

PUBLISHED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONS OF ALABAMA

# COUNTY COMMISSION

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**BACK TO THE  
STONE AGE**



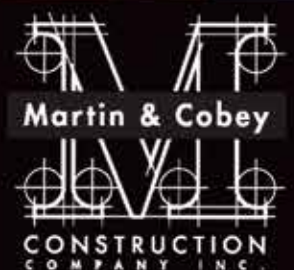


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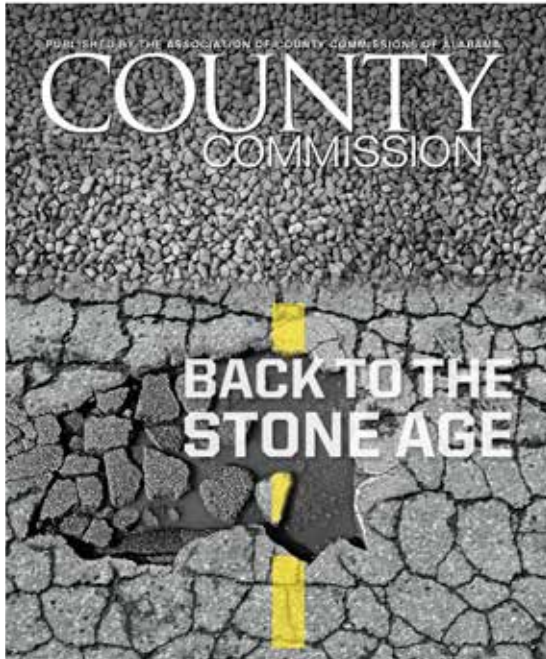
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VOLUME 60, NUMBER 2



***It seems like stepping back in time when paved roads are in such bad shape that the best option is to plow them up in favor of a gravel surface. Alabama's deteriorated roads hurt the economy, waste money and pose life-threatening safety risks.***



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# President's PERSPECTIVE



Hon. Ray Long  
President

A handwritten signature of Ray Long in black ink.

**Unified voice  
of county  
government  
has 'moved  
the needle' on  
transportation  
funding**

**We can use our  
collective influence  
on a broad range of  
county issues**

**A**s this year's ACCA President, I'd like to take all the credit for the success of this year's district meetings. So I will.

Seriously, this year's round of district meetings was among the most productive, well-attended and informative in a long, long time. I'd like to say that it was "presidential leadership" that made a difference. But I understand the president has very little to do with it, so all credit goes to the membership.

Each year as the Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature approaches, the staff begins to ramp up its preparation for the challenge ahead. For example, the Association's website is re-organized to emphasize bill tracking and grassroots contacts, our affiliate groups turn their attention almost completely to the issues they want to address, and our staff begins daily interaction with other organizations.

And for us, we know things are about to kick off when we get the notice of our district meetings and we gather for an evening meal and the chance to learn and fellowship. We always see a few folks who are not usually able to get to Montgomery during the session or to our other training and educational events, so it is a great opportunity to engage everyone.

More importantly it is a time for us to be energized about the opportunities we have during the upcoming legislative session and for us to hear a bit about those legislative issues that might be harmful to counties. With that information in hand, our challenge is then to make our grassroots contacts to help prepare our constituents and the members of the

Legislature for those matters that will come our way.

This year much of the discussion focused on the issue of increasing revenue for county roads and bridges. Nothing can unite and energize everyone from Florence to Dothan quite like the idea of "finally" being able to do something about our crumbling road and bridge system. And certainly everyone left the meetings with new resolve on this topic.

As you can see, much of this issue of County Commission is devoted to roads and bridges. Not surprisingly, most of you have been engaged in our public efforts on this issue since early last summer, if not before. On my last couple of trips to Montgomery, it has been clear that the Association has "moved the needle" on this issue, no matter what the final outcome.

The DRIVE Along tours of county roads are still getting attention. Social media continues to buzz about the issue. And, truthfully, we've worked so hard to inform the public about the ATRIP program that it might just be the most positive thing that's happened in Alabama in a long, long time.

And others are listening to our message. Just a couple of weeks ago a member of the House of Representatives set up two town hall meetings of his own so the public could come discuss the issue of improving county roads and bridges. Hardly a day goes by that someone doesn't contact the Association office about what we are trying to accomplish.

Looking to the future, however, the most significant takeaway from our collective influence on this legislative initiative might be just that



– a recognition of exactly what can happen when we get our collective energy focused on a single goal. Because once this legislative session ends, whether or not new revenue is enacted, there will be many other issues that should be pushed to the top of our state’s “to do” list.

And, at that point, it will be our role to become just as focused on those new issues as we have been on the topic of roads and bridges.

During lunch the other day, I was visiting with another county commissioner who outlined the continuing view by some in his county that he and his colleagues are only “road” commissioners. Even though roads are important, as he pointed out, most of the voters are finally becoming more focused on the

commissioners’ role as managers of the public funds and the leaders on policy issues confronting the county.

In rural Alabama, this certainly represents a change that has been a major focus of the Association for a very long time. Way back in 1989 – long before Ray Long ever thought about being a county commissioner or president of this Association – the Report of the Blue Ribbon Committee on County Government outlined the need to develop a different public perception of counties.

At that time, everyone agreed that roads and bridges were a very important responsibility but certainly not the ONLY responsibility of county government. Over the last three decades, clearly

we have again “moved the needle” as counties now are at the heart of the major policy questions that confront our state.

But with this change comes a great responsibility. If we are to continue, and even expand, this role we all must be willing to invest our time, influence, resources and expertise.

And so far we are clearly passing that test.

Next March we’ll be in the midst of a new set of challenges as the issue of road funding will have been resolved in a positive way. We’ll once again need to rally around this Association, our colleagues and our allies back home to ensure that our message is still delivered with ONE Voice. ■



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**Sonny Brasfield**  
*Executive Director*

*Sonny Brasfield*

## **Commissioner Bobby Miller held himself to a higher standard**

**His love for this  
Association and  
county government  
aren't likely to be  
duplicated**

Other than family, it's hard to imagine anything that could keep one's attention, and total commitment, from way back in November of 1976 until today.

The demands of daily living, economic upheaval and the constant pursuit of prestige are such effective distractions. In the span of four decades, these and so many other things serve to turn our heads and change our direction. But sometimes you find a guy who's different.

There was time to ponder that difference on a drive from Decatur to Tuscaloosa the other day. The reason for the trip was troubling, as I was to attend the funeral of one of the longest-serving county commissioners in my lifetime. The length of his public service, from back in 1976 until January of 2016, seemed so surreal, especially when measured in the context of today's political climate.

From November of 1976, the fall of my senior year in high school, until present day, my own road has taken a few turns before settling in with county government. Here I've found a place to serve and joined a family that's welcomed the small part I play in making life easier for those who depend on their neighbors.

Back in 1976 my friend from Tuscaloosa found his place too. And never looked back.

Arriving at his funeral service after that drive, the reality was impossible to ignore.

