

Rallying Local Support for ATRIP-2



A RESOURCE TOOLKIT FOR COUNTY
LEADERS

ACCA Publication



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:



We are nearing the point when political courage might finally outweigh the pressures of continuing to ignore Alabama's declining infrastructure. The ATRIP-2 bond issue has come into focus in the last six weeks, as legislators can no longer deny the dire need for new investments in local infrastructure programs. This progress is due, in large part, to the consistent efforts of county leaders. But our work is far from over.

While the components of the county bond issue remain intact, some aspects of the legislation are still in question – as many legislators would also like to fund additional ALDOT projects. And the need is undeniable. Some 624 miles of Alabama's major roads (almost the equivalent of driving from Mobile to Huntsville and back) are in poor condition. TRIP, a national transportation think-tank, estimates that poor roadways are a contributing factor in about one-third of fatal traffic crashes. And on top of that, congestion costs, accidents, and declining road conditions now cost Alabama drivers more than \$3 billion every year – about \$321 out of each driver's wallet.

The infrastructure bill will likely be introduced in the House very soon after legislators return from the two-week recess. One thing is certain: the Legislature will not take action without the ongoing commitment of county leaders and employees, who are first-hand witnesses to the infrastructure struggles that Alabama citizens face on a daily basis.

As I have said before, the conversation about road and bridge funding began last December in downtown Montgomery, when county leaders across the state unanimously voted to support a 3-cent, \$1.2 billion bond issue proposal for county roads and bridges. The ball is now back in our court. I urge all county leaders to utilize the resources in this toolkit starting TODAY. We must continue to engage and educate members of the community on the relationship between local infrastructure and their daily quality of life – from job opportunities and morning commute times to roadway safety and emergency preparedness.

The Association staff is at your disposal if you have any questions about how to best leverage these recommendations in your county. Thank you for your hard-work on this issue. We are in the home stretch.

Sonny Brasfield
Executive Director

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Key Statistics:

Safety:

- Alabama ranked 5th in states where drivers are more likely to be involved in a fatal traffic accident (NHTSA).
- A total of 4,280 people died on Alabama's highways from 2011 through 2015, an average of 856 annually (TRIP).
- Approximately one in 12 locally and state maintained bridges in Alabama show significant deterioration or do not meet current design standards.
- The fatality rate on Alabama rural roads is more than double the rate on all other roads in the state.
- One-third of all fatal crashes are a result of roadway features (ASCE).

Economic/Job Growth:

- In a 2015 survey, corporate executives ranked highway accessibility as the second-most important factor when selecting a new site (*Area Development Magazine*).
- Recent polls show that more than 90% of Alabama citizens believe that a quality Alabama transportation system is important to economic development and job growth.
- The design, construction, and maintenance of transportation infrastructure in Alabama supports the equivalent of 65,068 jobs.
- Every dollar spent on road, bridge, and highway improvements in Alabama results in an average benefit of \$5.20 (FHWA).

Cost to Drivers:

- Driving on deficient roads costs Alabama motorists a total of \$4.2 billion annually in the form of additional vehicle operating costs, congestion-related delays, and traffic crashes (TRIP).
- Driving on roads in need of repair costs each Alabama motorist an average of \$320 per year in additional vehicle operating maintenance (ASCE).

General Messaging and Talking Points:

While the ATRIP-2 overview provides a short review of the program, it doesn't necessarily prepare county leaders for the numerous face-to-face conversations they will encounter after the bill is introduced and making media headlines.

The tips below are designed to help local officials fully engage with members of the public, including the media, about the ATRIP-2 proposal. The Association staff will provide additional talking points once this legislation is introduced.

- When talking to local citizens or members of the media, keep the message simple. Stay away from governmental "lingo" and complex discussions of the issue because most citizens are not familiar with the legislative process.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." If you are asked a question you are not comfortable answering, you might respond by saying: *"That's a great question. Let me connect you with the Association of County Commissions of Alabama to provide you more information."*
- If a member of the media asks for more detailed information, refer them to www.drivealabama.org or encourage them to contact a member of the Association's policy team.
- When possible, use real-life and/or local examples to communicate the cause and effect of Alabama's poor infrastructure system.
- Use these talking points when talking with your family, friends, church members, and civic club associates. Also, utilize them when crafting social media posts.

