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# COUNTY COMMISSION

Volume 60, Number 1  
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Gearing up  
to DRIVE into

# 2016

**ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE PREVIEW**





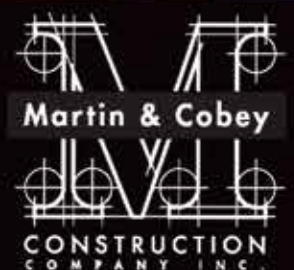


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FOR  
INFORMATION  
CONTACT

Brian Moore P 256.232.5384  
BMOORE@MARTINANDCOBEY.COM  
WWW.MARTINANDCOBEY.COM





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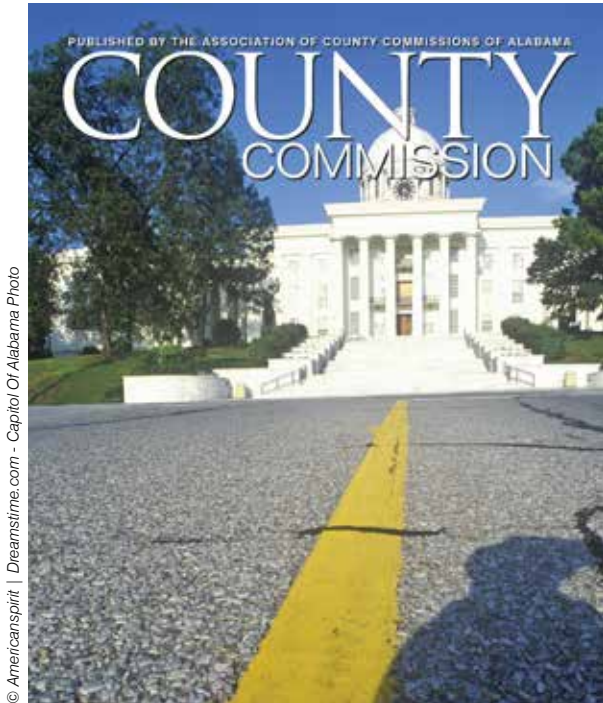
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**When the Alabama Legislature is in session, all roads lead to the Capital City! The 2016 Regular Session kicks off at noon on Feb. 2.**



# President's PERSPECTIVE



Hon. Ray Long  
President

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Ray Long". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ray" and last name "Long" clearly distinguishable.

## Winning the Fight

### The Value of Speaking in 'One Voice'

In less than a month, legislators will return to Montgomery for the start of the 2016 legislative session. From the first Tuesday in February until mid-May, the 140 legislators will be faced with difficult decisions and challenges that will affect Alabama citizens for years to come.

In county government, we are all too familiar with the choices they will be forced to make. The more than 350 county commissioners face those same decisions on a monthly basis in courthouses throughout our state. And, more often than not, the decisions we must make at the county level are directly impacted by what happens in Montgomery while the Legislature is in session.

As we embrace a new year and look toward the start of the 2016 legislative session, I want to challenge everyone to re-evaluate their role as a member of the Association of County Commissioners of Alabama, and then connect it to our new strategic objective to "Unify the County Voice."

Long ago, the Association's leadership realized that achieving our goals would require the collective wisdom, influence and collaboration of all of county government – including commissioners, sheriffs, tax officials, probate judges and the very important non-elected department heads and county employees. Over time, we learned that this is not always an easy feat, but the commonality among all members of this Association is this: we all must have a shared desire to act in the collective best interest of county governments in the state of Alabama.

This commonality is the central tenet of our motto, "67 Counties, One Voice," and it is the foundation upon which we will "Unify the County Voice" during the coming years. Without it, our advocacy as an Association is effectively silenced, particularly in the midst of a fight... and there is no doubt that we will be faced with some tough fights this year.

We've already started to gear up for one of our most important efforts of the last 20 years – the consideration of legislation aimed at providing a new emphasis on road and bridge investment in Alabama. The cost of road and bridge construction has more than doubled since the last revenue increase back in 1992. Everyone agrees that it is important that Alabama take steps to recapture the lost ground – and it's especially critical for county governments' ability to maintain and improve locally-owned roads and bridges.