There will certainly be a little something missing this August at our Association's convention. Bobby Miller, as much a "tradition" in county government as anything else I know, won't be there to put his arm around me and tell everyone that I

was "a real mess" back when I was a "little boy in Rosedale."

His smile, and love for this Association and county government, aren't likely to be duplicated.

Bobby had battled health challenges for many years. But he never stepped away from his role as leader in his community, and he never lost his enthusiasm for making his section of my hometown a place both of us could call home.

In today's social media world, his story is one written in stark contrast to many who decide that public office is the best route to getting ahead, wielding power or grinding axes. For Bobby, it was always about being proud of what you'd done with your time.

Back in 1976 Bobby and a young W. Hardy McCollum were elected in Tuscaloosa County – Bobby as county commissioner and Hardy as commission chair and probate judge. Since then, they've worked alongside each other as Tuscaloosa County has transformed from truly a "sleepy" university community to one of the state's most important economic engines.

They didn't always agree. I know that probably as well as anyone other than their wives, but they always put their wishes in the back seat and pushed forward in the best interest of the county.

There was a photograph displayed at his service that put it all in perspective. It showed Bobby, Hardy and their wives at a Bama football game. Everyone dressed in crimson. Everyone laughing. Everyone working together and with respect for the trust that the voters had placed in them.

A few of us gathered for the service laughed about that night,

the game that followed and, more importantly, how much we'll miss him next November when it's time for the Tide to travel to Baton Rouge again. And then we all wiped at our tears.

About 10 days after we paid our respects, Judge McCollum called the Tuscaloosa County Commission into session and, for the first time in 40 years, Bobby Miller's name was missing. It just wasn't, and isn't, the same.

Sure, someone else will sit in his seat during commission meetings in years to come – but they aren't likely to do it for 40 years and they aren't likely to enjoy it nearly as much as Bobby.

I thought about him again the other day when a former county commissioner who now serves in the Alabama House of Representatives took to the floor and lodged a

“  
*In the span of four decades, these and so many other things serve to turn our heads and change our direction. But sometimes you find a guy who's different.*  
”

string of criticisms against county government. In no uncertain terms, he used his credibility as a former commissioner to prop up opposition to one of the Association's bills.

I just shook my head and remembered Bobby. The comments of that former commissioner were in stark contrast to those delivered for 40 years by Bobby Miller. Bobby's

ultimate desires would never have justified such behavior.

That afternoon of his funeral, I pulled away from Bobby's church after celebrating a life dedicated to public service, to laughter, to family and to his God. I turned down a county road that's named in his honor and, because the day just demanded it, I weaved my way to the community center that will forever bear his name.

As I sat on a bench outside, the sun's warmth and the cool breeze made it easy to remember 1976 and all that has happened since. It's hard to believe that someone could be so dedicated to this job for so very long.

Some folks are just elected to public office while others hold themselves, and everyone around them, to a higher standard.

And the difference, these days, is as bright as that Tuscaloosa sun. ■

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**Mary E. Pons**  
Association Counsel

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary E. Pons'.

## Helpful Tips for Passing Local Legislation

**Citizens could  
improve process at  
November election**

**A**s I write this column, we are quickly approaching the one-third mark of the 2016 Legislative Session. ACCA staff, with help from the counties, is working hard to move the good stuff through the process and keep the bad stuff from moving forward. It is a busy time for all.

Counties working to have local legislation passed during this session have the additional task of keeping up with those bills – and the sometimes complicated written and unwritten rules for securing passage. A few tips may be helpful.

**1. Get bills advertised and introduced early.** Except for local constitutional amendments, local bills must be advertised for four consecutive weeks before introduction. In addition to allowing time to address any controversy with the bill, early introduction helps to avoid getting caught up in the logjam of legislation still pending toward the end of the session or used as “leverage” by legislators advocating to have certain bills considered or blocked.

**2. Know what bills say before advertising begins.** Because a local bill must pass as introduced, it is extremely important that all local bills are reviewed at the county level before the advertising begins. And it is recommended that the county provide legislators with a draft or outline of the substantive components of the bill so the drafting analyst at Legislative Reference Service understands what needs to be included.

**3. Carefully monitor bills during the legislative process.** Local legislation moves fairly quickly when all local legislators support the measure, but counties should keep a

close eye on their bills using ACCA’s local bills tracking system. If the bill hits a snag, it may mean there is opposition and the commission should determine if there are problems of which they were unaware.

**4. Only pass one version of a bill.** It is common practice to introduce a House and Senate version of the same bill. This improves the chances of having the bill become law, but can be very problematic if both versions become law. (If the same expense allowance passes twice, the county may find itself paying twice as much as it intended to pay). Since your legislator may not realize a bill has passed both houses, the county should keep an eye on this and keep them informed.

**5. Make sure there are enough votes for passage of local constitutional amendments.**

A proposed local constitutional amendment requires a three-fifths majority in each house (63 in the House/21 in the Senate). And every effort should be made to pass these measures with no dissenting votes to avoid a statewide referendum on your local issue.

Local legislation is important, but unfortunately complicated and these few tips barely scratch the surface. ACCA staff can help when problems arise, but cannot regularly monitor them, so someone in the county must assume that responsibility.

The Association has long advocated for substantive changes to improve the process for passing local bills – and to ensure county officials play an active role in the passage of all legislation specific to their county. At least one measure to improve the process is set to appear on the statewide ballot in November. And



if all goes well during this legislative session, a second – and equally important – proposal could be voted on by the people in the Fall.

Act 2015-44, passed in 2015 through the unwavering determination of Sen. Linda Coleman-Madison, proposes a constitutional amendment that would limit the risk of purely local constitutional amendments appearing on a statewide ballot. The act creates a two-step process for passage of local constitutional amendments whereby each house would pass the bill by a three-fifths majority, with or without dissenting votes, and then vote on whether the measure is local in nature. If the second vote passes without dissent, the measure would only appear on the local ballot. This would allow a legislator to be recorded as opposing

---

”

***The Association has long advocated for substantive changes to improve the process for passing local bills – and to ensure county officials play an active role in the passage of all legislation specific to their county.***

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”

the amendment on principle (for example, a gambling or alcohol-related proposal) without forcing a statewide vote.

The second proposal – to allow for amending local bills during the process – would provide counties with meaningful input into local bills after advertising and introduction. Today, local bills cannot be altered during the process – a restriction that

prevents counties from negotiating with legislators to find common ground on bills introduced – or from correcting technical problems or mistakes found in a bill after it has been advertised. Rep. Adline Clarke (HB 60) and Sen. Greg Albritton (SB 53) are leading the charge to get this proposed amendment through the legislature during this session.