General Talking Points:

- The ATRIP-2 proposal is the result of a joint effort of many of the state's top policy development organizations that have a shared belief in the necessity of investing in Alabama's declining state and local infrastructure systems.
 - Alabama Farmers Federation, Alabama League of Municipalities, Alabama Trucking Association, Alliance for Alabama's Infrastructure, Association of County Commissions of Alabama, Association of County Engineers of Alabama, and Business Council of Alabama
- The original ATRIP program was introduced in 2012 as a bold infrastructure initiative that resulted in more than 1,100 road and bridge improvement projects across the state. But as the program nears its end, Alabama's remaining infrastructure is still in rapid deterioration.
- October 2017 is the deadline for all projects to be submitted under ATRIP, and many engineers fear the momentum gained under the program will come to a halt.
- The end of the ATRIP program comes at a time when President Trump has placed a new federal emphasis on infrastructure. The President has said that when his \$1 trillion infrastructure plan is

released, that states will have a 90-day deadline to start their projects.

- The ATRIP-2 program is designed to continue the positive economic impact and safety improvements of ATRIP, but with an eye to the future.
- The ATRIP-2 program will allow local governments to improve low-volume roads that are currently ineligible for federal funds, while also ensuring that the state is prepared to take full advantage of any federal programs that the new Congress may enact in the near future.
- For every \$1 invested in infrastructure, there is an estimated return of \$5.20. This proposal will have a massive economic impact in our state, with a projected economic impact of more than \$10 billion in the form of new jobs, decreased congestion-related delays, and lower vehicle operating costs for hardworking Alabamians and their families.
- This cannot wait. Now is the time to renew our commitment to the long-term maintenance and improvement of Alabama's infrastructure. This investment will benefit the state of Alabama for generations to come.

DRIVE Alabama Surveys:

The DRIVE Alabama surveys are an integral part of the Association's presentation to the Alabama Legislature. The results provide a first-hand account from county residents who not only take notice of poor road and bridge conditions, but are forced to endure them every day. The following tips have proven to be effective methods of promoting the DRIVE Alabama Survey.

<http://www.drivealabama.org/about/survey/>

1. County Commission Meeting

Make the DRIVE Alabama survey an agenda item at your next County Commission meeting. The attendees are a captive audience and generally includes members of the press. Urge attendees to complete the survey at the link above. The Association staff can even provide you with postcards to hand out that have a link to the survey.

The Association staff has prepared a press release (included in this toolkit) about the survey for county leaders to provide members of the media. If your county plans to discuss the surveys at an upcoming commission meeting, please contact a member of the Association staff to get an electronic copy of the release.

2. Utilize Social Media

The most effective way to utilize social media is to initiate engagement on your personal or political page. Engagement means beginning a conversation about your topic that many people can participate in. Oftentimes, the most effective way to engage your audience is to ask a question that prompts thought or discussion, or to provide an action step. *Example posts:*

What are the worst roads that you drive on? Fill out the survey then tell us in the comments below!

What is your commute like? If you could make your commute easier and smoother, would you? You can. Take the DRIVE Alabama Survey then tell us about your commute in the comments below.

Notice, the question is not about the ATRIP-2 proposal, but about the citizen's personal experiences. People like to talk about themselves. Prompt them to talk about themselves in the form of a question, and they will.

3. Touch the People You Know

Social media is great for some, but a face-to-face conversation may still be the best way to reach others. Ask your friends, family members, church members, and colleagues to complete the 2-minute survey. Tell them you need them to complete a survey about the conditions of their local roads and bridges. To go one step further, you could seek feedback by going door-to-door. You could even provide your iPad or tablet and allow residents to take the survey while you're having the discussion.

DRAFT PRESS RELEASE FOR SURVEYS:

_____ County Commission Urges Citizens to Complete Survey on County's Worst Roads

County Leaders: Local Input is Critical to Efforts to Improve Alabama's Infrastructure

_____, Ala. – As part of the DRIVE Alabama campaign, the _____ County Commission is urging local citizens to complete a 2-question survey ranking the three most critical road and/or bridge projects in the county. With increased discussions about federal and state initiatives to generate additional revenue for roads and bridges, county leaders say local input is especially critical.

