

**RIDE IV
SALES TAX COMMISSION**

**March 20, 2024
10:00 a.m.**



**HORRY COUNTY
GOVERNMENT & JUSTICE CENTER
COUNTY COUNCIL
CONFERENCE ROOM**

**1301 2nd Avenue
Conway, SC 29526**

Commission Members:

Robert Wilfong, Chair
William Goldfinch IV, Vice-Chair
Jay Baldwin
Cecil Patrick
Jody Prince
Chad Prosser

AGENDA

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance**
- 3. Public Input – You must sign up with Mrs. Courtney Richardson (843.915.5160) by 4:00 p.m. the day prior to the meeting.**
- 4. Approval of the Agenda**
- 5. Approval of the Minutes – February 21, 2024**
- 6. Approval of the 200 Miles of Dirt Road Paving Project List**
- 7. Review and Approval of the Proposed Transportation Sales Tax Ballot Question**
- 8. Future Meeting Dates: April 25, 2024 (if necessary)**
- 9. Executive Session (if necessary)**
- 10. Adjourn**

**RIDE IV
SALES TAX COMMISSION**

**February 21, 2024
10:00 a.m.**



**HORRY COUNTY
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COUNTY COUNCIL
CONFERENCE ROOM**

**1301 2nd Avenue
Conway, SC 29526**

MINUTES

Members Present: Robert Wilfong, Chairman; William Goldfinch IV, Vice Chairman; Jay Baldwin; Cecil Patrick; Jody Prince and Chad Prosser.

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Jason Thompson; Andy Markunas; David Gilreath; David Jordan; Leah Quattlebaum; Courtney Richardson; Tammy Stevens; Adrianna Seals; Randy Plummer; Mark Hoeweler; and Brian Piascik.

Public Input: None

In accordance with the FOIA, notices of the meeting were provided to the press stating the time, date, and place of the meeting.

Chairman Wilfong called the meeting to order at approximately 10:00 a.m.

Jay Baldwin gave the invocation.

Chad Prosser led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Wilfong asked if anyone signed up for public input. Courtney Richardson stated there was none.

Chairman Wilfong asked if there were any changes to the agenda; Chad Prosser asked if a ballot question discussion could take place. Chairman Wilfong stated that could take place after the discussion of future meeting dates. Chad Prosser made a motion to approve the agenda as amended, William Goldfinch seconded. The amended agenda was approved unanimously.

Chairman Wilfong asked if there were any changes to the meeting minutes from the December 21, 2023 meeting. Chad Prosser asked that the meeting minutes be amended to show he was present. Chad Prosser made a motion to approve the amended minutes; Jay Baldwin seconded. The amended minutes were approved unanimously.

Chairman Wilfong stated we have concluded the public information meetings around the county, part of the process was taking in comments, which were provided in the packet, and Jason Thompson will give a brief overview.

Jason stated there were 7 meetings held across the county. There were approximately 35 constituents and a total of 55-60 total including staff and municipalities on average. There were 3 ways to submit comment cards which were in person at the public information meetings, online, and e-mail. Out of the cards received, after going through and picking out the “yes” and “no”, we had 61 in favor of RIDE 4 and 26 were not. The major takeaway from the ones not in favor of RIDE 4 was the program is too much money, timing is too long, and some stated that more information was needed which could have been from those who did not attend the meetings and was unable to ask questions. Majority of the comments were in favor of the program. There were some additional projects submitted through the comments which were:

- Widen US 17 from Farrow Parkway to US 501
- Widen Hwy 57 from SC 9 to NC border
- Widen Hwy 905
- Raise Hwy 22
- Widen Hwy 701 South
- Widen Hwy 378
- Widen Hwy 905 to SC 9
- Improve Intersection at SC 9, Hwy 90 and Hwy 17
- Widen Sea Mountain Hwy from SC 9 to Hwy 90
- Atlantic Beach which had 9 comment cards submitted requesting projects within Atlantic Beach
- Extend Gardner Lacy Road
- Widen Red Bluff Road

Some general comments several concurred with were to make sure the projects were bicycle and pedestrian friendly. Other comments were to include animal crossings for projects within the wetlands or remote areas of the county, choose routes that had the least amount of negative impacts on natural resources, and the displays at the meetings were impressive.