These two amendments, if passed and ratified in November, would benefit county government in immeasurable ways. Therefore, all counties should be working hard now to make sure their legislators understand and work for passage of HB 60 and SB 53 during this session, and then work with ACCA staff next fall to ensure that both these proposed amendments become part of Alabama’s constitution in November 2016. ■

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*Hale County Sheriff Kenneth Ellis, the 2016-17 President of the Alabama Sheriffs Association, taking his oath of office, administered by Hale County Probate Judge and Commission Chairman Arthur Crawford. Ellis also serves on the ACCA Liability Self-Insurance Fund Inc. Sheriffs Advisory Board.*

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**DEAR COUNTIES**

An open letter  
from Sen. Gerald Dial

# BACK TO THE STONE AGE

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**COUNTY ROAD TOURS**

Seeing the desperate need  
for infrastructure investment

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**NATIONWIDE CRISIS**

Infrastructure struggles  
similar across states

**21**

**OUR ROADS.  
OUR FUTURE.**

Making the case to invest

**25**

**FAST ACT**

How much help from  
the feds?

# A Message to Alabama Counties from Sen. Gerald Dial

Dear friends,

When we all were together in Auburn at your Association's Legislative Conference back in December, I had just come from the very first "DRIVE Along" road tour. It was my pleasure that morning to join engineers, commissioners, school officials and others from Lee County and Chambers County on a site visit of several locations that need immediate improvement. The sites we inspected make a very clear case that our rural transportation system is in crisis.

Shortly thereafter, the Legislature's Joint Transportation Committee began a series of five statewide "listening" events. During those stops, business leaders, economic development professionals, truckers and local officials all focused attention on how underfunded roads and bridges are harming our state's competitive position.

That day in Auburn, I challenged the county officials to "make their case" to the House and Senate members in the days and months ahead. I said that day, and still believe now, if our state is to secure an increased investment in road and bridge funding, the influence of county government will be an essential element in our success.

Since then many of you have held your own "DRIVE Alongs" and many of my colleagues in the House and Senate have seen for themselves just how desperately the revenue is needed. But even today, there is much work left to do if we are to be successful this year. As the 2016 Legislative Session nears its midpoint, the price of gasoline is at a shockingly-low level and almost everyone agrees that more revenue is needed.

But, somehow, the debate on providing additional revenue for road and bridge improvements is far from settled.

It's been a long time since any new revenue has been dedicated for transportation in our state. Over the last few months I've thought a

**MORE** page 14



**Sen. Gerald Dial**



Above: Barbour County

## DRIVE-Along County Road Tours shaping debate

To anyone driving by, it might not have looked like much. Just some people standing on the roadside, talking.

Every now and then, someone would point at the crumbling pavement.

However, if a passerby noticed that the group included local legislators, county commissioners and the county engineer it might seem more significant. But a quick glimpse still wouldn't give the whole picture



Left: Geneva County





***Above: Randolph County***

***Far left: Washington County***

***Immediate left: Cherokee County***

of state and local officials driving throughout the county, inspecting roads and bridges in the greatest need of work and gauging the impact of recent infrastructure projects.

The DRIVE-Along County Road Tours have been just that simple – and just that profound.

The tours, highlighting the desperate need for investment in county road and bridge infrastructure, are at the heart of DRIVE Alabama, a county engineer-led campaign. Tours were conducted in counties all across the state during December and January, just before the legislative session began.

“Clearly we knew that this legislative session would present an opportunity to seek

additional revenue for our crumbling roads and bridges,” said Sonny Brasfield, executive director of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama. “We felt that members of the House and Senate would be more likely to vote in favor of new revenue if they could see the needs for themselves. It is one thing to talk about 1,100 bridges that need replacing, it is another to stop your vehicle and look.”

Every year, current resources fall more than a hundred million dollars short of what counties need to adequately maintain 59,000 miles of roads and 8,650 bridges. And years of shortfalls were evident to tour participants –

bone-jarring potholes and weight-limited bridges, causing lengthy detours daily for school buses. Roadside memorials served as regular reminders that there can be life-or-death consequences when road deterioration is unchecked.

The tours, which generated substantial media coverage and social media buzz, did have bright spots, with stops at recently completed road and bridge projects funded through the billion-dollar ATRIP program.

“But when you come to the intersection of an ATRIP road and another road that is falling apart, you know right away that the job is not finished,” Brasfield observed. “This state’s county roads have been neglected for so long that even ATRIP wasn’t near enough.”

He expressed appreciation to each legislator who carved out time to investigate local roads and bridges firsthand. “For some, they certainly have a new appreciation for the seriousness of the problem,” Brasfield said.

The name “DRIVE Alabama” is shorthand for Developing a Road and Infrastructure Vision

**drive**  
**ALABAMA**

**CONTINUED** from page 12

lot about that session when the Legislature last approved an increase in road funding. I was a rather young legislator at the time – or at least looking back it seems like I was young.

I actively and openly supported that 5-cent per gallon increase in both the gasoline and diesel fuel tax. And I was resoundingly re-elected the next time my name was on the ballot.

This year alone, we'll have about \$160 million in additional revenue to spend on state, county and municipal roads because of the courage shown in passing that additional nickel tax back in the early 1990s. Our businesses and industries have

used the improved roads to employ our neighbors and our family members. Farmers and loggers have moved products on these improved roads. And school buses are now carrying a second generation of school children safely on roads and bridges maintained with this revenue.

Every citizen of this state has benefitted from the safety improvements that have been made with that money, and no one has suffered personal financial hardships because of the payment of that extra nickel. But inflation has overtaken the buying power of that nickel and our roads and bridges are suffering – and, as a result, so is our economy.

Having served almost continuously in the Alabama Legislature since 1974, I'm not sure anyone else in our state is more accustomed to listening to "the people" than Gerald Dial. It's been so long since I first joined the Legislature that I can hardly remember when I was not responsible for listening, considering, deciding and then explaining my actions to the folks "back home."

I clearly understand that no one – including the Dial family – is itching to pay additional taxes. But I also

understand from experience that our state's economic future is tied directly to its transportation system. If you attended one of our "listening" meetings then you know that I am certainly not alone in reaching that conclusion.

The last increase in fuel taxes actually costs us all very, very little – despite the fact that the existence of this revenue has been at the heart of our state's economic growth over the last two decades.

Consider this. If you drive 20,000 miles per year and your vehicle averages 20 miles per gallon, then that 5-cent increase from the 1990s costs you \$50 per year. Fifty dollars per year! That's about the price of ONE 16-ounce soft drink per week.

With that investment, our state has weathered economic storms, attracted new industries with names that are recognized all over the world, educated a generation of

children and watched them educate children of their own.

There are hard decisions to be made in the new few weeks. I am proud to support an increase in gasoline and diesel fuel taxes. These taxes are the fairest that our state levies – the more miles you drive, the more tax you pay. Drive less, and you pay less tax.

Clearly, we have the option to do nothing this session. In terms of finding the revenue we need to enhance transportation in our state, we've been doing "nothing" for more than two decades already.

But I am committed to doing more than sitting around and watching another session end without facing the problems that all of us see as we drive every day. You have my word that the passage of legislation is my top priority for this year's session. And I hope it's yours, as well. Because we cannot succeed without you.

Sincerely,  
**Gerald O. Dial**

**“You have my word that the passage of legislation is my top priority for this year's session. And I hope it's yours, as well. Because we cannot succeed without you.”**

for Everyone in Alabama, and it seems as though everyone in county government has contributed to the effort.

