

Wm. Weston J. Newton, Chairman
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The month of April normally brings great spring weather to Beaufort County and I'm sure I speak for you when I say we are all ready for it. I am looking forward to mild sunny days on the water – our greatest natural asset. Beaufort County has an estimated 658 sq. miles of water and only 187.5 sq. miles of land. The beauty, recreational opportunities and the economic value of our waterways are priceless.

If only we were capable of commuting everywhere in Beaufort County by boat. Then, we'd have little need of asphalt. Parking lots would be nearly non-existent. Bridges would be for pedestrians. We could carry a bicycle on our boat for travel inland when necessary. It's fun to fantasize about this, but I imagine we'd still have environmental challenges. There would be more docks intruding on our view and endangering our shellfish beds, marine habitat and marshes. We'd have more "no wake" zones. Heavy boat traffic on our waterways would disrupt wildlife and increase the danger of water pollution.

Meanwhile, we must continue to depend upon our traditional highways. Where we need them is obvious in some cases and more difficult to determine in others. We have been wrestling with this issue heavily the past few months.

As you probably know, voters approved \$152 M in sales tax money in 2006 to augment funding for Beaufort County's top ten transportation projects. The economic downturn has since halted growth and the reduction in revenue from impact fees generated by new construction means another important source of roadway funding has come up short. Interestingly, we have generated the expected sales tax revenue, but it only meets a portion of the funding requirements.

County Council and BCTAG formed a task force of staff engineers from the County and municipalities to research the needs and limitations and make a proposal for prioritizing our road projects. Following consideration of the team's recommendations, collectively we decided to delay construction of the bridge portion of Bluffton Parkway Phase 5A, but proceed with the road portion to Buckingham Plantation Drive. We approved the continuation of improvements on U.S. 278 all the way to SC 170 and approved a two-phase approach for SC 170 widening. These projects are essential for safe and timely hurricane evacuations through southern Beaufort County and materially improve the day to day safety and capacity of these facilities. Other approved projects include:

- Complete SC 170 between US 278 and the Bluffton Parkway.
- Delay Bluffton Parkway 5B
- Proceed with the environmental assessment for the northern bypass in the City of Beaufort.
- Proceed with the design of the entire Boundary Street project in the City of Beaufort and with construction in phases.

It was important to consider the investment our County has already made in determining our future direction, but also know that County and municipal leaders are working together with the safety of our citizens as our primary concern.

I am pleased that we have come this far. When the roadway improvement effort accelerated about 5 years ago our roads were extremely overcapacity and in many instances unsafe. There were accidents and bottlenecks every day on US 278. The state had no money to fix the problem. It took a lot of research and thoughtful planning at the local level to arrive at funding methods from several sources. Since then, we have come a long way.

In closing; I wish each of you warm, sunny days and breezy nights and the continued access to all the pleasures that our County provides - both on the land and on the water.

For a complete update and the current status of these ten sales tax projects visit www.bcgov.net and select the "HWY Projects" tab on the home page.