As the Association family came together to discuss this issue at the Annual Convention, in our Legislative Workgroups, and at the Legislative Conference, it became clear that there are some varied opinions about the most efficient way to generate such revenue. The existence of the differing opinions will not cause us to fail. In fact, this variety of opinion – based on a wide range of factors – always contributes to our ability to make a better "collective" decision than any of us could make alone.

As we worked on our new strategic plan, our voices were consistent and strong. Almost without reservation, each commissioner voiced his or her



desire to see additional revenue focused on road and bridge construction in Alabama. We know the problems – perhaps better than anyone – and we know that if we fail during this session, the decisions we will face in our individual counties will only become more and more unpleasant.

Those who wish to keep Alabama mired in its current position are likely to work toward dividing our counties. Some will say that more funding should be shifted to counties on the district system or to those on the unit system. Perhaps some will try to divide us by saying that a larger portion of any new revenue should be distributed under a new approach that takes into

account some issue that would serve only to weaken our voice.

Should any of this talk arise, please recognize it for what it really is – an attempt to weaken the single, unified and effective voice of county government. Those who may attempt to distract us in this way will do so only because they know that a strong, collective effort by our Association is the key to success on this issue and, of course, on all the other issues that will face us during the 2016 session.

More important than any single challenge, including our effort to FINALLY address the glaring and dangerous condition of our roads and bridges, is our ability to work through issues in a way that produces

a unified position of strength. It is our role as the single, unified and effective “voice” for counties that allows us to take care of the people who depend on us back home.

Inside the pages of this issue of this magazine you’ll see details on our legislative goals and our policy statements. Each word represents the input of county officials and employees from throughout our state. And each word is important. The details in this magazine represent our collective wisdom, our collective vision and our commitment to work in a unified way toward our collective goal on the challenging issues that arise this year and on those that will confront us in the years to come. ■

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**Sonny Brasfield**  
*Executive Director*

*Sonny Brasfield*

**If the needle is  
to be moved,  
momentum must  
come from the  
'county team'**

**Success depends  
on unifying the  
county voice**

It happens every year. Those who have been around Goat Hill for a while look at the political landscape right before the start of the legislative session and proclaim that it will be “one of the worst” sessions we’ve ever seen.

With the 2016 regular legislative session just around the corner, I am again concerned about the challenge we will face when the Alabama Legislature reconvenes on February 2. There are many reasons to be pessimistic, but perhaps the easiest to explain starts and finishes with money.

During 2015, it took three sessions, the use of one-time money, and some budget sleight-of-hand to piece together a state General Fund budget that would support some semblance of state government through September 2016. From all indications, the financial circumstances that placed the general fund agencies in peril the last time around have – by some measures – actually gotten worse. So the budget chaos will be hiding behind every door during the upcoming session.

This issue alone would be enough to derail most sessions, but there are other factors – related in part to the interplay between some members of the majority party as well as the interaction between the majority and minority parties – that will likely hang around the Alabama State House like fog on a February morning.

With that backdrop, the Association is marshalling its forces for a long overdue effort at providing additional funding for road and bridge projects in our state.

The last time Alabama provided new revenue for important transportation construction, Elton

John and Michael Jackson had No. 1 hits on the Billboard charts, MTV premiered something called a “reality show,” and a guy named Jay Barker was leading Alabama to the National Championship of college football.

So, this effort is long overdue.

But let’s be clear, simply saying that additional revenue is needed because “it’s been a long time” will not solidify a coalition of legislative leaders to secure passage of such important legislation. But it does put into context the urgency of reinvesting in our state’s future and in the central element in our economy – our road system.

The other day, a reporter who has been around Montgomery for a very, very long time asked if we really thought the Alabama Legislature would increase the state’s gasoline tax and, thereby, provide counties with additional revenue to rescue our crumbling road and bridge system. I chuckled a bit and then explained that the important and significant pieces of legislation almost always seem to be long-shots BEFORE the session begins.

The key to success on this subject, and all the others on our priority list, will rest on the involvement of the “county team” both in Montgomery and, more importantly, back home at the grassroots level. If the needle is to be moved on the issue of generating additional revenue for roads and bridges, reforming the way local laws are enacted, updating the process for defending challenges of ad valorem tax assessments, and seeking improvements in our state’s juvenile justice system, then it will be the “county team” that generates the momentum for that movement.

