

Title: **SIMPSONVILLE UMC CELEBRATING 100TH**
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SIMPSONVILLE UMC CELEBRATING 100TH

Centennial Celebration

service scheduled April 17

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Officials with Simpsonville United Methodist Church have spent months preparing for an exciting April. That's hardly surprising though. You only get one chance to celebrate a 100th birthday.

Church officials' planning will culminate with a Centennial Celebration Service on April 17 at 11 a.m. Many previous pastors and members have been invited. This service will be followed by a free luncheon in the Christian Life Center.

"In 37 years, this is the first church I've served that's experiencing an anniversary like this," said the Rev. Joel Jones, who's served at SUMC since 2012. "This has been exciting and I'm amazed by the number of people who have come in and stepped up to the plate and helped pull this off."

"Our Centennial Committee has been amazing."

That service will cap a celebration that

100

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In addition to the marker, the Centennial Committee, which is headed by Mary Brittain, planned a book chronicling the history of the church. It will be available at the April 17 service. "A Century of Faith" was compiled by Linda Pendergrass with assistance from UMC's historian Larry Greer. Pendergrass said completing the book was like giving birth.

"It took about nine months to finish," Pendergrass said with a smile.

The front of the book

features the old sanctuary next to the new sanctuary in a painting done by SUMC member Elizabeth Henderson.

Pendergrass said the books will be given to former SUMC ministers and also donated to all three libraries in the Golden Strip.

Simpsonville UMC's mother church was Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church South, located a few miles away from downtown Simpsonville on Holland Road. By 1916, there had been a Baptist church in downtown Simpsonville for 28 years. It was then that some Be-

thel members decided to try to establish a Methodist church downtown.

They met for a year in the Forum, the community room of Simpsonville's Woodside Mill, before H.H. Griffin donated two lots on the corner of Crisp Street and SE Main Street

for the church's new home. By the end of 1917, the congregation raised the \$9,000 needed to pay for the new church where the current church stands today.

In 1968, the Methodist Church united with the Evangelical United Brethren which gave the church its current name of Simpsonville United Methodist Church.

During this same time, a three-phase long-term building plan began. The Fellowship Hall was constructed first and completely paid for by church members in 1977, 11 years ahead of schedule. The

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church office and education wing was built next, and then the new sanctuary which was dedicated on Dec. 7, 1986.

"The others parts were built as we needed them and could afford them. ... We've been very fortunate to have members who tithe very freely," Greer said. "As our membership grew, so did the need for a new sanctuary.

"In the '70s, our membership really took off. That coincided with the development of Simpson-

ville itself becoming a bedroom community of Greenville."

In the late 1980s, what has proved to be an important addition to SUMC came along when a preschool was established by LeMoyné Graydon. Today, the preschool has around 250 students, while the church serves 1,412 members.

"We have people all the time coming to worship and I'll say, 'I've seen you.' They'll go, 'I'm a parent of a child that goes to pre-

school here,' " Jones said. "We have several that continue to visit and have become very active members. They are such a big part of this church."

Within the community, SUMC is perhaps best known for its annual Journey to the Manger, featuring live nativity scenes each December. The Christmas event began in 2001 under then SUMC Pastor George Riser. Jones said it takes more than 200 church

members, who make and clean all the costumes, a night to pull the elaborate three-night event off.

"It's our gift to the community. We don't accept donations during it," Greer said. "It's gotten to the point now where we've had people come through because it's part of their Christmas tradition."

Jones added, "We've had people come from as far away as Clinton and Charlotte."

"As our membership grew, so did the need for a new sanctuary.

LARRY GREER

UMC HISTORIAN



SUBMITTED

A South Carolina historical marker is unveiled at Simpsonville United Methodist Church.

Title: **Audit: DOT should better prioritize state's road needs**
 Author: BY SEANNA ADCOX Associated Press
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Audit: DOT should better prioritize state's road needs

BY SEANNA ADCOX

Associated Press

COLUMBIA

South Carolina's Department of Transportation should better prioritize the state's roadwork needs, list them in a way that's understandable and time construction to reduce repair costs, the Legislative Audit Council said in a report released Tuesday.

The council's long-awaited audit, requested by legislators, found the state's highway system has deteriorated significantly since 2008, even as the DOT added 760 miles of lanes. While that widened congested roads, it added to maintenance costs.

The report comes amid the Legislature's debate over how to fix South Carolina's crumbling roadways.