David Gilreath stated a copy of all the comments received were given to the commission members. However, to be respectful of privacy, the name and personal information of those who submitted the comments have been redacted, but we do have the original copies.

William Goldfinch said some of the feedback he received was a misunderstanding from the citizens thinking this was a new tax or additional tax. He thinks there is a big educational component involved with us informing the public especially when attempting to go from a 7-year project to a 25-year project. This is not an additional tax or a new tax, but an extension of what has been going on for 20+ years. It is imperative staff, commission members and the media inform the citizens this is just a continuation of what’s been going on for a long time to get done what needs to be done.

Chad Prosser stated he received several questions about the Interstate Connector project and whether or not the funding included the bridge across the Pee Dee River. He stated the projection

includes the bridge and the Horry County portion, not the portion in Dillion and Marion County. Based upon other comments he noticed, we are not fully funding this project. This is based off a local match funding, what we expect to be a maximum local match, but we do expect state and federal resources to be put into it as well. Chairman Wilfong stated if the State and Federal agencies do not contribute, the project ends and the program ends. Mr. Prosser stated this would shorten the length of the tax if the State and Federal agencies did not contribute. David Gilreath stated there is an expectation the SCDOT and Federal Government would complete the interstate to Horry County so that it's not a bridge to nowhere. Chad stated those he has spoken too feels this would put pressure on SCDOT to finish the portion that is their responsibility.

Chairman Wilfong said one thing that has been discussed and needs additional information is the mass transit element. There has been some feedback on helping Coast RTA build a new facility out of the City of Conway to the City of Myrtle Beach and he would like to have discussion for consideration. He thinks the budget is somewhere between \$20-30 million.

Mr. Prosser said from his understanding, this is a priority of Myrtle Beach as well as Conway to move those facilities but would defer to the representative of those areas for their opinions if that is something that needs to be included. Cecil Patrick said this is something that needs to be considered and they need to get out of Conway since Myrtle Beach is where the bulk of everything goes on at.

William Goldfinch stated this is in line with the City of Conway. Coast RTA presented their plans to the City of Conway a few years ago to move their maintenance facility to the City of Myrtle Beach where the bulk of their service exist. Mr. Goldfinch acknowledged the importance of the services offered but some of the feedback he has received is if everything passes, public transportation is going to be given an approximate amount of \$1 million a month, what exactly is that going towards?

Chairman Wilfong stated there has been some discussion with Coast RTA and asked Brian Piascik if he could answer some questions since he was present.

Brian stated Coast RTA has always been undersized and not sized for a region for 200,000, much less 400,000. They have done some work to see what the region needs in regards to public transit, and it outpaces more than \$7.25 million. He thinks it is important for everyone to understand, \$180 million of the \$300 million is after year 12.5 so it's all backloaded because of the growth projections. Mr. Piascik also stated they are shovel ready to expand services but outside of the building, they have several transit coaches that need to be replaced which is about \$4.2 million. They are also in need of passenger counters, in addition to a new maintenance facility, two passenger facilities, and a third one in North Myrtle Beach over time. Their strategy is less about big buses, but more about the smaller vehicles. There is a large senior population, and using Carolina Forest as an example, within all the neighborhoods, it would be difficult to get in and out of them with large buses. Brian said they are very grateful for what the commission and county has done for Coast RTA over the last few years but they are ready to be a bigger part of the transportation system. Brian stated he is about to deliver his seventh clean audit in a row and they are a good use of public dollars and moving forward they could be a big benefit to the region.