Without decisive actions from the county level, these issues will fade like “The Real World” – which, if you have forgotten, was the name of that first reality television show back in 1992.

Clearly there will be many ways to measure success this session. The passage of all of the Association’s priority legislation would be the most visible evidence that success has been achieved. But, just as important is the defeat of the many, many pieces of legislation which would likely impact counties in a negative way.

At a time when finding additional operating revenue is unlikely, the ability for counties to continue essential services rests squarely on our being able to hold the ground

we have – being aggressive in protecting county revenue, finding more efficient ways to collect ALL of the revenue due to the counties, and defeating the passage of new unfunded responsibilities that will dilute our revenue.

In this arena, speaking with a strong and unified voice will be our sole responsibility. And, speaking of that one voice, a third important goal for this year’s session is the enhancement of the efforts embodied in our new strategic plan, *Unifying the County Voice*.

For many years, we’ve talked about the unlimited potential of uniting the individual courthouse officials into a solid and consistent coalition to protect and improve

county government. As we look to expand the unifying voice, the lines of communication between the Association, the sheriffs, and the tax officials have never been better or more productive. We enter this session with the realization that we must combine our mutual experience and collective expertise to benefit all of county government.

If this session truly is to be “one of the worst” we’ve ever seen, then we must actively and aggressively guard this growing coalition. And most importantly, we must seek out ways to use our collective voice for the benefit of ALL of county government.

Our success in 2016 depends on it. ■



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# 2016 ACCA Strategic Goals

***The Association of County Commissions of Alabama's membership selected the following strategic goals as the top priorities in the Alabama Legislature this year. These issues were chosen from ACCA's Strategic Goals for the 2015-2018 Quadrennium (or four-year term) of the state legislature.***

## **1 ■ Drive Alabama: Funding for Roads and Bridges**

The ever-increasing need for construction, maintenance, and repair of county roads and bridges far exceeds available revenues for such projects.

The Association, working with a coalition of business leaders and interest groups will pursue legislation to provide adequate funding for state and local road and bridge projects utilizing the current gas tax formula.

## **2 ■ Appointing Outside Counsel for Litigation of Commercial Property Cases**

Current law requires the local district attorney to handle all ad valorem tax cases within their respected circuit. Due to the need for specialized counsel with expertise in certain commercial ad valorem tax cases, the Association proposes legislation allowing the county commission to contract with outside counsel in tax dispute cases involving commercial property and to appropriate funds for that representation to be paid from the county's reappraisal budget.

## **3 ■ Retiring Department Heads**

Current law prohibits a retiring department head from contracting with his or her former employer for a period of two years after he or she leaves employment. This can significantly hamper a county during the period of transition since the expertise of the retiring person can significantly aid in training his or her replacement. The Association proposes legislation to allow retiring department heads to temporarily contract with their former employer to provide transitional assistance for a limited time.

## **4 ■ Clarifying Definition of State Inmate**

The implementation of the Prison Reform Act of 2015 will result in a significant increase in the number of individuals on parole or probation being housed in the county jail. To ensure counties do not assume the responsibility and cost for these individuals, the Association, working with the Sheriffs' Association, will seek legislation to ensure the state is legally and financially responsible for persons on parole or probation when held for a temporary confinement in the county jail or awaiting hearing or transfer to a state facility.



# From the Cover

## 5 Omnibus Pay Act

In an effort to simplify the process and availability for granting increases to local elected officials under the Omnibus Pay Act, the Association proposes legislation to remove the limitation that local elected officials only receive increases granted at time the county budget is adopted and to limit increases to uniform cost of living adjustments. It is the belief of the Association that this legislation will help alleviate confusion and controversy related to proper application of this important law.

## 6 Police Jurisdiction Reform

Local control and taxation within the police jurisdiction is a constant source of controversy and confusion between local governments and citizens living within those areas. Reducing the size of a police jurisdiction would serve to minimize the municipality's control outside its corporate

limits where citizens not living in the municipality are impacted by the decisions of that governing body. The Association proposes legislation to provide that the police jurisdiction in any municipality is limited to 1½ miles outside the corporate limits of the municipality regardless of the population of the municipality.

