list, with their total “pavements” miles in parentheses: Fairfield (24.74), Beaufort (21.98), Dillon (21.47), Marion (19.33) and Lee (17.93).

DOT has worked on other road projects not included in the latest gas-tax-hike records provided to The Nerve or listed on the agency’s website. For example, the department and town of Hilton Head Island in June completed a \$1.1 million, 1.5-mile repaving project on Pope Avenue – a major tourist artery – though part of it has to be redone after complaints from drivers, according to a story last week in The Island Packet newspaper.

Meanwhile, residents across the state continue to wonder when bad roads and bridges in their communities will be fixed. In June, the South Carolina Policy Council, the parent organization of The Nerve, launched “[Project Road Repair](#)” to encourage citizens to ask their state lawmakers – who [largely control the selection of DOT commissioners](#) – for specifics on the status of their roads.

Here’s a sampling of the email responses so far from lawmakers:

“I don’t have another email from you and your tone is hostile,” Rep. Krystle Simmons, D-Berkeley, wrote to a constituent, who noted she emailed Simmons earlier but didn’t get a response. “I’m

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will be checked on this for you please be more specific ... "

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"I get many notes like yours, and like you, I am very frustrated," said Rep. Bill Chumley, R-Spartanburg. "This is exactly what I thought would happen when we passed the gas tax bill that I voted against. ... I believe that this bill was just a way to raise taxes, and repair roads in certain districts."

"I am very familiar with the road you are asking about and agree that it is in desperate need of repair," Sen. Ross Turner, R-Greenville, wrote. "The sad truth is that if it is not currently on the priority list – it's because there are roads worse than it."

"You can go to the SCDOT website and click Sptg. County for all roads," Rep. Rita Allison, R-Spartanburg, said in a one-sentence reply to a second email sent by a constituent seeking answers.

To see the roads statewide that DOT has scheduled to repair, [click here](#).

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