Chairman Wilfong stated he understands they are undersized, but when compared to different markets, cost is \$1 per ride, which is the least expensive, but what some would like to know is how can Coast RTA get to where they need to be. Brian stated he does believe the fare box is lower than it should be, but if you compare to New York City which has about a 25% fare box collection on their system. In the United States, the fares do not generate money to operate, they basically pay for gas.

William Goldfinch stated in New York City, you have more economy of scale because you have more riders; you don't have an empty subway. He asked what can Coast RTA do as an organization to generate more revenue. He used the example if Coast RTA is given a certain amount of dollars to build a new facility, that's tangible, but when stating they are being given \$299 million over a 25-year period, he needs to know where that money is going. When you can see what's being done, such as buying new buses or hiring new employees, that can be quantified. Mr. Goldfinch said he supports what Coast RTA does and his constituents of Conway need his services, and they value the services, as well as the Grand Strand, but he wants to be able to quantify it.

Brian stated currently, they spend about \$700,000 a month, mostly in wages. A lot of the expenses are services and not necessarily tangible.

Mr. Goldfinch asked what would happen if RIDE 4 doesn't pass? Brian stated he would hope the county would continue to support using the road use fee. When Covid-19 hit in the 2020-2021 timeframe, they received a good amount of money from the Federal Government and he replaced some of his equipment and laid out a plan to add a little more service over the next 5 years. This would hopefully show the benefit of expanding services would be leading up to and going after a funding source in 2026. Coast RTA was prepared for RIDE 4 to happen in its current form and then try to do something in 2026. Three things out there for Coast RTA are property tax, vehicle registration fees and sales tax in South Carolina.

Chad Prosser asked what percentage of the funds are Local versus State and Federal? Brian said currently between 35-40% are local funds for operating expense. Chad asked how that shifts or changes over the next 25 years? Brian said it would go up slightly because they would use the Federal dollars more on the capital side. They receive urban and rural formula funds. The urban funds are based upon population which is about \$2.4 million a year and can change, depending on the census. Brian also stated there are no federal programs for tourist transportation.

Chad said he remembers from many years ago, the annual budget debates, which made for difficult planning on Coast RTA's side because you didn't know what you would get from year to year. He thinks there is great value he doesn't want to go understated in the fact this would secure a recurring funding source that's not subject to annual budget debates. There is some value in replacing the current funding with a steady known recurring source which would allow Coast RTA to use other sources of funding for capital needs which has not been able to be done before due to being on an annual year to year budget.

Chairman Wilfong stated the bulk of the money are the wages and operational cost and that would free up the money that is coming from the county now which would come back to the county. For replacement of buses and passenger facilities, he asked how much money would that be? Brian stated he would need \$20 million for the maintenance facility and \$2.5 million each for the passenger facilities, one in Myrtle Beach and one in Conway.

Cecil Patrick asked what is the impact going to be to move everything to Myrtle Beach, is that going to save money? Brian said it would save about \$600,000 a year and it also helps with response time if there is a service interruption. Cecil stated Myrtle Beach is trying to become more pedestrian friendly which should allow Coast RTA to transport more people. He asked if they had any numbers on that or has it been looked at? Brian said they do not but have constant communication with the City of Myrtle Beach regarding shelters and where the stop locations are. Down the road, he would like to work with all the jurisdictions with pedestrian facilities and improving services. Brian said he would be happy to lay out specifics what they plan to use the money for.

Chairman Wilfong asked if we consider additional funding on the maintenance and passenger facility, that would be a separate line item on the project list, not in addition to the mass transit item? Chad Prosser stated this is fundable under a transportation tax but this needs to be clear when we get to discussing the question and how that's phrased so there is no confusion. Chairman Wilfong asked what was the pleasure of the commission?

William Goldfinch asked from a funding standpoint, where is the \$25 million coming from? If this passed in November, when could this be built? Brian stated it is ready to be let and would probably take two years to build. Coast RTA has tried three years in a row to receive federal dollars but have been denied each time and will continue to apply. Chad Prosser asked if it would help if we provided some federal match; Brian stated this would help his cause.