DOT's reliance on a per-gallon gas tax, unchanged since 1987, can be a problem as inflation increases construction costs and more fuel-efficient vehicles mean people buy less gas, auditors wrote.

Sen. Tom Davis, whose filibusters over the last two years have blocked a gas tax increase, said the report backs up his argument that the Legislature must first change how the agency's governed.

Currently, the DOT is jointly overseen by the governor, who appoints the secretary, and a board of commissioners appointed by legislators. That creates confusion and undermines authority, according to the report.

"We have a structure in place that inherently scatters the money," said Davis, R-Beaufort. "It's not just a theoretical argument. It's why stuff doesn't get done."

Secretary Christy Hall, who took DOT's helm last summer, said the agency complies with the 2007 state law that requires the ranking and prioritizing of projects. She said the "complex" system can be improved. In a statement, she and other DOT leaders agreed on the "vast majority" of recommendations in the 335-page report.

As it is, "it's not a transparent system," said LAC audit manager Brad Hanley. "They may be following things well, but they don't document it. We can't tell with any assurance it's being properly implemented."

The report's recommendations include consolidating priorities to a single list, though the commission – in a separate statement – disagreed.

"A single list will be confusing at best and extremely difficult to justify given the vast differences between types of projects," the commission said.

Currently, projects are prioritized under 15 categories, including interstate widening, paving and bridges. It's unclear how commissioners choose which projects to advance from the various lists, according to the LAC.

As to whether priorities were listed in correct order, auditors could not verify projects' scores. And while state law allows lower-ranked projects to leapfrog higher priorities in certain cases, the commission provided no written justification for such decisions, the report found.

The report also found DOT should periodically review road conditions to identify when pavements are on the verge of deteriorating into poor condition. Once that happens, repairs become much more costly. The LAC suggests publishing a yearly list that specifies those roads and mile markers, which could result in projects being re-prioritized.

Gov. Nikki Haley continued pressuring House leaders on Monday to agree to the road-funding plan the Senate passed last month. It would allow Haley to appoint all commissioners.

But House leaders contend the funding part of the proposal is foolish, as it designates \$400 million annually from state tax collections to roads. In the future, that will require either cutting essential services or simply ignoring the law, which means roadwork won't be funded, House leaders of both parties say.

A House panel meets

Thursday to discuss the audit and the Senate's plan.

Title: **Audit: SC's roads agency needs new income sources**
 Author: BY CASSIE COPE ccope@thestate.com
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Audit: SC's roads agency needs new income sources

Revenues to fix roads not keeping pace with inflation, audit says

Transportation Department's structure also 'creates confusion,' audit says

BY CASSIE COPE

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S.C. lawmakers should tie the state's gas tax to fuel prices or inflation and identify other sources of revenue to pay for road repairs, according to a report released Tuesday.

Compared with other states, South Carolina dedicates the least money to its roads, considering the size of its road system and the traffic carried, the report by the Legislative Audit Council said.

In addition, the structure of the state Transportation Department — governed by an eight-member commission, seven members appointed by legislators, and an agency head, appointed by the governor — “creates confusion” as to who is in

charge, the report said.

In response, Transportation Department head Christy Hall again Tuesday urged lawmakers to pass changes to her agency's structure this year.

“The (Legislative Audit Council) itself noted the confusion over the simple question of who is in charge,” Hall said. “Without that critical issue resolved, it will be nearly impossible to set clear priorities, instill effective accountability and correctly answer the question of where

the buck stops for the organization.”

For two years, S.C. lawmakers have grappled with how to raise more money to repair the state's

crumbling roads.

Many Republican lawmakers argue the structure of the Transportation Department needs to be changed, putting the governor in charge, before more money is sent to the agency.

Lawmakers have made it clear the state's gas tax — the third lowest in the nation — will not be increased this year, an elec-

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The state's 40,000 miles of Transportation Department maintained-roads, excluding interstates, deteriorated from 2008 to 2014, the S.C. Legislative Audit Council found.

54 PERCENT

of primary roads in poor condition in 2014, up from 31 percent in 2008

46 PERCENT

of secondary roads eligible for federal money in poor condition in 2014, up from 31 percent in 2008

54 PERCENT

of secondary roads not eligible for federal money in poor condition in 2014, up from 33 percent in 2008

ROADS

FROM PAGE 3A

tion year, to help pay for road repairs.

The state's reliance on the fuel tax to pay for repairs is problematic because that tax does not adjust to reflect inflation, according to the audit. In addition, more fuel-efficient cars have led to a drop in fuel consumption, threatening the state's gas-tax revenue.