“This kind of statewide, coordinated project is impossible without the investment of time,

energy, expertise and excitement from every county,” said Dale County Engineer Derek Brewer, president of the Association of County Engineers of Alabama. “We talk all the time about speaking with ONE Voice.

Sometimes you have to ‘invest’ with ONE Voice as well.

“And over the last six months county engineers, commissioners, administrators and others have invested in enhancing our roads and bridges.” ■







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## Going ‘Back to the Stone Age’ in Chambers County

*The road was so bad – and any possibility of resurfacing so far in the future – that residents along Chambers County Road 139 thanked Chairman Joe Blanks for tearing out the paved road and replacing it with gravel. This dilemma is not unique to Chambers County or even Alabama; jurisdictions across the country face similarly difficult choices.*

# Infrastructure struggles similar across states

## ASCE Report Card: Alabama earned C- on bridges, D+ on roads

**W**hat’s the old joke about there being good news and bad news and which do you want first?

Well, when the American Society of Civil Engineers started handing out “news” on the condition of Alabama’s infrastructure, the punch line wasn’t funny at all.

Alabama’s bridges notched a grade of C- on the group’s 2015 Report Card, and roads came in with a D+. Experts agree the deteriorated condition hurts the economy, wastes money and poses life-threatening safety risks.

As bad as the current status sounds, Alabama has a lot of company from other states. “This challenge exists in every state, and some states have been more active than others,” said economist Alison P. Black, Ph.D.

As chief economist for the American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA), she sees that most states are wrestling with the same factors – road usage is up, resources for road upkeep are down and the pressure to compete for economic development prospects is intense.

The Federal Highway Administration reports that Americans are driving more miles on rapidly deteriorating roads and bridges. Skyrocketing inflation has zapped the impact of existing revenue for road maintenance and improvements. In a lukewarm economy, people want good infrastructure to give their communities a competitive edge in recruiting new jobs.

In the face of these overwhelming needs, states both red and blue are taking the lead on solving the problem. Some 16 states have

increased gas taxes in just the last 3 years, a significant acceleration, according to the trade group ARTBA.

In many places, voters have had the ultimate say on road funding, approving over 72 percent of ballot initiatives for transportation funding in the last decade, according to ARTBA. There is a “very high approval rating” when people see this as an investment in their communities that will return benefits for years to come, Black said.

This “can-do” attitude in individual states is partly rooted in a realization that the federal government is not likely to save the day anytime soon. The recently enacted Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act included welcome “modest increases,” she said. But after years of temporary fixes and crisis after crisis, its passage does not signal that the political will exists to provide help in proportion to the needs, she added.

Many times, the states that are pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps are counting on a double benefit from the investment: first, the immediate economic boost of the work itself, and then long-term gains from improved infrastructure’s value to the business community.

“It’s going to have a ripple effect on the economy for years,” the economist said.

Just for starters, the Federal Highway Administration estimates that each dollar spent on road, highway and bridge improvements results in an average benefit of \$5.20 in the form of reduced vehicle maintenance costs, reduced delays, reduced fuel consumption, improved safety and reduced road and bridge maintenance costs.



States that are making progress on their transportation infrastructure have a variety of funding mechanisms to choose from, but fuel taxes – the traditional workhorse for funding these services – still dominate, ARTBA finds.

Fairness is a big part of the appeal. Fuel taxes are a user fee, and that means they are only paid by

people who use the service. If you drive more – putting more wear and tear on the roads – you pay more. Drive less? You pay less.

“Increasing user fees to pay for a service is viewed as a conservative choice,” said Carolyn Kramer, manager of the Transportation Investment Advocacy Center.

Flat taxes such as Alabama’s are the most common. Some jurisdictions have turned to a general sales tax to help their roads. Other popular strategies are “undiverting” existing revenue, increasing vehicle excise taxes or bringing alternative fuels and electric vehicles into the tax base.

Tying levies to vehicle miles traveled (instead of gallons of gas) has an appeal, but so far is proving burdensome to implement.

Regardless of the specific approach, nearly half of all state legislatures are considering measures to increase transportation investment this year, ARTBA reports.

Alabama’s neighboring states are taking steps to improve their road and bridge infrastructure. Georgia has already increased investment, and there are active efforts underway in Tennessee and South Carolina.

“The southeast, like much of the U.S., is trying to push hard to move ahead,” Kramer concluded. ■

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# Our Roads. Our Future.

By Jim Page Jr.

President & CEO,

Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama

Member, Alliance for Alabama's Infrastructure

**A**s Alabamians, we work hard and take pride in the things in which we invest our money. Whether it's our home, automobile or our children's education, we think carefully about how we spend money and exercise fiscal responsibility.

With that in mind, it might be time to start thinking more about the money that we invest in our roads and bridges.



**Page**

Most of us travel across state highways and U.S. interstates every day to get to work, buy groceries and visit family. Whether we realize it or not, roads are a vital part of our daily lives.

Unfortunately, we are putting ourselves and our families in danger nearly every time we travel our roadways. In fact, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers' 2015 Report Card for Alabama's Infrastructure, approximately 50 percent of state highways in Alabama are in fair, poor or very poor condition. Even more alarming is the fact that one-third of all fatal car crashes are the result of roadway features, according to the ASCE. As you can see, people are losing their lives due to the poor condition of our roads, creating a "silent crisis" that more and more people are finally beginning to talk about. Thankfully, we can fix it.

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Economic Development Association of Alabama

Association of County Commissions of Alabama

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Medical Association of Alabama



## BACK TO THE STONE AGE

Many of the repairs and maintenance projects for these roads and bridges are being delayed, mainly due to lack of funding. One of the primary reasons that funding is declining is that cars today are much more fuel efficient than they were in 1992 — the last time our state increased the gasoline tax.

To give you a sense of how funding has changed, think of the following example provided by the Alabama Department of Transportation: In 1994, if you drove 12,000 miles in a Honda Accord built at that time, you paid about \$185 in gasoline tax over the course of a year. In 2013, if you traveled the same number of miles in a new Honda Accord, you paid \$142 for the entire year. Although it's nice to pay less, it's easy to recognize what that lower price tag means for our roads and bridges.

Our state highways and county roads depend on revenue from the state, not the federal government. It's our responsibility as Alabamians to maintain, repair and expand our

infrastructure, and now is the time to embrace that responsibility.

Thankfully, with additional investment in Alabama's infrastructure come real, tangible benefits. In fact, according to the Federal Highway Administration, for every \$1 invested in roads, we will likely see \$5.20 in benefits.

From long-term job growth to lower costs on consumer goods, we will see and experience positive economic outcomes in all 67 Alabama counties. As a result of those outcomes, Alabamians can feel a great sense of pride and satisfaction

as our great state better positions itself to compete with our southern neighbors. We are winners, and it's time to bring that mentality to our roads and bridges.

