

Minutes of the Jasper County Council Transportation Sales Tax Advisory Committee Meeting

Date: August 22, 2025

Body: Jasper County Council Transportation Sales Tax Advisory Committee (TSAC)

I. Opening and Introductions

1. **Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer:** The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance and a prayer for deliberation, time, and energy to fulfill the promise of improving Jasper County roads.
2. **Introduction of Consultant:** Representatives of Infrastructure Consulting Engineers LLC (ICE), referring to them as "the consultant" or "program manager".

II. Program Management Contract Review and Recommendation

1. **Contract Development:** The proposed contract with ICE was developed based on the scope of work outlined in the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and adjusted through discussions to address potential missing items upfront.
2. **Contract Flexibility:** The contract terms were designed to be flexible, allowing the Committee to **add and subtract projects** as deemed wise, providing ease for County Council by avoiding the need for approval on every minor adjustment.
3. **Financial Terms (Not-to-Exceed Fee):**
 - The fee is structured based on assumed tasks and 12 projects being moved forward in the first five years (though this could range from 8 to 15).
 - The proposed **not-to-exceed fee for program management is \$8.95 million** over the first five years.
 - This amount is approximately **2.4% of the total program cost** during that initial period.
 - The estimated program management cost for the full 15-year life of the program is projected to be around **6.1%**, noting the front-loaded costs required to rapidly stand up the operation.
4. **Recommendation Sought:** The Committee recommend to County Council that the contract is **fair and reasonable**. The contract is scheduled to go before County Council on September 2nd for approval.

III. Discussion of Consultant Scope and Strategy

1. **Project Urgency and Funding:** Mr. Mayor of Hardeeville noted that Argent Boulevard is the Committee's top priority, and constituents are anxious for design work to start. He recommended that if a **small bond** is required to initiate funding immediately, he is in favor of it to "get moving as soon as possible".
2. **Consultant Duties (Program Management Defined):**
 - ICE will help determine **financial needs** (how much money is required and how to acquire it, e.g., bonding) and ensure funds are spent wisely.
 - ICE ensures the county adheres to **SC DOT rules** when working on jurisdictional roads (like Argent Boulevard), preventing costly rework.
 - ICE handles the entire process, including requesting qualifications (RFQs) for separate design engineers, reviewing construction documents, managing **right-of-way acquisition**, and **utility coordination**.
 - ICE will manage construction letting, bid receiving, recommending awards, and overseeing construction inspection to ensure materials meet DOT standards.

3. **Leveraging Funds:** ICE will coordinate with agencies like the Low Country Council of Governments (COG) and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to secure additional **federal and state money** to supplement and leverage the local sales tax dollars.
4. **Local vs. Federal Determination:** The Committee discussed the need to determine early whether projects will be **local or federal**. This decision is critical because changing funding sources mid-project (e.g., from local to federal) requires restarting, which wastes money. ICE will help make this "very first" determination.
5. **Public Transparency Strategy:**
 - Public information is considered a "**big component**".
 - An expert **public relations firm** will serve as a subconsultant to quickly stand up a **website/public-facing program** to ensure transparency regarding financial expenditures, project status, and schedules.
 - The initial cost of standing up this communications program is why the initial percentage of the management fee is higher.
 - A suggestion was made to use **QR codes** at project sites to link directly to regular updates, ensuring citizens are aware of progress and countering public misconception/negativity about unspent funds (as seen in Buford County).

IV. Financial and Collection Report

1. **Financial Report (Mr. Skinner):**
 - **Old Penny Tax (2016):** The total accumulated funds currently in the bank are **\$28,729,516.89**.
 - While the county collected more previously (around \$30 million), this figure reflects current available cash.
 - Approximately **\$17 million is still obligated** for ongoing projects, including about \$7 million for the Exit 21 project, and remaining funds for Exit 3.
 - This leaves an estimated **\$11 to \$12 million in unobligated funds** that can be utilized.
 - **New Penny Tax (Current):** The first quarterly deposit (covering May and June) totaled **\$830,023.91**.
 - **Financial Planning:** County staff confirmed a meeting is scheduled for August 28th with bond counsel and the financial advisor, potentially including the ICE folks, to discuss bonding and availability, anticipating a key decision in the fall (within the next 60 days).

V. Administrative and Future Meetings

1. **Staff Administration:** Mr. Fulghum reported that staff will take steps to proceed once the contract is approved by County Council (after September 2nd). The ordinance for the Green Belt portion is delayed and will likely surface for first reading on September 15th.
2. **Meeting Frequency:** Staff anticipate needing **monthly meetings** with the Committee for the first six to nine months to regularly review progress and processes as they are being established.
3. **Next Meeting Date:** Due to a lack of immediate updates following the September 2nd council meeting, the Committee agreed to skip September.
 - **Action Item:** The next meeting was set for **October 17th at 10 a.m. in Ridgeland**.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned following a motion and second.