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Business Organizations Pleased With Bridge Completion, But Still Advocating Increased Infrastructure Funding

Several South Carolina business organizations are commending legislators, Governor Haley and the SC Department of Transportation (SCDOT) for the completion of the first bridge replacement funded by ACT 98, while still maintaining that additional funding is needed to finish the job of repairing roads and bridges.

Palmetto AgriBusiness Council, SC Alliance to Fix Our Roads, SC Farm Bureau, SC Forestry Association, South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, SC Trucking Association, SC Manufacturers Alliance and Carolinas AGC agree that the SCDOT announcement of the official opening of the Jumping Branch Bridge in Blacksburg, SC scheduled for July 21, is a tangible result of a commitment by legislators to increase funding for South Carolina's highways. In 2013, the General Assembly approved \$600 million in infrastructure funding under Act 98.

The SC Alliance to Fix Our Roads (SCFOR) has been at the forefront of spearheading the campaign to increase highway funding. "While this first small step is progress, we must continue to put a spot light on the greater needs of our road and bridge infrastructure in South Carolina," Bill Ross, SCFOR Executive Director, commented. "ACT 98 will add approximately \$1 Billion in funding over 10 years but this is less than 10% of the funding needed. Comprehensive funding reform is necessary to retain/attract business, support manufacturing, tourism, agriculture, forestry and improve safety along our highways." Ross added, "Funding our infrastructure is a core responsibility of our state government and impacts the quality of life of every citizen in our great state. In 2014 nothing was done to improve funding. South Carolina deserves better in 2015."

For South Carolina agribusiness, efficient transporting of products is key to sustainability. "The completion of this first bridge project under Act 98 is an indicator that more road and bridge improvements may actually be on the horizon; allowing agribusiness to remain competitive with neighboring states," SC Farm Bureau Federation President David Winkles, Jr. said. "Our farmers are thrilled. Existing deteriorated roads and bridges with posted detours or weight limit restrictions put our family farmers and their consumers at a competitive disadvantage. South Carolina must continue to invest in our infrastructure to strengthen the economic growth of our state."

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According to SCDOT, nearly one-third of South Carolina's primary and interstate highways are in poor or mediocre condition, with approximately half of the secondary roads in failing condition. One out of every five bridges in the state is considered deficient.

Cam Crawford, President and CEO of the South Carolina Forestry Association, said his organization is pleased with the announcement of the first bridge replacement by the SCDOT using funding provided under Act 98. According to Crawford, replacing load-restricted bridges is a top priority of the South Carolina Timber Industry. "Load-restricted bridges cause logging trucks to travel an additional 15 to 20 miles when delivering logs to a mill. This increases fuel costs and results in inefficiency since more time is being spent on the road instead of the woods harvesting trees for wood and paper products," Crawford said. "We strongly encourage the General Assembly to provide additional funding for road and bridge repairs and replacement next year."

SC Manufacturers Alliance President Lewis Gossett said, "The reshoring of manufacturing jobs to the United States continues, and South Carolina has every expectation to continue its leadership role in that trend. One of the things, however, that can derail our progress is deteriorating and inadequate infrastructure. We are pleased to see this money "hitting our roads and bridges," and we urge our policy makers to continue their work to meet our future infrastructure needs."

"There is a direct correlation between economic growth and increased freight demand. We consider this a welcome and critically needed down payment on upping the state's commitment to providing a safer and more efficient highway system," said Rick Todd, President and CEO of the South Carolina Trucking Association.

"It is a small, but significant action in fixing a tremendous problem," Cathy Novinger, Executive Director of Palmetto AgriBusiness Council, commented. "We are grateful to Governor Haley and our legislators as they begin to address our failing infrastructure system," she said. "But with \$6 billion still needed in funding, we must continue to work toward a comprehensive plan that leads to a safe and reliable transportation network for our state."

The organizations plan to continue collaborative efforts to encourage the General Assembly to find sustainable, recurring funding to meet South Carolina's infrastructure needs.

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