The gas tax also hurts low-income consumers most, the audit said.

The state should adjust

the gas tax to take into account inflation and find more sources of revenue for roads, the audit said.

Options include a levying surcharge on insurance premiums, putting fees on alternative fuel or electric vehicles, and charging fees based on the miles traveled by a vehicle, the audit said.

The Transportation Department has estimated it needs an added \$1.5 billion a year to maintain and expand the state's transportation system.

However, that estimate

“is questionable since it includes a large number of assumptions,” the Audit Committee report said. That estimate is based on data from the Transportation Department and Federal Highway Administration as well as state roads agency staff. But there is the possibility of inaccuracies or bias in the numbers, the report said.

The Transportation Department has said it needs an added \$1.2 billion a year to bring the state's roads to excellent

condition, excluding expansion.

The S.C. House has proposed spending \$415 million on road repairs starting July 1 as part of the state budget, including money spent for repairs after last year's flooding. The state Senate has passed a plan to spend \$400 million on roads.

Gov. Nikki Haley has pushed for more control of the Transportation Department, urging the House to pass the Senate plan. “We have an oppor-

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tunity to fix this problem — and ultimately our roads — this year, but only if the House concurs with the Senate reform plan,” said Haley spokeswoman

Chaney Adams. “The governor will continue to press House members to do just that.”

A House committee will meet Thursday to hear

from Audit Council and Transportation Department officials.

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Title: **LAC report discovers problems aplenty at DOT**
 Author: TIM SMITH TCSMITH@GREENVILLENEWS.COM
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LAC report discovers problems aplenty at DOT

TIM SMITH

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COLUMBIA - The Legislature's watchdog agency issued a lengthy and critical report on the state's highway agency Tuesday, finding fault with the way priorities are set, its governance structure and the way road dollars are spent.

But the long-awaited audit uncovered no acts of fraud or wrongdoing by the state Department of Transportation and concluded that costs by the agency are comparable to costs by transportation agencies in neighboring states.

The 360-page audit also reported what many South Carolina motorists already know, that the state's roads have been in decline for many years even as projects added mileage to the system with revenues that have failed to keep pace with inflation.

DOT

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of projects, has advanced lower-ranked projects over higher-ranked projects without written justification, could not provide the raw data used to calculate scores for the criteria used to rank projects and could not provide the methodology to determine criteria scores.

» DOT does not re-evaluate its project priority lists to determine if more pressing needs exist or if the rank for previously ranked projects is still valid or needs re-ranking. The prioritization process is not transparent to the public, department personnel, the Commission, and others.

» DOT's internal auditing process is flawed because of a lack of independence for its chief internal auditor. The board has changed the original rules governing the auditor, which hamper any independence.

» In 2015, the agency provided \$182 million to local planning agencies for transportation projects, even though only about \$36 million was required by federal law. Much of the money goes for projects that expand capacity but may not address state needs.

And all of that is being governed in a confusing system with two masters, the governor and the Legislature, the Legislative Audit Council reported.

"It comes as no surprise to anyone who has been watching that our transportation system is broken in South Carolina — it's why we've been fighting for real reform to the DOT for years," said Chaney Adams, a spokeswoman for Gov. Nikki Haley. "We have an opportunity to fix this problem — and ultimately our roads — this year, but only if the House concurs with the Senate reform plan, and the governor will continue to press House members to do just that."

In a response included in the report, DOT officials said they agree with most of the report's 148 recommendations and noted there were no

findings of financial mismanagement.

"SCDOT appreciates the LAC recognizing the difficulty of the governance structure that the agency has been operating under since 2007, the broken financial model that has not kept pace with escalating costs, and the redirection of road and bridge money away from SCDOT and its core priorities," said State Transportation Secretary Christy Hall and DOT Chairman Mike Wooten in their official response.

The examination by the LAC also reported:

» DOT does not have a single prioritization list encompassing all types

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» The state has paid out almost \$44 million since 2005 for claims against DOT made by motorists whose vehicles or bodies were damaged as the result of bad roads.

» DOT cannot provide a clear breakdown of expenditures on maintenance and capacity-building activities in order to evaluate the relative priority of these two major functions.

» In 2011, DOT used its employees to inspect privately owned bridges inside a private, gated community

» One county transportation committee not identified in the report spent almost \$69,000 to pave a parking lot at a state university.