Mr. Goldfinch used the Highway 22 Extension project as an example, saying if the project came in under the estimated cost, the tax would end. He would like to see a breakdown of what exactly is needed and how much it would cost from Coast RTA, so there is some accountability held instead of just handing over the money. Mr. Goldfinch asked if this made sense. Chairman Wilfong said it does. The biggest items on the list for Coast RTA are wages and replacement of existing capital. Brian stated this in place with Richland County and Charleston County; he will see what type of agreements those transit authorities have with their jurisdictions and how they plan. He knows he will have to show the dollars being spent in Horry County. He would like to see where the priorities are and give them a certain level of funding. Brian also stated Coast RTA is a public entity and their books are open for anyone to go view at anytime they would like to.

Chad Prosser asked Brian how much federal funding has been requested. Brian stated they requested \$42 million last year. This money was for three facilities as well as five electric buses and five electric charging stations, which is required to be eligible for the funding. Chad asked how much this was towards the facility; Brian stated in the low \$30 million range. Brian also mentioned if they run the parcel, they could lower the request. Chad asked if the City of Myrtle Beach owns the parcel and Brian said it is privately owned.

Chairman Wilfong said he would like to see the commission fund this. He recognizes there are still some questions, which Brian will come back and discuss.

Chairman Wilfong said he would like a motion, as a separate line item on the project list, to provide funding, \$25 million, to move the Coast RTA facility from the City of Conway to the City of Myrtle Beach. Chad Prosser stated he is in favor of this, but with the other projects, we are funding a percentage and anticipating federal funding. He would like to know if the commission wants to fund a percentage to allow some pressure on federal funding. Brian stated their ask is 50% but they may not get 50% but he would still like to move forward with the project even if he got 35%. Chad Prosser asked if we did 70% formula wise, would that be a safe range, like we have done with other projects, David Gilreath stated it would make execution of the referendum difficult potentially if it is subject to outside funding. David Jordan stated if there was no federal funding, this could happen in 2025-2026 but if it's contingent on federal funding, then it would hang out until the tax is extinguished or they get the federal funding, so it could potentially linger for 25 years. Chad stated he does not feel strongly one way or another, he thinks it is a good project, he just means it is consistent with how other federal projects have taken place.

Cecil Patrick made a motion to fund Coast RTA, Chad Prosser seconded. David Jordan stated this is for \$20 million for the maintenance facility and \$2.5 million each for a passenger facility in the City of Conway and City of Myrtle Beach.

William Goldfinch asked if they get the federal funding, does the money come back to the program, do you end the tax early, or what happens? David Jordan stated it can come back into the program or it can be used for other capital needs for the bus company, which would include the buses. Mr. Prosser said it should be specified. William Goldfinch stated 25 years is a long time, what happens if Coast RTA is not here, we're talking about public transportation, it could be a monorail, who knows, but are we specific to Coast RTA, how does this work? Chairman Wilfong stated this is why he would like for it to be a separate item because it is being specific. David Jordan said the \$25 million would be specific to Coast RTA but if you don't fund the whole thing, which the motion was, if it's based on the match, the language may have to be adjusted.

Mr. Goldfinch asked where the \$25 million is coming from. Chairman Wilfong said this is a City of Myrtle Beach project and asked Mr. Cecil Patrick is this is viable to take from Seaboard Street. He stated Seaboard Street, as presented, is \$33 million; Cecil asked if there was any where else to take from. Chairman Wilfong said it can come from the Kings Highway Improvements which is at \$105 million. Mr. Patrick said the city needs Seaboard Street. Brian P. stated even though most of their services are in Myrtle Beach, they are serving the entire county. Mr. Goldfinch said take half from the Kings Highway Improvements project, and half from the dirt road projects. Chad Prosser said the dirt road component is a big component in achieving the votes needed in the unincorporated areas of the county for the past RIDE plans. Mr. Goldfinch said if there is a strategic part of this, he would withdraw that comment. Jody Prince stated he would not be in favor of taking the money from the dirt roads. Chairman Wilfong stated he don't believe that is the way to go since it is a large constituency. He understands it is a regional product, but taking it from the Kings Highway Improvements, since the facility is going to the

city, he sees it coming from that project and if it gets funded from a grant, then the money goes back to the Kings Highway Improvements project.

