

SPECIAL TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

October 14, 2025

A meeting of the Traffic and Transportation Committee was held on this date, beginning at 3:34 p.m. in person in the Council Chambers at 80 Broad Street and over Zoom.

Committee Members: Councilmember Seekings (Chair), Councilmember Brady (Vice-Chair), Councilmember Gregg, Councilmember Gregorie, Councilmember McBride, and Mayor Cogswell

Also Present: Michael Mathis, Robert Somerville, Elizabeth Dieck, Deja Knight-McMillan, Magalie Creech, Melissa Cruthirds, Mandi Herring, Katie Dahleim, Logan Hampton, Councilmember Parker, Councilmember Appel, Councilmember Bowden, Councilmember Shealy, Jason Kronsberg, and Donna Constance

Chair Seekings called the meeting to order

Invocation

The meeting was opened with a moment of silence led by Chair Seekings.

Approval of the September 23, 2025, meeting minutes

On a motion by Mayor Cogswell, seconded by Councilmember Gregorie, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the September 23, 2025, Traffic and Transportation meeting minutes.

Discussion Regarding City of Charleston Transportation Priorities for Potential Future Transportation Sales Tax Referendum

Chair Seekings said that this was a different setup for the committee meeting and that it was part of a series of four meetings to discuss the City's involvement and projects of interest, as well as reviewing the upcoming County Transportation Sales Tax Referendum. These meetings would be organized by region of the City and then by project. As chairman and a council member, he emphasized that nothing on the economic front in the county was more important than securing funds for infrastructure, with the half-cent sales tax being the main source. The City aims to bring everyone together and support the county, aligning with them and other jurisdictions to pass the half-cent sales tax referendum.

Mayor Cogswell said the purpose of this meeting was to discuss the potential schedule for both the public and council members. They need to begin engaging with advocacy groups, residents, and businesses to encourage participation and establish their objectives for each district. In the previous presentation, they reviewed the letter sent to Chairman Middleton in May of this year and considered the county's priorities, involving City staff from the 2024 referendum, excluding 526. In the 2024 projections, the county estimated that the total revenue from extending the half-cent sales tax would be around \$5.4 billion, rounded up to \$6 billion from the SIB or the state over 20 years. Since then, the county has revised this estimate to \$4.25 billion, and it will be up to them

where that number ultimately lands. The 2024 initiative, which excluded 526, based TST funding on the population of North Charleston, Mount Pleasant, and Charleston. Data collection is needed to determine what's best for the region, which the county will assess. Two priority road projects were the Maybank Highway on Johns Island and Harborview Road, then Folly Road, on James Island. Some improvements were made to Maybank Highway, including widening, light timing, pedestrian improvements, and sidewalks. For Folly Road on James Island, the Rethink Folly concepts had been discussed and studied. That included some beautification, a road safety audit, and initiatives that the DOT would implement. Harborview was the least developed but experienced significant congestion, especially during peak hours, and getting onto the connector was flooded during King tides. The goal of the council members was to collaborate with advocacy groups and the public to vet out the specifics because voters wanted to know where their money was going and when. They could also incorporate flexibility by addressing corridors, general concepts, and specifics where appropriate.

Councilmember Gregorie asked if they could define what the road projects were.

Mayor Cogswell said it was up to them to define based on the guidelines in the ordinance. If there were measures to either raise Harborview or protect it from water crossing over to keep it open, that would fall within the scope of a road project. Since they have an inland flooding partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers related to inland flooding and properties like Harborview, that part of the funding would come from the federal government and not be entirely covered by Charleston County or visitors' tax dollars.

Councilmember Gregorie said he would have to be able to sell this, and if this were not inclusive, it would be tough.

Councilmember Parker mentioned that when they discussed Rethink Folly, phase one had already been funded. She asked about phase two and how much money was needed. They had been waiting to see what the SCDOT would do with their safety audit so they could plan accordingly. This was an important point because if this were phase two of Rethink Folly, other groups like the SCDOT would need to be involved.

Mayor Cogswell said this was a county initiative spanning multiple jurisdictions and that they were not concerned about James Island Town, the public service district, or the City; this was Folly Road.

Councilmember Parker asked if they could focus on the SCDOT and the safety audit.

Mayor Cogswell said the SCDOT was clear that they would fund the safety improvements. They wanted to make this a beautification project, but also make it safer.

Councilmember Parker emphasized the importance of resolving this issue because Phase Two was a significant expense. They would also like to see some of their smaller projects completed, such as the sidewalks and other improvements.

Mayor Cogswell emphasized that this was a vital effort. They constantly heard about traffic issues, and the solution involved funding that would address them. This was not a lottery ticket for everything they might want to accomplish. Not every district would get everything they requested, but at least 75% to 80% would be achievable. They needed to approach this with a spirit of compromise, work together, distribute the benefits fairly, and make the most of the available dollars.