## 7 Amending Local Legislation

The Constitutional Revision Commission, which met for over two years to identify needed changes to Alabama's Constitution, recommended several revisions that could directly impact county government in significant and positive ways. While two of these recommendations were passed by the Alabama Legislature during the 2015 Legislative Session, the proposal to allow for debate and amendment of local legislation still needs legislative approval in order to be placed on the statewide ballot in November 2016. Because the ability to negotiate provisions of local legislation during the legislative



# From the Cover

process is a key to allowing county government a meaningful voice in legislation that will affect the county, the Association will once again work toward passage of this important proposed constitutional amendment.

## 8 Appointments for Board of Registrars

Under current law, persons serving on the Board of Registrars are appointed by the Governor, State Auditor, and Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries. These appointments are political in nature and persons serve with little accountability for the work performed. The Association believes this antiquated system should be altered to ensure there are state standards for the registration of voters and maintenance of the voter list in each county, and that persons performing these essential functions of government are properly supervised at the local level. To accomplish these

goals, the Association proposes legislation to provide state standards for voter registration and voter list maintenance and to allow the county commission to appoint and supervise persons performing these functions as county employees paid by the state. ■



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# ACCA DISTRICT MEETINGS

Wednesday, January 13, 2016  
Burningtree Country Club,  
Decatur, AL  
(Morgan County)

Thursday, January 14, 2016  
Classic on Noble Restaurant,  
Anniston, AL  
(Calhoun County)

Tuesday, January 19, 2016  
Grove Hill Senior Center,  
Grove Hill, AL  
(Clarke County)

Thursday, January 21, 2016  
Sisters Restaurant  
Troy, AL  
(Pike County)

Tuesday, January 26, 2016  
Alabama Cooperative  
Extension System Auditorium  
(Tuscaloosa County)

Wednesday, January 27, 2016  
Marriott Legends at Capitol  
Hill, Prattville, AL  
(Elmore County)

The 2016 Legislative Session will begin on February 2 and a key component of our preparation for the session is the District Meetings. The meetings help us prepare to play offense by advocating for legislation that would be positive for counties and play defense by working against legislation that would hurt county government.

During the meetings, ACCA staff will report to you on the expectations for the 2016 Legislative Session and a number of other matters important to your county. As you all know, the success of the Association is directly linked to the level of participation by the membership. If you take an active role and work to support the Association, we can continue to provide excellent service to your counties. Because the Association is the only voice for county government in Alabama, it is important that counties work together.

All meetings will begin at 6 p.m. and the cost for ALL meetings will be \$20 per person. We encourage you attend the meeting that best fits your schedule. Register online at [www.alabamacounties.org](http://www.alabamacounties.org). Directions to each location will be emailed about a week before the meeting. If you have any questions regarding the district meetings please call the ACCA office or email Jennifer Datcher at [jdatcher@alabamacounties.org](mailto:jdatcher@alabamacounties.org).

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# ACCA 2015 Strategic Goals & Legislative Policy Statement Accomplishments

## ALABAMA GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE

### County Decision Making

**Goal:** To enact a constitutional amendment to authorize local decision-making.

With the Association's urging, the Alabama Legislature passed Act 2015-220, proposing a constitutional amendment that would give county government limited decision-making authority to carry out management and administrative activities without the need for the passage of future local laws. This proposed constitutional amendment would allow counties the authority to address the following:

- County personnel programs, policies, and procedures,
- Community programs for litter-free roadways, public facilities, and public property,
- Public transportation,
- Operation of county offices, and
- Emergency assistance programs.

## Local Constitutional Amendments

**Goal:** To improve the Alabama governmental structure between state and local governments by passing a constitutional amendment to encourage local-only referenda on constitutional amendments.

The Legislature, with strong encouragement from the Association, passed Act 2015-44 creating a two-step process for passing local constitutional amendments that would make it more likely that proposed local constitutional amendments would not face a statewide referendum.

## COUNTY OPERATIONS & BUDGET AUTHORITY

### County Modernization

**Goal:** To modernize the operation of county government in several ways.

The Association achieved many of these goals with the Legislature's passage of County Modernization III.