"No one understands the daily impact of poor road and bridge infrastructure like the people who have to drive those roads every day," said Commissioner _____. "It's critical that the voice of _____ County residents are heard loud-and-clear in any discussions about additional revenue to ensure those funds are prioritized in the most efficient manner."

Citizens can rank the county's top three road and bridge problems in one-of-three ways:

1. Complete the survey at www.drivealabama.org/about/survey/
2. Email them to drivealabama@gmail.com (and include the county of residence)
3. Post them to the **DRIVE Alabama** Facebook page

In the American Society of Civil Engineers 2015 Alabama Infrastructure Report Card, the state's roads and bridges were graded at D+ and C-, respectively.

"We are going to take these survey results to our local legislators. I'm afraid we're going to see more and more road and bridge closings across the state if we don't take action soon," said Commissioner _____.

#

***DRIVE Alabama** is a coalition of community leaders and citizens led by county engineers from Alabama's 67 counties speaking in **one voice** to bring attention to the growing infrastructure needs across the state of Alabama. For more information about the silent crisis facing Alabama's transportation infrastructure, please visit the **DRIVE Alabama** campaign at www.drivealabama.org or on social media via [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).*

Print Media:

The newspaper industry has changed dramatically in the past 20 years and many Americans now utilize online news journals and social media to learn about current events. But in many Alabama communities, citizens still turn to the local newspaper to seek local news. You may find value in placing an opinion editorial in the local paper.

Below is a sample opinion editorial on the state's infrastructure needs. Feel free to submit the editorial "as is" (after filling in the appropriate blanks) or tweaking it to give it your own voice. Keep in mind that short and concise is always the best approach.

If you need assistance getting an opinion editorial placed in your local newspaper contact a member of the Association staff at 334-263-7594. The Association staff can also provide media lists specific to each county.

SAMPLE OPINION EDITORIAL

Something unheard of is about to happen in Montgomery. For the first time in 25 years, Alabama leaders are preparing to consider legislation to improve the state's rapidly declining infrastructure. The proposal is estimated to bring \$(enter county dollar amount) into (enter name of County) County for the maintenance and improvement of county and city roads and bridges.

And it's right in the nick of time, because Alabama's roads and bridges are crumbling before our eyes. The American Society of Civil Engineers' most recent report graded Alabama's overall infrastructure as below-average, with our roads and bridges receiving respective grades of C- and D+. As a result, the average Alabama driver spends about \$300 each year on vehicle repairs resulting from poor road conditions.

Part of the problem is that construction costs for Alabama's roads and bridges have more than doubled in the last 25 years, while our infrastructure investments have stayed the same. The average cost of a car in 1992 was about \$16,000. Now it's \$33,000. The same is true with construction costs, which means county engineers across the state are paying 2017 construction costs on a 1992 budget.

Our interstates, state highways, and county roads are the arteries to the things that matter most in our lives: our families, our children's schools, our jobs, our churches, and so much more. We cannot continue to ignore the problem.

President Trump recently announced his intention to infuse \$1 trillion into the nation's infrastructure. In order for state and local governments to receive any of those funds, they will have to provide "matching" dollars – which is generally around 20% of the total federal investment. The President has made it clear that state and local governments will have 90 days to get their matching dollars together – or they will miss out.

Will Alabama be ready?

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Our roads have become a dangerous place. More than 800 Alabamians lost their lives last year in automobile accidents. And far too often, poor road conditions are to blame for the fatal accidents on Alabama's roadways. It is time for our state to recommit to improving our road and bridge infrastructure. I urge the citizens of _____ County to complete the 2-question DRIVE Alabama Local Road and Bridge Survey (www.drivealabama.org/about/survey) to share their opinion about the local roads and bridges in most need of repair. Our safety may depend on it.

Sincerely,

Commissioner _____ of _____ County

Dear Editor,

Did you know that business leaders cite "infrastructure" as the second most important factor when selecting new locations? Right now, Alabama's road and bridge funding is below that of seven other southeastern states that are competing with us for new industries. An investment in Alabama's infrastructure is an investment in new jobs and economic development prospects. I am writing to encourage local citizens to take the 2-question DRIVE Alabama Road and Bridge Survey (www.drivealabama.org/about/survey) to share their opinion about the local roads and bridges in most need of repair.