Mr. Prosser stated Cecil Patrick made the motion and asked if that was the motion; Mr. Patrick stated the motion stands. Chairman Wilfong asked if there was a second. Chad Prosser seconded.

Chairman Wilfong restated the motion. The \$25 million to Coast RTA is for the maintenance facility and two passenger facilities. The budget of which will come from the Kings Highway Improvements (Highway 17 Business/Farrow Parkway) project. Should Coast RTA get grants to offset the \$25 million, the balance from the grants goes back to the Kings Highway Improvements project. Cecil Patrick stated this is correct. Chad Prosser stated he stands with his second.

David Jordan wanted confirmation the Kings Highway Improvement project is now \$25 million short; Chairman Wilfong stated yes. David Jordan then asked how are we taking the money out; Chairman Wilfong stated less scope. David Gilreath stated that is very difficult, you could force the scope to be reduced linearly so we don't build as many linear feet of the project but it may force the beginning of the project to midblock somewhere it's not appropriate. As difficult as all of the projects are, if we bargain and barter between projects and take money from one to another, it will make it difficult years down the road. What he suggests, is amend it stating we want to do it from this beginning to the ending point, the definition can be given later, but don't tie it to the dollar. Chad Prosser stated these are not firm estimates. David Gilreath stated the estimates are based on general scopes.

Chairman Wilfong asked what is recommended. David Gilreath stated staff would recommend that you select a project, fund the project, and let us manage the project as we get down the road. An estimate has been given on standards, but at this point, staff cannot say we can reduce those standards. This is something that has not been done before. We have committed on making improvements on a given road and that's what we did. We will balance the projected cost and scope but it puts us in an odd spot from the referendum standpoint.

Brian Piascik asked if he could make a suggestion. He said he understands the assumptions for federal and state participation are project by project. He is not sure if the mass transit line item has an assumption relation to federal dollars. If we adjusted the federal participation for the whole program by less than 0.25%, then you fit the \$25 million. He suggests staff goes back to see if it fits. Coast does not want to take it from another project.

Chairman Wilfong stated he knows it's all planning. He knows we cannot just plan to print money, but at some place, this has to fall between the lanes, it's a lot of money. Brian stated it is a lot, but when you look at the bigger scope, what is \$25 million out of \$6 billion. Chairman Wilfong stated he understands that, but pennies make dollars, and at point does \$25 million not make a difference. Chad Prosser stated in terms to the referendum, you've got to put the numbers in to allocate them, so it's got to come from somewhere by definition. Jay Baldwin asked if it was a timing issue that is the concern with taking and redesigning the project where you're going to take the funding from? David Gilreath said timing is a consideration with all of them; it all affects how we end.

Chad Prosser asked what the total cost was for the Kings Highway Improvements project. Chairman Wilfong stated the budget is \$105 million.

William Goldfinch asked what the budget was for the Seaboard Street project. Chairman Wilfong stated the budget is \$33 million. William then asked how important is the Seaboard Street project to the City of Myrtle Beach. Cecil Patrick stated it is very important.

Chad Prosser stated where we stand with the motion, if it were passed, it would require staff to go back and adjust the scope before we finalize the question. David Gilreath stated if we were to adjust the scope, he would suggest to adjust the start and end point which is around 25% of the project. You can only take off so much before you have to stop the project so if you kept the current length, and cut 25% off of it, you may not be able to execute the project in its entirety therefore the scope would need to be adjusted as it's described on the referendum. Chad stated he would defer to the City of Myrtle Beach whether or not they wanted to do that. David Gilreath stated it may just become a nonviable project. Chairman Wilfong stated if you looked at the project description, it seems like any of the elements could be reduced. Chad stated since it is not bid ready, there are not numbers associated with the description. David Gilreath stated, if it's a few percentage points, it can be adjusted.