# From the Cover

Act 2015-53 modernizes the administration of county government by revising several outdated sections of Alabama law, and clarifying existing language related to counties. Specifically, this act does the following:

1. Allows counties general authority to contract with municipalities,
2. Clarifies Alabama's law related to county commissioner conflicts of interest,
3. Authorizes counties to create a self-funded property insurance program,
4. Clarifies bonding requirements for 9-1-1 Board members and employees, and
5. Prevents the annexing of county-maintained roads along emergency evacuation routes.

## Local Preference

**Goal:** To amend the competitive bid law to allow counties to grant a local preference where the local vendor's bid is within 5 percent of the lowest responsible bidder.

The Legislature, at the Association's request, passed this permissive act, Act 2015-293, increasing the existing local preference for those companies within the county from three percent to five percent – now allowing counties to award contracts to local companies within five percent of lowest responsible bidder. This preference will apply to purchases of personal property and services.

The Act also authorizes counties to use in-state companies owned by identified disadvantaged businesses if their bids are no more than 10 percent higher than the lowest bidder in cases when the lowest bidder is from outside the state of Alabama.

## Open Meetings Law

**Goal:** To clarify mutually-agreed upon provisions of Alabama's Open Meetings Law that do not

unnecessarily restrict the ability of the county commission to effectively conduct public business.

Lawmakers amended the Open Meetings Law with Act 2015-340, which includes provisions negotiated by the Association insuring that the ability of the county commissions to conduct business was not affected negatively. It is the position of the Association to oppose any further changes in the Open Meetings Law that would negatively impact counties.

## ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

### Fair Campaign Practices Act

**Goal:** To require e-filing of campaign financial reports and to clarify campaign financial reporting and enforcement procedures.

The Association successfully negotiated with legislators to provide for local candidates to start e-filing all campaign financial reports, beginning in 2018, and for the State Ethics Commission to oversee and enforce campaign laws. Further, the Act clarifies the campaign finance and statement of economic interest reporting requirements and places enforcement of campaign finance with the non-partisan Ethics Commission.

## REVENUE PROTECTION

### Internet Tax Remittance

**Goal:** To bring Alabama into compliance with federal legislation related to the collection of taxes owed on internet sales if such federal legislation should take place.

In an effort to accomplish that goal, the Association advocated with legislators in favor of Act 2015-448, designed to entice those out-of-state retailers

(primarily internet-based companies) to voluntarily collect a substitute sales tax of eight percent on all items delivered into the state. This Act could bring significant revenue to counties as internet companies sign up for voluntary remittance of internet tax.



# From the Cover

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & THE ALABAMA TRUST FUND

### Periodic Reporting of Tax Exemptions

**Goal:** To require periodic reporting on tax incentives relating to any job growth, local economies, or other instances of tax incentives.

The Association worked with supporters of this legislation, Act 2015-534, to now require all companies exempt from the payment of sales, use, and lodgings taxes to annually file information reports with the Department of Revenue.

## JUSTICE & PUBLIC SAFETY

### Drag Racing Legislation

**Goal:** To increase penalties for illegal drag racing on public roads in an effort to reverse the upward trend of the activity in both urban and rural areas of the state.

With the Association's active support, the Legislature passed Act 2015-315 to increase the penalties faced by illegal drag-racers, race organizers, and spectators if convicted of the offense. It also includes provisions for impounding a vehicle that has been involved in illegal drag-racing activities.

## RURAL TRANSPORTATION

### One Call Notification Excavations

**Goal:** To support changes to the "call before you dig" program designed to ensure the state's eligibility for certain federal grants,

provided such efforts do not require the state or counties to notify any entities before performing routine maintenance on state or county roads or rights-of-way.

Legislators incorporated Association-negotiated provisions in Act 2015-363 so that the

definition of "excavation" does not include routine roadway maintenance activities carried out by those responsible for publicly-maintained roadways – a protection that ensures counties can perform these functions as necessary without delay. ■

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**HUGE 2-Day Contractors' Equipment & Truck Auction**

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# Mind Your P's and Q's

## Social Media Etiquette in Legislative Advocacy

The Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA) is constantly working to improve its advocacy outreach. Doing so allows the organization to further contribute to legislative conversations by promoting policy changes that can improve the operation of county government. The same is true for Alabama's 67 county governments. If used effectively, advocacy efforts at the county level provide local leaders an additional avenue to help improve the lives of their constituents.