Chair Seekings said he agreed with Councilmember Parker's point that high-impact, readily available, and readily buildable projects, where people can see and feel the effects quickly, are an important component to all of this.

Councilmember McBride said that the BCD COG's goal was to analyze traffic data, study traffic patterns, and examine population growth. The presentation they provided was an introductory overview for Charleston County in June, when they began reviewing the TST 2026. They compared 2019 traffic data around Charleston County with the projected 2045 traffic figures, which were based on population and employment growth. The presentation included specific road service levels across Charleston County and what the BCD COG expected for 2045, including projects already funded. If they presented similar data and frameworks, they would be more likely to accept their recommendations.

Chair Seekings said they focused on road flooding, but what they did was use their roads as storage facilities for excess water. As they considered the projects, needs, and the value they could get—not just in the city but regionally in the county—they recognized that roads which frequently affected and shut down, especially major arteries, need to be part of the conversation. They must coordinate with the county to ensure these factors are included when the list is compiled. Their needs on the peninsula were different from those of Johns Island and James Island, which were no less important but just different. They did not want to just sell this to the county but to work with them to make sure the projects reflect what was real in their world, so they could get relief on it.

Mayor Cogswell said the county had been collaborative in the process, and they wanted to see this succeed. He appreciated all of their efforts to date on engaging with the cities. They felt confident that they were going to work with us, be reasonable and logical to help stretch the dollar. He said they had been great to work with to date and were accommodating, and that would continue as this effort intensifies.

Councilmember Gregg asked whether there would be a coordinated lobbying effort to visit Colombia and pressure the DOT for action. He noted that the half-cent sales tax would generate significant funds for Charleston County, but that would be irrelevant because 526 was a parking lot and would remain so until 2045, when the DOT planned to address the widening of 526. The state had been severely inadequate in tackling transportation issues in its region. There needed to be a unified lobbying effort among all the counties, the City of Charleston, Mount Pleasant, and any other interested Cities. They were not being adequately served by the South Carolina Department of Transportation or the legislature concerning road funding.

Mayor Cogswell said that Speaker of the House Murrell Smith experienced traffic problems in the tri-county area when he visited Mount Pleasant, on his way back to Columbia on 526. They formed a committee of legislators to develop recommendations from Secretary Powell on how to address the growing needs of different regions. He believed there was a concerted effort to modernize the DOT both within the organization and in the legislature.

Chair Seekings said one of the advantages they had in the Lowcountry was Representative Brewer. Staying in touch with him as they go through this process would be important to the success of their efforts as they push forward in their attempt to contribute to the county with the half-cent sales tax.

Councilmember Gregorie asked if the West Edge District, Laurel Island, and Magnolia would be considered as they moved forward.

Mayor Cogswell said those would be considered when they ran the growth models and would be based on permits and entitlements.

Chair Seekings asked if Chairman Middleton had given any indication when the County Council hoped to have a defined referendum so it could go to the public, and they could start advocating to sell it.

Mayor Cogswell said they would like to have this by December so it can be reviewed regionally and then refined, allowing the data to support some of these initiatives. There will also be a final review before it goes on the ballot.

Chair Seekings asked if there was a similar ask of Mount Pleasant and North Charleston.

Mayor Cogswell said they all have been tasked with the same.

Councilmember Appel said that, in addition to defining the lists of projects, which was critical for gaining the support needed to reverse the figures from last November, it was important to remember some of the non-project-specific components of the overall sales pitch to get the public on board. The half-cent sales tax was supposed to raise billions of dollars, but no one knew where those billions were spent. Even though the roads had been repaved and looked great, people still had no idea where all the money had gone. Restoring public trust required the county to identify smaller, achievable projects. One issue with the 2016 sales tax was that they adopted a pay-as-you-go model, but did not bond that money. By bonding money from the 2026 sales tax, they could fund projects immediately and get things moving. When considering managing multiple multi-million-dollar projects across the county, they needed to assess whether they had the staff and technical capacity to complete them. Critical analysis was necessary. At the same time, they needed to inform the public of the steps they would take so that if the public entrusted them with the money and gave them authority to manage it, they would be capable of completing the projects efficiently.

Councilmember McBride said the purpose of the sales was to fund 90% of state roads. Charleston County was not raising taxes to improve county or city roads; they were state roads that could not keep up with population growth.

Councilmember Shealy said this was critical for Districts 2, 5, and 10 of the outer West Ashley, which was struggling with infrastructure and traffic issues and was experiencing growth.

Chair Seekings said the more participation, both internally and from the public, the more likely the referendum was to pass and be popular.

With there being no further business, the Committee adjourned the meeting at 4:17 p.m.

Clerk of Council's Office

Donna Constance