

## Taxpayers on Hook for Road- and Bridge-Naming Legislation

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By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

**Big:** 400 lawmakers routinely approve naming road sections and bridges for living or deceased persons, including ex-legislators and other former public officials.

Not only does it take up a lot of collective time that could be spent working on larger, more pressing issues, but it also comes with a cost to taxpayers – and local roads.

A little-known state law requires that the cost to the S.C. Department of Transportation to produce and erect the new road and bridge signs be reimbursed largely from a state fund designated to repair local roads.

The Nerve's review of DOT records provided through the state's open-records law found that 94 new signs cost a total of \$28,776 under 44 road- and bridge-naming proposals approved from March 2019 to February of this year.

Typically, two signs were produced and erected per request at a total cost of \$594, most of which involved manufacturing and overhead expenses, records show.

The reimbursement to DOT is capped by law at \$500 for each resolution adopted by lawmakers, the agency told The Nerve for a 2019 [story](#). The legislative proposals are made through concurrent resolutions, which, unlike general bills, can't be reviewed by the governor.

State law also requires that a majority of the legislative delegation in the county where the named road and bridge is located first approve reimbursements to DOT. The delegations – made up of House members and senators representing that county – appoint most County Transportation Committees that approve local road projects with "C" funds, which come from part of the state gasoline tax.

By law, reimbursements to DOT under road- and bridge-naming proposals approved by lawmakers must be paid from the "C" fund.

The road-naming issue took on heightened public interest in 2019 with the criminal case of former longtime DOT commissioner John Hardee of Columbia, who pleaded guilty to a federal attempted evidence-tampering charge. The DOT Commission approved removing signs on stretches of two roads named after Hardee at Columbia Metropolitan Airport and in Horry County, renaming the "John N. Hardee Expressway" at the airport to the "Columbia Airport Expressway."

Gov. Henry McMaster in 2018 declined to renominate Hardee, the son-in-law of longtime state Sen. Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, to the DOT Commission – a week after The Nerve [revealed](#) that Hardee was a paid consultant for a lobbying organization that received thousands annually from other public agencies.

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DOT records show that two new “Columbia Airport Expressway” signs cost a total of \$2,784 to produce and erect – the most expensive project among the 44 approved requests in The Nerve’s review.  
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Hits: 460

But Hardee’s case didn’t slow down lawmakers from naming roads or bridges after former public officials. The Nerve’s review found, for example, that lawmakers since 2019 approved designating:

- Part of Shop Road in Richland County as the “Honorable Jimmy C. Bales Highway” on behalf of the former state House member;
- The bridge that crosses the Edisto River along U.S. 17 in Colleton County as the “Senator Peden McLeod Bridge” on behalf of the former state senator and House member; and
- Mitchellville Road in Jasper County as the “Councilman Leroy Sneed Road” on behalf of the former Jasper County Council member.

In addition, lawmakers in 2019 approved naming an Interstate 126 interchange in Columbia on behalf of the late Thomas Moffatt Burriss, who served in the House. Last year, they agreed to dedicate part of Belvedere Clearwater Road in Aiken County to the late Ronnie Young, who also was a House member.

The Nerve’s review also found that road and bridge namesakes since 2019 included living or dead community and religious leaders, and police officers and firefighters killed in the line of duty.

Outside of DOT records provided to The Nerve, lawmakers in this year’s legislative session approved at least 11 road-naming resolutions.

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