By generating additional revenue that will be protected for infrastructure projects, Alabamians will be protecting themselves and their children, investing

in our state and making Alabama an even better place to live.

Keep in mind: Our Roads. Our Future. Our Responsibility. ■

### Investing Pays Off

\$1 ► \$5.20

Every dollar invested  
in roads & bridges  
can return \$5.20 in  
benefits.

Source  
Federal Highway Administration

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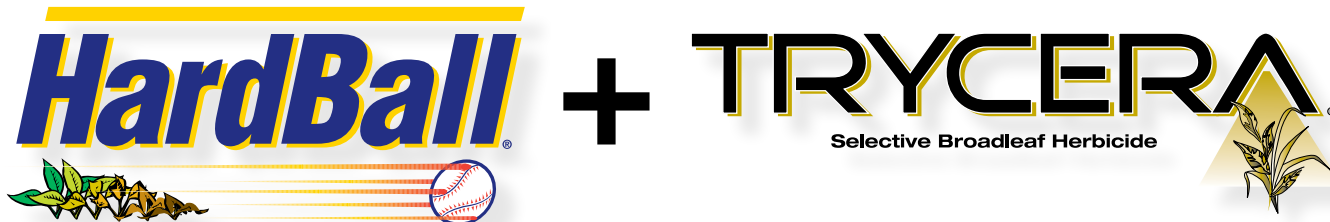
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NRM-10174AL-NX.1 (10/15)



# NACo, NACE influenced FAST Act

**T**he National Association of Counties' mission statement speaks of advocating "with a collective voice on national policy," and there may be no better example of that than the recent team effort on the federal transportation program.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) and the National Association of County Engineers (NACE) worked together seamlessly on the \$280 billion Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, which became law in December.

This intense collaboration yielded significant wins for the nation's 3,069 counties: increased fully-funded, federal spending for five years paired with reforms that strengthen county transportation.

"The NACo and NACE partnership is at a level of collaboration that we have not seen in our careers," said County Engineer Richie Beyer of Elmore County.

With leadership responsibilities in both organizations, Beyer was one of the county engineers who provided key technical assessments of proposed language. This input armed the NACo lobbyist with specific examples of how a provision would be good or bad for counties.

"The combined lobbying effort of these organizations is just another example of counties speaking with 'one voice,'" said Chambers County Engineer Josh Harvill. "The county priorities that are included in the FAST Act highlight the return on investment for NACo and NACE members."

These were recognized during NACo's 2016 Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. NACE presented tokens of appreciation to NACo President Sallie Clark, Past President Riki Hokama,

Transportation Steering Committee Chair Peter McLaughlin, his predecessor Jim Healey and Jessica Monahan, NACo's lead staff member on transportation issues.

The stable, multi-year funding is an achievement in itself, and counties will also benefit particularly from increased decision-making at the local level and continued streamlining of projects.

For Alabama, the biggest uptick in funding will hit in 2016, when the state expects its Federal Highway Program apportionments to increase 4.7 percent over the previous year. Growth the next four years is more modest, but the road construction industry expects this growth to outpace inflation.

Local decision-making is bolstered with the existing Surface



***Q: Does the FAST Act resolve all the problems that DRIVE Alabama is working to solve?***

**A.** No. It is significant progress, but the FAST Act is only one piece of the puzzle. DRIVE Alabama wants a sustainable long-range plan for the state's roads and bridges, so from the coalition's perspective, it is a very good thing to have five years of federal funding providing stability to a major portion of Alabama's transportation infrastructure.



Bear in mind that more than half of the county-owned roads in the state must be maintained without federal dollars. The means to maintain and improve Alabama's local road system must be found or the state could lose the investment placed in the farm-to-market system some 50 or 60 years ago. There are already examples of going "back to the stone age," when paved roads are turned back into gravel roads because that's the best option with current resources.

Transportation Program being expanded into a program of block grants. Local governments will direct an increased amount of funds to projects on the federal aid network as the share of Alabama's allocation that must be distributed according to population will gradually increase from 50 to 55 percent.

The FAST Act replaces Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), a two-year surface transportation law that initiated reforms to expedite and streamline projects. The FAST Act builds on those reforms with multiple provisions to accelerate environmental reviews as well as simplified procedures to speed repair of critical infrastructure during emergencies.

Despite the positive reforms begun under MAP-21, the law had slashed funding for locally owned infrastructure by 30 percent. These funds are more than restored under the FAST Act, according to analysis from NACo.

When counties consider the improvements in the FAST Act, Harvill said the team effort should be remembered. "We improved several items that should allow us to plan in advance and work more efficiently within our federal program, and I am grateful to everyone from NACo and NACE who worked together on this law," Harvill said. ■



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## top 10 tips

# Making the Most of County Days

*There is no better time for the unified voice of county government to stand out than **County Days at the Legislature***

**1. Call ahead** to make an appointment. Representatives and senators have a lot to accomplish in a short amount of time, and their packed committee schedules often mean they need to be in two places at once.

**2. Use the briefing with ACCA staff** to ask any questions or get clarification on any concerns you might have. If you feel unsure about what to say to one of your legislators on a particular issue, please ask!

**3. Pull together 1-2 key facts/figures** as examples of how a given bill will affect your particular county. This is very persuasive with legislators and adds hometown weight to your message that a bill is good/bad for all counties. This often gives legislators real-world examples to use in committee deliberations or floor debate.

**4. Build your network of relationships** with legislators. If there are legislators representing your county that you don't have a relationship

with, make an effort to meet them. If you know them all, try to build a relationship with members of key committees (i.e. County & Municipal Government Committees in both chambers).

**5. Wear comfy shoes.** You will be on your feet a lot.

**6. No pocket knives.** You will have to go through a metal detector, so it's best to leave anything that could be used as a weapon at home or in the car.



## County Days at the Legislature

Tuesday, March 8, 2016 | Autauga, Baldwin, Cleburne, Coffee, Colbert, Escambia, Hale, Jefferson, Lauderdale, Marion, Marshall, Russell

Tuesday, March 15, 2016 | Barbour, Chambers, Choctaw, Clarke, Coosa, DeKalb, Lamar, Lawrence, Madison, Montgomery, Shelby

Tuesday, April 5, 2016 | Cherokee, Calhoun, Chilton, Crenshaw, Etowah, Limestone, Tallapoosa, Tuscaloosa, Wilcox, Winston

Tuesday, April 19, 2016 | Bullock, Covington, Dale, Dallas, Fayette, Greene, Jackson, Lee, Talladega, Washington

Tuesday, May 3, 2016 | Bibb, Blount, Clay, Conecuh, Cullman, Franklin, Henry, Houston, Lowndes, Macon, Randolph, Sumter

## News You Can Use

**7. Encourage county department heads** to participate in County Days too. It can be helpful for these subject-matter experts to have legislative relationships too, and they can be an important part of “67 counties, One voice.”

**8.** If you are going to be watching the floor action from the **House or Senate Gallery**, ask your representative or senator to arrange for your **introduction**. The speaker or lieutenant governor will recognize the group as guests

of their legislators and ask you to stand. (And there’s an added benefit – everyone else in the chamber will know that counties are on deck that day. This will enhance our image as an active, engaged and influential group!)