Chairman Wilfong stated there is a motion on the table and there has been discussion, to take the funds out of Project K, King Highway Improvements, for the maintenance facility and two passenger facilities for Coast RTA. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Wilfong stated there was some input from the Town of Atlantic Beach. They presented some projects for the commission to consider and those projects are challenging. The projects are constrained with right-of-way on Kings Highway, help acquire right-of-way for the extension of 30th Avenue South to make it a 4-way intersection. He believes we need more information from staff and costing from SCDOT prior to making nay determination on that. Chairman Wilfong asked if there were any comments on that. Jay Baldwin stated what their number one objective was to turn a 3-way stop light to a 4-way stop light which would take some imminent domain due to structures there blocking where that road would go. He also stated there is no way to know without doing some research and that funding would have to come from somewhere, and we don't know how much the funding would be and it will take some time to determine that, if it's not too late. Chairman Wilfong stated it may be too late. Jay then stated there is some intersection improvement funding that has yet to be identified and this could potentially end up there.

Chairman Wilfong asked if there were any other amendments to the project list or things to discuss based on public input.

Chad Prosser made a motion to move the project list, as amended; William Goldfinch seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Chairman Wilfong stated the future meeting dates were March 20, 2024 and perhaps April 25, 2024.

Chairman Wilfong stated the next discussion item was to briefly discuss the ballot question. Chad Prosser said there has been discussion how we designate those extra funds and it would be nice if we had some options from staff, or staff recommendations, when we come back for the question since there are different ways to bind that and satisfy all the interest. He thinks this has been a process that has worked very well for the RIDE programs and with the RIDE committee with the interest of all concerns so we need to find a way, out of the 25-year program, to provide for that. The reason we have the future funding in there is so we have flexibility to address unknown needs we do not know at this point, but in 10 or 15 years, it will become evident. Chairman Wilfong stated if you look at those two projects together, you're looking at \$600 million, which is in essence, a RIDE program which is how he's been thinking about it. At years 10-15, there could be a committee to rank additional needs to assign that money. Mr. Prosser stated we have taken departure from the RIDE programs and going with the transportation tax that doesn't have the same statutory requirements but we are following the same process because it's been a good process between the cities, county, and leadership. We just need to make sure that's bound if we're going to do the 25-year program, that it's bound for the future somehow and there are different ways that could be done. It could be done by the ballot question, an ordinance, agreement with the League of Cities and county then bound by ordinances. He does not have a preference, but would like some feedback from staff on how to do that. That is something that will need to be dealt with at the next meeting when discussing the ballot question. Chairman Wilfong stated that has been talked about and asked if it was scheduled for the next meeting. David Gilreath stated it is penciled in on the next agenda which will be published the week prior to the meeting. It is our intent to bring some information. David Jordan has been working with some outside counsel to bring the questions to a form that can be sent to the commission members so they can look at it with some recommendations and things they may want to consider. The form will be sent to them prior to the next meeting and if the commission is comfortable with it at the next meeting, they could pass it. Chad Prosser stated that would be helpful and the reason he raised it at this meeting is because it is something we received public input on and questions about through the public input process. David Jordan said after talking with some at the meetings, this would not start until 10-15 years later for discussion on the projects. Chairman Wilfong said no sooner than year 10, no later than year 15, there is a committee, like the Advisory Committee, that uses GSATS ranking and methodology to identify projects. David Gilreath asked should we leave that as an appropriate methodology due to not knowing what GSATS may be; everyone agreed.

Chairman Wilfong asked if there was any need for executive session. There was none.

Chairman Wilfong asked if there was a motion to adjourn. Chad Prosser made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Jay Baldwin seconded. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:08 a.m.