Over the years, the strategies for effective legislative advocacy have drastically evolved.

Today, social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and blogs are powerful vehicles in promoting legislative advocacy to a large audience. The use of social media platforms along with effective messaging can be used to demonstrate that county leaders have a strong and united voice and are active participants in advancing county government.

The main social media sites are especially designed to help individuals, organizations, and governments facilitate relationship building and stakeholder engagement. Social media's open and interactive environment offers an easy and low-cost way to mobilize supporters, foster dialogue with large audiences, and attract attention to legislative issues that might otherwise be ignored by traditional media outlets.

But beware: social media can also be a double-edged sword – because for elected officials, it represents the ultimate in government transparency. To avoid any major blunders, governments, public officials,

and communications officers need to not only get familiar with using social media...but get good at it.

In many ways, social media etiquette for legislative advocacy is intuitive, but here are a few easy tips and ideas to make good use of social media during the legislative advocacy process:

- 1. Keep your posts positive or neutral.** If you don't share the same political view or agenda as the elected official you visit, you can still share your work with constituents – even if the visit wasn't positive for your issue or for county government. Here are a few ways to stay positive in the midst of a not so positive legislative interaction: (A.) Express gratitude for the person's time. (B.) Share that you personally lobbied them on a particular issue. (C.) Acknowledge that more work needs to be done in your state.

Remember: your social media posts should be about policy, not politics. Like Momma always said, "If you don't

have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all."

- 2. Know how to reach your elected official on social media.** Most elected leaders have Twitter accounts or Facebook pages. You can usually find it on the official's website or through a quick Google search. Use that username in your Twitter or Facebook messages. This is proper social media etiquette, and also gives the account holder a notice that he or she has been mentioned in someone else's post.

For example, on Twitter you might say: *"Had a great meeting today with @SenSmith and staff. He supports a long-term plan to fund local road and bridge programs!"*



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# From the Cover

Or on Facebook, you would say: *“Joined colleagues this a.m. in a meeting with **Senator Richard Smith** to ask that he cosponsor SB 111. I hope we can count on his support.”*

NOTE: The ACCA keeps a contact list for all elected officials in the state of Alabama. Contact an ACCA staffer if you need assistance identifying your representative on social media.

time to look at the elected official’s Facebook and/or Twitter page before your visit and get a feel for how the office uses social media.

While elected officials typically aren’t camera-shy, their staffers may not be used to having photos taken—let alone shared on social media sites. However, sharing photos of you and your colleagues outside the office or in front of the State House is a great

way to highlight your visit and your work. You can post photos to Twitter or Facebook to increase engagement. Research has shown that Tweets with photos get 18 percent more clicks, 89 percent more favorites, and 150 percent more retweets!

For example, **#AlabamaCounties** and **#67Counties1Voice** are the hashtags for the ACCA; **#DRIVEAlabama** is the hashtag for the DRIVE Alabama campaign; and **#ALpolitics** is the hashtag for all matters related to the Alabama political scene.

**6. Keep your messages short and generic for maximum sharing and retweeting potential.** Facebook allows you to share a large number of characters, while Twitter only allows you to share up to 140 characters. But research shows that the messages most likely to get shared and retweeted are between 100-120 characters. Break your thought into 2-3 posts if you need to express something lengthier.

And in order to increase your shares and retweets, avoid writing in first-person. Instead experiment with keeping the words more generic. Write in a way that could sound like it was coming from someone else.

**7. Link your social media posts related to county government to the Association of County Commissions of Alabama.** Also use social media to connect with other individuals, organizations, and coalitions that you want to update or invite to share your message. ■

**3. Check in with the official’s office before you post a message about your visit.** It’s good etiquette and relationship-building to let the elected official or staff know that you may use social media to share highlights of the visit. It also gives the office advanced notice, and they can look for your posts in case they want to share or retweet on their own sites.

**4. Ask before you share a photo of an official or staffers.** Many elected officials’ offices have a policy – official or unofficial – for social media use. Some like to retweet and share photos and messages from their constituents. Others prefer to only push out headlines or key messages and not retweet or share messages from visitors. Take

**5. Use the best hashtag.** If you are involved in an advocacy campaign, use the commonly accepted hashtag for that campaign in all the messages you post about your legislative visits, so that others interested in this issue can easily search and follow related tweets.