**9.** Spread the word on **social media**. If you ask, legislators are often gracious about posing for a photo with visitors. Once



you’ve got the image, post it on Facebook or Twitter, tag your legislators, and say something like “Thank you for your leadership and service to \_\_\_\_ County.” These photos tell everyone back home that their state and local officials are working hard for them. (And don’t forget the hashtag #alpolitics)

**10.** Wear your **ACCA lapel pin** or **67 counties sticker** at the State House so everyone will recognize that you are part of the unified voice of county government. ■

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## IN PROFILE



“  
*We’re going to be very aggressive, and we’re going to do our best to be of service to county government.*  
”

Joe Sumners

## Working to meet needs of county officials

Joe Sumners may have worn out several cars during the last 25 years, supporting local governments and economic development groups, but traveling throughout Alabama’s 67 counties does not seem to have exhausted his passion for the work.

“I’m just really enthusiastic about this new institute and what we can accomplish,” Sumners said. “One of my most favorite things I’ve ever done was helping create the current county commissioner education program, and I’m glad to be working with Sonny and others to meet the needs of county officials.”

Auburn University has recently merged its Economic & Community Development Institute, led by Sumners, with its Center for Governmental Services to form a new outreach unit called the Government & Economic Development Institute (GEDI). Sumners was tapped to serve as GEDI executive director.

“It’s no stretch to say that Dr. Sumners is uniquely qualified for this role, with his extensive background in local government services and economic development,” said Sonny Brasfield, ACCA executive director. “He

brings to the table a powerful combination of scholarly credentials enriched by years of ‘boots on the ground’ experience.”

Sumners, a native of the Creswell community in Shelby County, earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Auburn and completed a Ph.D. in political science at the University of Georgia. He regularly teaches a graduate seminar on economic development, and he has teaching experience at three other universities.

Sumners’ official bio also lists numerous publications on the topic of rural economic and community development as well as research in Alabama’s Black Belt region. Much of his political science career has been in what academia generally calls “outreach,” which roughly translates into the practical, real-world application of a given field of study.

For the last 15 years, he focused specifically on economic development, but, to hear him talk, it’s clear that he doesn’t separate economic development, community development and the responsibilities of local officials.

# News You Can Use

“To have a strong economy, you have to have a strong community,” Sumners said. “The typical thought about economic development is recruiting industry, but it’s much broader than that, taking in factors such as tourism, workforce and existing businesses.”

Generally, he said communities have three basic areas they need to address – simultaneously:

1. Civic infrastructure, with community leaders from all walks of life cooperating and collaborating;
2. Human infrastructure, from pre-k up to workforce development;
3. Physical infrastructure, which can range from roads and bridges to broadband internet connectivity to water and sewer services.

“In all those, there’s a really really heavy role for local government,” Sumners said. “You really can’t separate the role of the public sector and economic development, which is just public strategies to increase private investment.”

This new role brings him back in contact with the Alabama Local Government Training Institute, a state-mandated education program for county commissioners that is under the GEDI umbrella along with other certification programs for local officials and employees.

Local government has depended on the two preceding organizations for specific services, and those will continue, he pledged, noting that there may be opportunities to improve those services and expand the data and research available to help officials make informed decisions.

“We’re going to be very aggressive, and we’re going to do our best to be of service to county government, city government and the economic development community,” he said.

The new institute has similar priorities to the University of Alabama Center for Economic Development, but Sumners said the athletic rivals have a long history of working together on this field of play.

“My philosophy has always been if you can get Auburn and Alabama working together, that’s a powerful partnership,” Sumners said. ■

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## COUNTY ECONOMIES 2015

### SHELBY COUNTY, AL



### SIZING UP 2015

POPULATION, 2014	206,655
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, 2015	4.1%
REAL GDP, 2015, IN 2009 DOLLARS	\$8.5 Billion
Shelby County, AL has a county government.	
Shelby County is a medium-sized county in the Birmingham-Hoover, AL metropolitan area.	

### TOP FIVE SPECIALIZED INDUSTRIES, BY EMPLOYMENT, 2015

PROFESSIONAL & BUSINESS SERVICES	13.0 THOUSANDS JOBS - 14.9%
FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES	11.9 THOUSANDS JOBS - 13.7%
CONSTRUCTION	5.6 THOUSANDS JOBS - 6.4%
INFORMATION	1.1 THOUSANDS JOBS - 1.2%
LOGGING & MINING	470 JOBS - 0.5%

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### QUESTIONS

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Director of Research and Outreach  
research@naco.org

### FINDINGS

WWW.NACO.ORG/COUNTYECONOMIES

#COUNTYECONOMIES

DEFINITION OF TERMS: (Data Sources: Moody's Analytics and U.S. Census Bureau)  
Economic output (gross domestic product - GDP): Total value of goods and services produced by a county economy, also known as GDP. Jobs: Total wage and salary jobs, whether full or part-time, temporary or permanent in a county economy. It counts the number of jobs, not employed people, for all employers in a county economy, not only for the county government. Median Home Sales Price: Median sales prices of existing single-family homes in a county economy. Unemployment Rate: The proportion of the civilian labor force that is unemployed.

To find an economic analysis of your county, go to [www.NACo.org/countyeconomies](http://www.NACo.org/countyeconomies) and click on the "County Profiles" button.

## NACo County Economies 2015

# Most Alabama counties show economic growth

By Dr. Brian Knudsen  
Research Analyst  
National Association of Counties

As Americans cast their first votes in presidential primaries, the National Association of Counties has released its annual look at recovery patterns across the nation's 3,069 county economies.