» DOT does not accumulate and analyze road condition data with adequate frequency to determine the best times to apply the most cost-effective preservation treatments for non-interstate roads. "Therefore, the Commission, the General Assembly, and the public are not informed of the location and number of roadways that could be treated on a timely basis with the least expensive preservation methods before more expensive solutions are required."

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DOT leaders disagreed with the LAC on the issue of ranking and priority procedures, saying the agency fully complies with the law and using one list for ranking all types of projects would not be practical.

Some of the LAC's recommendations are for DOT, while others are for lawmakers.

Among them: indexing the gas tax for inflation or to another economic indicator; having diverse funding streams to prevent the state from continuing to be over-dependent on the gas tax; making road preservation and maintenance activities a priority; making the secretary or the commission the governing authority at the agency but not both as is now the case; and finding ways to reduce the number of road miles under the state's responsibility while considering alternatives for projects that add mileage to the state system.

The Senate last month passed a roads bill that would give the governor the authority to appoint highway commissioners and allocate \$400 million in General Fund money for road needs.

The House roads bill passed last year would raise about the same amount of money at the gas pump and through increasing the cap on the sales tax for vehicles. It also would give the governor the authority to appoint highway commissioners and provide financial incentives for local governments to take some local roads out of the state's inventory.

House leaders are mulling whether to agree with the Senate bill after saying it does not provide for the state's long-term infrastructure needs with a sustainable revenue source.

Sen. Mike Fair, a Greenville Republican and legislative member of the LAC, said the Senate, by pushing for changing the governance structure and using funds other than the gas tax, have addressed much of what the LAC found wrong.

"I think the pressure has been turned up on the House to accept this approach," he said.

Sen. Lee Bright, a Spartanburg County Republican who requested the LAC audit last year along with other lawmakers, described the report as a "disaster" for DOT and a vindication of his opposition to any increase in the gas tax.

"While I am still going through the details, it is readily apparent that the DOT is bloated, mismanaged and out of control," he said. "The idea that some of my colleagues, at the urging of the Chamber of Commerce and other special interests, wanted to increase taxes on ordinary South Carolinians to dump even more money into this failed agency is beyond belief."

Rep. Gary Simrill, a Rock Hill Republican who chairs a House panel that drafted the House roads bill, said the report reinforces what his panel found in a need for changing the agency's governance and to provide a long-term and sustainable funding source.

He said his panel will meet Thursday to take up the LAC audit.

"I think it's up to us being good stewards of the taxpayer dollar, good stewards of resources and our fiduciary responsibility back to the taxpayers to be sure we do this in the best manner and not just the quickest manner that we can," he said.

Ted Pitts, president of the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, said the audit reinforces the Chamber's arguments for a sustainable, diversified revenue stream for roads.

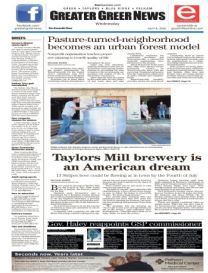
"As the House special committee prepares to meet on Thursday to consider the Senate plan, we are reminded that there is still time this year to not only fix the DOT, but to address roads funding with at least \$600 million of sustainable, recurring funding for our roads," he said. "The state Chamber remains committed to working with General Assembly leaders to provide a long-term solution to fixing South Carolina's roads in order to improve the business climate and keep our citizens safe on their commutes."

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HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF

With \$400 million, according to DOT, 95 percent of South Carolina's interstate miles could be improved.



Title: **Gov. Haley reappoints GSP commissioner**
 Author: MICHAEL BURNS MDBURNS@GREENVILLENEWS.COM
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Gov. Haley reappoints GSP commissioner

MICHAEL BURNS

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Valerie Miller has been reappointed to be one of three Greenville County representatives on the Greenville-Spartanburg Airport Commission.

She will serve a six-year term expiring Dec. 31, 2021, following Gov. Nikki Haley

signed appointment that began in January of this year.

"We are thrilled to have Valerie for another six years,"

said Greenville-Spartanburg Airport Commission Chairperson Minor Shaw. "Her insight, her intellect and the energy she brings to the commission are invaluable."

The Greenville-Spartanburg Airport Commission is the six-member governing body of GSP International Airport, comprised of three Greenville County residents and three Spartanburg County residents

nominated by their respective legislative delegations and appointed by the governor.

Greer's Leland Burch joins Shaw and Miller as Greenville representatives while Hank Ramella, vice chairperson, Bill Barnett and Doug Smith represent Spartanburg County.

- Follow Michael Burns on Twitter @MikeNearGreer



Valerie Miller