Minutes of the Jasper County Transportation Sales Tax Advisory Committee

Date: October 17, 2025 [Title] **Source:** Excerpts from the transcript of the video "Jasper County Transportation Sales Tax Advisory Committee 10/17/25" uploaded on the YouTube channel "JC Media" [Title].

1. Committee Status and Quorum

Mr. Gruber noted that the committee did not have a **quorum to make an official recommendation**. A four-member body requires at least three members present to achieve a quorum. Although lacking a quorum prevents official recommendations, conversation continued.

2. Sales Tax Program Structure and Work Plan

The committee discussed the recommendations presented by ICE (the media consultant).

- **Program Phasing:** ICE recommends dividing the sales tax program into three 5-year periods.
- **First 5-Year Plan:** ICE is currently developing the work plan for the first 5-year period. This plan, based on committee priority lists and available funding, will include **upgrades to Argent Boulevard and improvements to parts of US 278**. Details will be developed over the next 90 days.
- **Future Planning:** A second 5-year plan will be developed in 2029, based on the financial information available at that time.
- **Flexibility and Priorities:** Concerns were raised that setting five-year periods might make the plan too rigid, potentially preventing the committee from acting on new opportunities. It was emphasized that the committee must remain flexible, though they currently need direction to start work.
- The established priorities from the referendum (1A and 1B) are Argent and US 278.
- **Action (Staff Direction Modification):** The initial two proposed bullet points of direction were combined into a single work directive.

Direction: Direct staff to develop a work plan for **Argent Boulevard, US 278 between Exit 8 and John Smith, and additional portions of US 278**. Staff should report back to the committee with recommendations as additional funding becomes available.

3. US 278 Gap Project (John Smith Road to Exit 8)

The committee discussed correspondence received from Carla Vincent, Hardeeville's engineer, regarding intersection improvements at John Smith and US 278.

- **Need:** Carla Vincent requested that sales tax funding be used to fill an approximately **0.7-mile gap** between the SC DOT's Exit 8 project and Hardeeville's John Smith project.
- **Advantage:** Moving ahead with this portion of 278 simultaneously with discussions about Argent Boulevard was advised, as it addresses a safety concern (the intersection is becoming "more and more dangerous") and traffic backups, particularly at the Margaritaville light. Working on this section now presents a "window of opportunity".
- **Coordination:** It was noted that this simultaneous work could potentially save money and time by using one developer/engineering firm.

Action (IGA Recommendation): The committee recommended beginning the development of an **IGA (Intergovernmental Agreement)** between the County and Hardeeville to jointly work on the John Smith exit/gap project.

- **Motion:** A motion was made, seconded, and passed by unanimous vote (I: all in favor, none against) to move forward with the list of recommendations, specifically including the development of an IGA/MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) to be brought before both County Councils.
- **Media Strategy:** The development of the IGA/MOU needs significant press coverage, and ICE will be relied upon to help disseminate this information.

4. Financial Projections and Tracking

The financial projections derived from the pre-approval referendum collection were discussed.

- **Projections:** The projection for the current (partial, 8-month) collection year was **$829,000**. The projection for the next full year (2026) is **$12.1 million**, based on a projected 12.5% increase over the last referendum.
- **Tracking:** It was suggested that the committee should review collections against these projections in the first quarter of the year. A request was made to obtain the spreadsheet listing projections against actual collections to gauge progress.

5. Bond Ordinance Discussion

Kimberly Burgess provided a summary of the General Obligation Bond Ordinance prepared by bond counsel, Howell and Lincoln.

- **Purpose:** The ordinance authorizes Jasper County Council to approve the issuance of **General Obligation (GO) bonds** previously approved by voters in the November 2024 general election.
- **Discretion:** Issuance of the bonds (up to $150 million) is completely discretionary for County Council.
- **Structure and Security (Article Three):** The total $150 million may be broken into several series of bonds issued at times that suit construction schedules. The bonds are secured by a pledge of the **full faith, credit, and taxing power of the county** (property tax levied). However, the county is committed to first applying collected transportation sales tax revenues to pay the debt service on the bonds.
- **Rating:** The bonds are expected to be rated Double A minus by Standard & Poor's rating service.
- **Small Borrowings:** Series of bonds $1.5 million or less, with a final maturity of 10 years or less, may be sold directly to a bank without a competitive sales process. This approach can reduce issuance costs, as credit rating agencies charge fees for larger borrowings.
- **General Obligation:** The chairman questioned why the ordinance mentions the property tax as security when the referendum specified the penny tax as collateral. It was clarified that because the county is not collateralizing roadways (like a mortgage) and is not using a lease/installment purchase, it must be structured as a GO bond, inherently pledging the county's full taxing authority.

Action (Bond Ordinance Recommendation): A recommendation was requested for the committee to advise the County Council to authorize the ordinance allowing for the $150 million authority and to begin the process with the first serialized issuance.

- **Motion:** A motion was made, seconded, and passed by unanimous vote (I: all in favor, none against) to approve recommending the bond ordinance to County Council.

6. Branding (Taglines and Logos)

ICE presented several taglines and logos for consideration to establish a public face for the program.

- **Taglines/Slogans:** A member suggested that staff run the proposed taglines by a creative team. A suggestion was made to keep taglines short (around five words) and clearly reference the penny tax.

- **Logos:** Suggestions included incorporating a reference to the **penny tax** within the logo design. One committee member favored the top-left option, which marries with the county logo and includes a flower symbol (Dogwood).
- **Public Communication:** A crucial item raised was the need for **signage** once branding is adopted, displaying messages like "project in design" or "project in permitting" to inform the public that work is being done even if orange barrels are not visible. Signs should also state, "your tax dollars at work".
- **Action:** Staff will gather input on taglines and logos and aim to present options (with variations) for final approval at the next meeting.

7. Argent Boulevard Utility Relocation

The committee was informed of a potential utility conflict on Argent Boulevard at the intersection of Shortcut and Argent, which continues to experience frequent accidents.

- **Conflict:** Electrical transmission lines in the corridor may need to be rerouted behind commercial businesses, a process being worked on with Dominion Energy and DOT. This relocation is necessary because the intersection will be signalized, and power lines conflict with traffic signals.
- **Funding Consideration:** Staff requested consideration from the committee on whether they would be open to recommending the **relocation of these power lines as an allowable expense** from sales tax referendum funds.
- **Opportunity:** It was noted that this relocation, driven partly by impact fees (already covering $6.5 million worth of improvements), eliminates a future utility conflict that the sales tax program would otherwise have to pay for, thus stretching the county's money.
- **Next Steps:** If the committee agrees, staff recommends developing an IGA for this specific project. Staff advised being proactive and communicating publicly why this work is being pursued now.

8. Next Meeting

Staff requires approximately 1-2 weeks to gather and synthesize input on the tagline and logo.

- **Tentative Date:** The next meeting, focused potentially on finalizing the branding, is tentatively set for **November 21st at 10:00 AM in Hardeeville**. Staff will confirm if the meeting is necessary within the next week.

9. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded, and passed by unanimous vote (I: all in favor, none against).