### County Economies 2015:

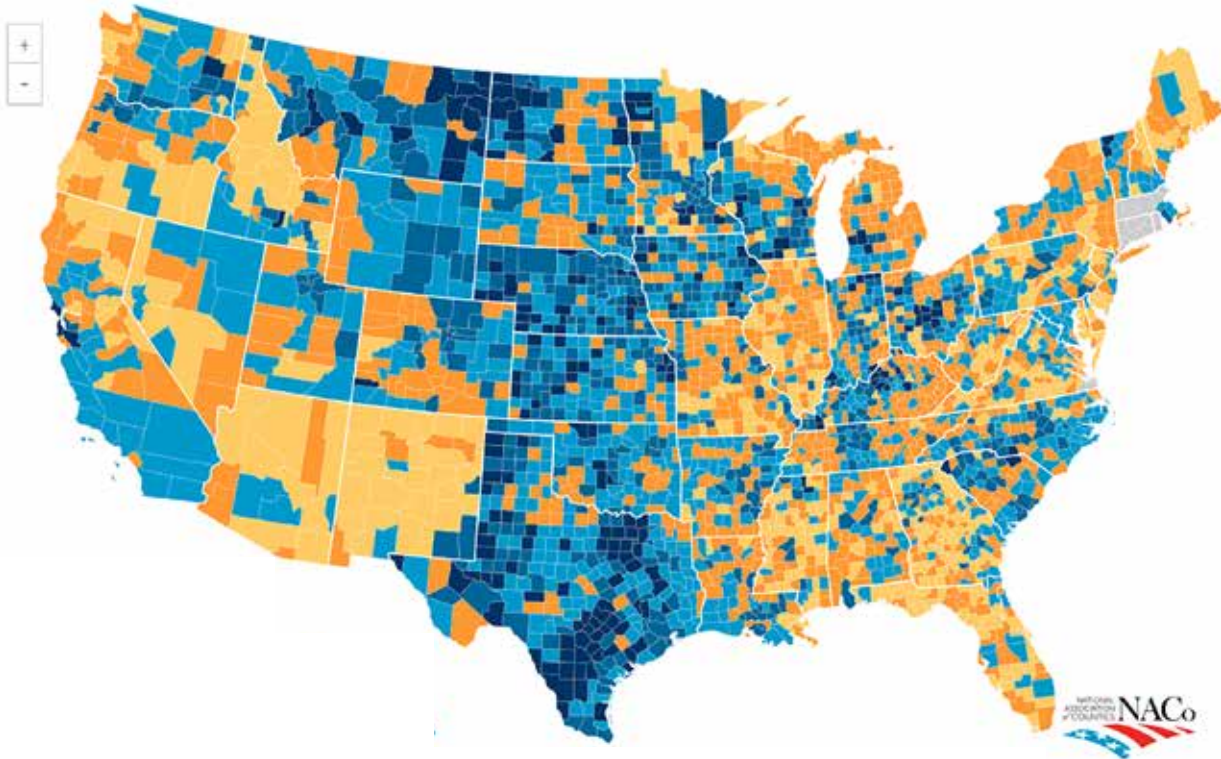
### Opportunities and Challenges

analyzes annual changes of four economic performance indicators — economic output, also known

as gross domestic product (GDP), employment, unemployment rates and home prices — between 2014 and 2015 across county economies. In addition, it explores 2013-2014 wage dynamics as well as 2009-2014 trends in productivity and wages in county economies.

This report focuses on the county economy and not on the county government. It keeps track of the peaks and valleys, recession and recovery for each county economy in the country since 2002.

In Alabama, most county economies grew in 2015, but few have recovered from the recession. All 67 Alabama county economies had unemployment decline in the past year, while 94 percent saw rising home prices. Also, 58 county economies (87 percent) saw year-over-year growth in jobs and economic output (GDP) in 2015. Forty-four (or 65 percent) Alabama county economies had recovered on home prices by 2015, a higher rate than the national average. Yet,



## About NACo's County Economies 2015

When trying to understand national and local economic trends, sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words. County leaders now have access to an interactive visual tool to help assess the economy of their county thanks to NACo. Find it online at [www.naco.org/CountyEconomies](http://www.naco.org/CountyEconomies)

NACo's "County Economies 2015: Opportunities and Challenges" is a nationwide analysis of economic recovery at the county level, and it was the source of the information cited in the adjacent article. Individual counties are assessed on four key indicators:

- Economic output (gross domestic product/GDP)
- Employment
- Unemployment rates
- Home Prices

The result is a color-coded interactive map of U.S. counties, showing the progress of economic recovery for each county.

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# News You Can Use

by 2015 only one of Alabama's 67 county economies had returned to their pre-recession levels on unemployment rate, 11 (16 percent) had recovered on jobs and less than half (42 percent) recovered on economic output. Furthermore, none of Alabama's county economies recovered on all four indicators analyzed by 2015.

The economic recovery is creating an uneven geography of opportunity. Forty-two Alabama county economies (63 percent) saw increases in cost-of-living and inflation-adjusted wages in 2014, similar to the national share. Longer term, wages did not keep up with productivity gains everywhere between 2009 and 2014. The NACo analysis examines average real wages

# 67

***Alabama County Economies  
with Unemployment Decline  
in 2015 (Source: NACo)***

in county economies, not for county government employees. Thirty-one Alabama county economies (46 percent) saw real wage increases alongside productivity gains over the five-year span. By contrast, 24 county economies (36 percent) had falling wages, yet productivity increased.

This uneven recovery across county economies contributes to the challenges that counties already

confront. Counties face a triple threat from the uncertainty around federal policy on tax reform, entitlement reform and appropriation cuts not accompanied by reductions in unfunded mandates. Counties are doing their part under difficult conditions by investing in economic development, infrastructure and providing services.

County Economies 2015 highlights that it is on the ground, in counties, where Americans feel the national economy. The economic recovery and growth continued to spread in 2015, but unevenly around the country. These opportunities and challenges point to the continuing need for a strong local-state-federal partnership to secure a strong economy. ■

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## IN PROFILE

### Morgan Arrington, ACCA Staff Attorney

**D**uring her first two months at the Association of County Commissions of Alabama, new staff attorney Morgan Arrington says she's learned that the close-knit Alabama counties actually do speak with "ONE Voice," but usually only after the issue has been considered from 67 different angles.

"I was drawn to the idea of representing one client, where I could dive in and learn as much as possible," Arrington said. "That suits my personality, for sure. But I have learned very quickly that we really have 67 clients – even though they speak with ONE voice – with their own unique angle on just about every issue."

She joined the ACCA staff in January, which meant it was time to hit the ground running on all facets of legislative preparations – including District Meetings all around the state – and preparing for the 2016 session of the Alabama Legislature.

"The timing was great for me," she says of the District Meetings. "I got to meet who I am actually working for. And it quickly became clear why the staff talks about the 'county



***ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield reviewing a legislative document with Staff Attorney Morgan Arrington.***

family,' everyone has welcomed me in such a wonderful way."

Mary E. Pons, ACCA's long-serving Association Counsel who is scheduled to retire later this year, is working with Arrington on a daily basis to help the transition to her new, and specific responsibilities. This means many county officials and employees have already "met" Arrington, if only as the voice on the other end of the phone during calls with Pons.

"Recruiting the right person to pick up and carry the baton on

the legal services we provide to counties was an extremely important process. This role requires a unique combination of skills, experience and insight," said Sonny Brasfield, ACCA executive director. "It was essential that Morgan have the opportunity to work alongside Mary for the next few months, but we also expect that she'll develop her own style and use her own experience and strengths to benefit the unified voice of county government."

In her legal career B.C. (Before Counties),

Arrington's experience has included work in civil and administrative law, Brasfield noted. She also brings a background in legislative work, policy development and training.

"Working closely with Morgan these past two months has been a pleasure and leaves me confident that counties will be well cared for during her tenure," said Pons. "She has immersed herself in learning as much as she can as quickly as she can. She is a bright, energetic, and hard-working professional who has already shown a strong commitment to being a fierce advocate and advisor to counties, hopefully for many years to come."

As part of the policy team, Arrington said that reviewing legislation that could impact counties is providing a quick and thorough immersion in the many different responsibilities of counties. "That's really exposing me to the complexities that exist in county government. It is impressive."