Sincerely,

Commissioner _____ of _____ County

Social Media:

Sixty-eight percent of all Americans are on Facebook. Social media is quickly becoming the sole medium for many citizens seeking out new information and opportunities to interact with other people. This makes social media the ideal (and most convenient) place to discuss important local issues and promote the DRIVE Alabama survey. Sometimes social media conversations get tricky.

TWO IMPORTANT TIPS:

1. When having conversations on Facebook, or any social media platform, don't ever be afraid to say, "I don't know." If asked a question on social media that you are not comfortable answering, you might respond by saying: "That's a great question. Let me connect you with the Association of County Commissions of Alabama for more info."
2. Don't engage in unproductive back and forth on social media. If someone disagrees with your position, consider ending the conversation by saying, "Thank you for sharing your position. It's important for everyone to research this issue and form their own opinion."

Still wondering what to say in your social media posts? Consider using one of the following examples:

1. Did you know? Automobile accidents claimed the lives of more than 4,000 Alabamians from 2011 to 2015. You can help make Alabama county roads safer by letting us know which roads and bridges in your county are in need of repair. Take this quick, 2-question survey here: <http://www.drivealabama.org/about/survey/>
2. If there was additional road and bridge funding available in your county, which roads and bridges would you fix? Tell us in this 2-question survey #DriveAL <http://www.drivealabama.org/about/survey/>
3. We need your input! Which local roads and bridges need improvement? Tell us what you think with this 2-question survey! #DriveAL <http://www.drivealabama.org/about/survey/>
4. (Include picture of road in disrepair) County Road _____ in _____ County is utilized by ### citizens every day. Do you drive on a county road that is in need of maintenance? Let us know with the DRIVE Alabama County Road and Bridge Survey! <http://www.drivealabama.org/about/survey/> #DriveAL
5. Do you commute to work every day? How bad are the roads on your drive? Take the DRIVE Alabama Survey then tell us about your commute in the comments below. <http://www.drivealabama.org/about/survey/> #fixALroads #DriveAL
6. Did you know? Poor road and bridge conditions lead to \$320 in car repairs every year. Tell us about the local road and bridges in your area that are in need of repair. Take a 2-question survey here: <http://www.drivealabama.org/about/survey/>

Testimonials:

The Association is constantly seeking content for the ACCA and DRIVE Alabama social media pages. A great way for county leaders to voice their support for the infrastructure program is by simply providing a quote to be shared on social media. The quotes can be two or three short sentences, expressing the significance of the program to your home county.

Consider the following examples:



For years, local governments have piecemealed together funding for roads and bridges. If Alabama is going to compete nationally for jobs and resources, we must have an infrastructure system in place to accommodate economic development opportunities.

[Sonny Brasfield \(ACCA Executive Director\)](#)



Local roads and bridges are the portals to our communities, and a critical component of economic growth for county governments. Alabama needs a long-term, sustainable revenue source to adequately address our infrastructure needs.

[Ray Long \(Morgan County Commission, Chairman\)](#)

County officials can also utilize smart devices to record video testimonials. Simply use a phone or tablet to record a few words of support for infrastructure funding, and email it to a member of the Association staff for use on social media and the DRIVE Alabama website.

Other Engagement Methods:

There are a number of other things you and your colleagues can do to promote the ATRIP-2 program in your community. Below are six recommendations that will keep you actively engaged and informed about Alabama's quest for new infrastructure revenue.

1. Make direct contact with House members about the importance of supporting the ATRIP-2 program.
2. Utilize the various social media platforms committed to promoting new infrastructure investments in Alabama:
 - a. **Alliance for Alabama's Infrastructure** – on Facebook and Twitter
 - b. **DRIVE Alabama** – on Facebook and Twitter
 - c. **Fix My Roads Alabama** – on Facebook
3. Issue a public statement of support for the ATRIP-2 program.
4. Identify one person – likely a commissioner or the county engineer – to serve as the spokesperson on this issue to ensure consistency of messaging.
5. Encourage all county employees to complete a survey of the "Top-3" most important infrastructure projects in your county.
 - a. www.drivealabama.org/about/survey
 - b. County commissions will be promoting this survey statewide during the two-week Spring Recess.
6. Sign up to receive the Alliance for Alabama's Infrastructure News and Media Highlights.
 - a. Contact Drew Harrell (धारrell@bcatoday.org)