

SC spends gas tax money on repaving

First projects are planned for 27 counties

JEFFREY COLLINS
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COLUMBIA - The first \$26 million raised by South Carolina lawmakers increasing the gas tax will go toward repaving projects in 27 counties, state Department of Transportation commissioners voted Thursday.

It was the first meeting since the Legislature overrode Gov. Henry McMaster's veto and decided to raise the gas tax by two cents each year for the next six years.

The resurfacing projects are just the start of how the DOT plans to spend its new revenue. DOT Secretary Christy Hall told the commissioners she has a broad range of plans from rural road improvements to reducing the state's alarmingly high vehicle fatality rate to widening interstates and improving interchanges that are snarled on a daily basis.

"I believe it would benefit us to go ahead and declare what we want to do," said Hall, who presented a plan on how to spend the increasing tax revenues.

The most prominent projects will be improving three of South Carolina's major interchanges. Work is already being done on Interstate 385's connection to Interstate 85 in Greenville. Hall also plans to fix the Interstate 526-Interstate 26 junction in North Charleston and work on the single biggest project in state history—a \$1.5 billion untangling of Columbia's Malfunction Junction where I-26,

Interstate 20 and Interstate 126 all come together.

The DOT has longer term plans to add lanes to Interstate 85 north of Spartanburg, Interstate 26 near Columbia and Charleston and Interstate 20 west of Columbia. South Carolina also plans to work with Georgia on replacing the I-20 bridge with a wider span at the state line over the Savannah River.

But Hall doesn't want all the money to go toward just a few highways. Of the \$800 million projected to be raised by the

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eventual 12-cent gas tax increase and other fees, more than \$400 million will go to repaving roads.

Hall said pavement in South Carolina has been neglected for 30 years, leaving just 20 percent of roads in the state in good condition.

people to know that the DOT is spending money on priorities that were chosen years ago and not just picking out pet projects now that they have more cash, DOT Commissioner Robby Robbins said.

Robbins, like almost all the other commissioners, thanked Hall for her hard work and for going around the state to present her plan at DOT offices and other places.