

## A First With The Gas-Tax-Hike Law – And It's Little To Celebrate

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By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

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As of Dec. 31, more revenues were collected under the law, though many South Carolina motorists probably won't be happy about it.

As of Dec. 31, more revenues were collected under the law, which took effect July 1, 2017, than the total estimated cost of all road and bridge projects identified by the S.C. Department of Transportation to be paid with the money, recently released agency records show.

Deposits over the 42 months totaled nearly \$1.65 billion, about \$42 million more than the approximately \$1.61 billion in total project "commitments" identified by DOT, according to agency records.

DOT continues to sit on a massive reserve with the gas-tax-hike revenues: As of Dec. 31, the cash balance of a special fund created with the law totaled about \$722.4 million, which represented approximately 44% of all collected revenues, records show. Investment earnings on the fund grew to more than \$23 million.

In passing the gas-tax-hike law, which raised the state gasoline tax by 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 deteriorating roads and bridges.

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

But as of Dec. 31, DOT had identified 4,132 miles of "pavements" projects in the state's 46 counties, which represented 12.3% of the total number of miles of state-maintained roads that the agency says needs to be resurfaced or rebuilt, The Nerve's latest review found.

Meanwhile, DOT plans to use a good chunk of the gas-tax-hike revenues for interstate widenings. Of the approximately \$1.61 billion in identified project "commitments," about \$258.6 million, or 16%, is earmarked for interstate widenings. Another \$162.7 million is designated for "rural road safety," which involves such things as widening shoulders and adding guardrails.

In 2019, powerful state Sen. Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, who sits on the State Transportation Infrastructure Bank (STIB) board, created a special Senate panel to study accelerating interstate expansion. The STIB over the years funneled several billion dollars to large construction projects in select counties.

The South Carolina Policy Council, the parent organization of The Nerve, has contended the gas-tax-hike law was written in a way to [divert revenues](#) to the STIB to pay off bond debts.

The Nerve's latest review of DOT records found that through Dec. 31, the total dollar amount of

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Completed "pavements" projects statewide remained less than half of the estimated cost of all such projects. Completed "pavements" projects statewide totaled \$534.7 million, or 46% of the overall \$1.16 billion estimated cost of those projects – about the same completion rate compared to

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Of the state's 46 counties, 29 fell below the 50% mark, including the larger counties of Greenville, Horry, Lexington and Richland. From Nov. 30 to Dec. 31, Clarendon and York counties recorded \$2.8 million and \$2.6 million increases, respectively, in the total dollar value of completed "pavements" projects, though for unexplained reasons in the records, seven counties showed overall decreases.

The vast majority of counties showed no change in the total dollar value of completed "pavements" projects from November to December, The Nerve's review found.

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

- Dorchester: \$12 million (49.9%);
- Lancaster: \$16 million (49.6%);
- Spartanburg: \$20.4 million (49.1%);
- Marion: \$7.5 million (48.3%);
- Union: \$8.2 million (47.7%);
- Richland: \$17.7 million (47.6%);
- Bamberg: \$4.5 million (47%);
- McCormick: \$3.2 million (46.9%);
- Kershaw: \$9.8 million (46.6%);
- Williamsburg: \$9.3 million (46.5%);
- Horry: \$36.9 million (46.1%);
- Dillon: \$6 million (45.5%);
- Calhoun: \$4.9 million (45.5%);
- Barnwell: \$5.4 million (44.2%);
- Colleton: \$11.4 million (42.3%);
- Marlboro: \$4.5 million (37.9%);
- Saluda: \$6 million (37.8%);
- Greenville: \$21.6 million (37.5%);
- Lexington: \$16 million (37%);
- Florence: \$13.8 million (35.4%);
- Hampton: \$4.3 million (33.2%);
- Georgetown: \$8.3 million (29.6%);
- Abbeville: \$5.4 million (29.4%);
- Darlington: \$4.7 million (28.5%);
- Allendale: \$2.9 million (26.1%);

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- Aiken: \$9 million (26%);
- Anderson: \$14 million (25.6%);
- Pickens: \$5.5 million (21.9%);
- Newberry: \$3.8 million (16.1%)

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