The Association has distinguished itself by providing counties with legislative assistance



## News You Can Use

that is both broad in scope – due to the wide-ranging nature of county responsibilities – and deep, to aggressively protect and improve county government in Alabama. On any given day, Arrington will be involved in the Association’s insurance programs, will represent counties before state agencies, will respond to time-sensitive legal questions and will provide county attorneys with research on complex issues at the local level.

“There is no job description that can do

justice to the demands of this position,” Brasfield explains. “The work plan you have for any given day can be completely diverted by something going on in one of the courthouses. I think Morgan is already learning that the most rewarding aspect of being on this team is helping the members.”

She graduated from the University of Alabama School of Law, and most recently worked as an assistant attorney general with the Alabama Medicaid Agency. Among her responsibilities there,

she represented the agency before numerous circuit courts and administrative law judges, tracked legislation and provided legal guidance for agency leadership and staff.

Before law school, Arrington worked for the federal government for four and a half years, first in the Drug Enforcement Administration’s Montgomery office and later in Virginia, where she worked as intelligence research specialist for the U.S. Treasury’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network. While there

she received top-secret national security clearance.

A native of Covington County, Arrington now lives in Pike Road with her husband McMillan and their young daughters Sarah and Anne Phillips.

“The legislative session has made it abundantly clear to me that county government touches almost every element of our daily lives. I have a lot to learn, but it has been exciting and I have been energized by the challenge,” Arrington concluded. ■



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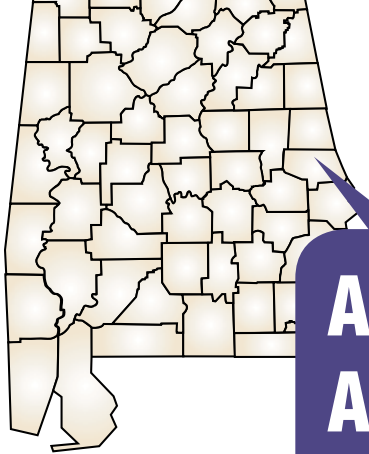
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ALABAMA MOUNTAIN LAKES TOURIST ASSOCIATION

**Q** How does the local road and bridge infrastructure affect the work of an emergency manager?



## A voice from Alabama's 67 counties...

**Kathrine Carson**  
*Director, Lee County EMA,  
& President, Alabama Association  
of Emergency Managers*



**A** Anyone involved in emergency planning and coordination will agree that the top two elements of emergency response are communication and transportation. These two elements provide the framework upon which all other emergency planning and response is dependent. It is essential that we maintain the ability to provide emergency services to our people, and our residents must be able to rely on a solid transportation infrastructure for evacuation when necessary.

**Q** How would you describe the duties of a county emergency management agency (EMA)? And how does the county EMA relate to the work of emergency responders such as police, fire and ambulances?

**A** Emergency managers look at the big picture. Whether the jurisdiction is the entire nation (FEMA), the state (AEMA) or a county (local EMA), the focus is not on one particular discipline or perspective, but rather on how the vast network of resources available can be quickly brought to bear in meeting the needs of our citizens. What training do we need? What are our resource shortfalls and what resources might be available from outside our jurisdiction? EMA's job is to be the coordination point or hub. Your EMA manages the resources and information that are essential to

a multi-level response, connecting people in need with people who have resources and knowledge to assist in a range of situations, from natural disasters to hazardous materials spills and other man-caused emergencies involving mass casualty or mass fatality. Any time a community experiences an emergency that requires resources beyond normal day-to-day elements, EMA may be called upon for consequence management and resource support.

Your local EMA is communications hub for the entire county. They are responsible for monitoring threatening situations and passing information on to those who need it, including the public. Notification and warning is a major part of what they do for elected officials, first responders and the community.

**Q** From the viewpoint of emergency management, why do Alabamians need a good road and bridge network?

**A** Whenever possible, prevention of an emergency is the key. A small fender bender due to an improperly maintained

road can lead to a much larger accident, perhaps escalating up to a large hazardous materials incident requiring evacuations. Accidents aren't only dangerous to those who are involved; they often lead to additional, related accidents and dangers that can be even more devastating.

Alabama has a multitude of highly trained, professional individuals representing emergency services (fire, law enforcement, EMS, and public works) who are prepared to assist our citizens in times of need. Reliable transportation routes are essential to emergency evacuation measures, the provision of emergency resources and medical care when our population is threatened. These services must be able to reach those threatened citizens safely and reliably via our roads and bridges.

**Q** If emergency responders are delayed, what are the possible consequences?

**A** Paramedics, ambulance services and hospitals, from the largest metro hospital to the smallest community hospital, understand that getting a patient



to the hospital within the “golden hour” is essential. Survival rates for severely injured or ill people decrease significantly after an hour has passed. In addition, life and property are at great risk when essential fire and law enforcement services are delayed. Time is always of the essence. If a fire truck must take a detour, the cost we pay in lives and property affects the whole community, not just the family whose home is lost. The same is true for law enforcement response.

**Q** There are about a thousand bridges in Alabama with posted weight restrictions low enough to interfere with school buses. Does that also affect the ability of emergency responders to reach people quickly?

**A** If these bridges are restricted for a school bus, by the same token, they are also restricted for fire trucks and some ambulances.

**Q** Some bridges are posted with weight limits as low as 3 tons – which is about the weight of a Chevrolet Suburban without driver, passengers or cargo. Even a smaller emergency vehicle such as an ambulance is well-stocked with equipment and supplies. What sort of impact does this have?

**A** Well, of course the first question that comes to mind is how do responders cross that bridge with a 55,000 pound fire engine? The answer is, they don’t. The same is true for ambulances and law enforcement vehicles. Responders’ only option would be on foot, leaving their valuable equipment behind. Is this what we are willing to accept in these modern times? The answer is a resounding “No!”

**Q** In an emergency, do dispatchers have responsibility for advising responders about traffic jams or bridges with posted weight limits?

**A** If the 911 dispatcher is aware of an immediate issue that impacts the response, of course they will relay this to the responder. Almost every fire department in Alabama has a bridge or multiple bridges with design or weight limits that may impede response. As professionals, firefighters and paramedics learn about the hazards in their jurisdiction and the best travel route to use to reach the area and what vehicles they can use to facilitate the response.

**Q** It sounds like reducing traffic accidents – and the related injuries and fatalities

– is only the beginning of the public safety benefits when a community is served by good infrastructure, is that right?

**A** It is essential that we maintain and build upon our transportation infrastructure in so many ways. There is no way to detail, in this short article, all of the impacts possible. They range from everyday medical emergencies, fires, and law enforcement emergencies all the way to the large-scale disaster.

There is one common thread that impacts our ability to respond in each case, we must be able to reach our citizens to intervene. The alternative is not acceptable. The safety of our citizens, our friends, our families as well as the safety of our public servants in performance of their duties depends upon it. All Alabamians deserve a reliable and safe transportation network. Our lives – your life and your family’s – depend on it. ■

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