Ask yourself

*‘Would I want someone to say this about me or my work?’*

or

*‘Would I say this to them in person?’*  
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— Leila Lewis, Be Inspired PR



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# Alabama County Platform

***The 2016 ACCA Alabama County Platform was approved  
by the ACCA Board of Directors on December 2, 2015, and was adopted by the ACCA  
membership at the Annual Legislative Conference on December 3, 2015.***

## **County Expenditures for Compensation & Benefits**

### **Foundation Principle**

The County Commission is charged with making the budgeting decisions necessary to provide the most effective and efficient services to the citizens within the revenue available in each of the 67 courthouses.

Legislatively-mandated adjustments in salary and benefits pose a threat to the delivery of such services. For this reason, the Association opposes any legislation which mandates any expenditure of county revenues for the payment of compensation, salary supplements, expense allowances, or benefits for current or former government officials or employees.

### **Strategic Goals**

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

- To reform Alabama's workers' compensation law by reasonably reducing medical costs while not subjecting employers to increased payments or expenditures.
- To remove the limitation that local elected officials only receive increases granted when the county budget is adopted, and limit increases granted to cost of living adjustments.

### **Legislative Policy**

In addition to its strategic goals, the Association has adopted the following legislative policy consistent with this Foundation Principle:

- Support for the Omnibus Pay Act in its current form and opposition to any requirement to provide or increase compensation, benefits, or county-paid salary supplements for state or local officials.
- Opposition to mandated and unfunded requirements to provide or increase compensation or benefits for any county-paid personnel or volunteers.
- Opposition to shifting responsibility for the payment of the employee-share of retirement contributions for probate judges to the counties.
- Support for the elimination of all supernumerary programs and opposition to any mandated and unfunded increases in payments made under existing programs.



# From the Cover

## 67 Counties, *One Voice*

■ Support for authorizing cost of living increases for state and local retirees, provided such legislation only applies to retirees in a particular county if approved by the county commission.

■ Belief that any retirement program changes should not apply to local participants without approval of the county commission.

■ Belief that local government should be represented on the Retirement Systems of Alabama Board of Control and that elected positions and/or local government representation on the Board should not be eliminated.

■ Support for authorizing counties to establish civil service systems, provided the creation of such systems does not provide for collective bargaining.

### Alabama Governmental Structure

#### Foundation Principle

The relationship between Alabama counties and the Alabama Legislature is established in constitutional and statutory law.

The preservation of a constitutional relationship between the State of Alabama and its counties as well as a workable and productive statutory allocation of responsibilities between the state and the counties is

essential to the delivery of services. Therefore, Alabama counties encourage the Alabama Legislature to fully fund state agencies and opposes the shifting of costs and administrative responsibility of state functions to the local level through the state budget process.

#### Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

● To shift the statutorily-required publication of legal notices from a “newspaper” to publication on a website maintained by the state or by each individual county.

● To provide a constitutional amendment to ensure open debate of local legislation.

● To provide for six year terms of office for county commissioners.

#### Legislative Policy

In addition to its strategic goals, the Association has adopted the following legislative policy consistent with this Foundation Principle:

■ Opposition to removing or impeding local control of the county department of human resources.

■ Opposition to restricting or limiting a county commission’s

authority to independently make decisions related to county property.

■ Opposition to abolishing regional planning commissions.

■ Support for continued application of current constitutional and statutory provisions providing that elected officials can only be removed from office through the process for impeachment.

■ Support for Alabama’s current structure for enacting or amending state general or local laws and belief that no provision allowing for citizen referendum should be enacted.

■ Support for the ratification of proposed constitutional amendments to authorize local decision making and to encourage local only referendums or local constitutional amendments.

■ Belief that individual property rights must be balanced with adequate means to protect the health, safety, and welfare of all citizens.

■ Belief that any additional restrictions on the use of constitutional and statutory procedures for condemnation of private property for necessary governmental purposes will serve to harm the collective well-being of all citizens.



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205-603-8279  
[ashancock@revds.com](mailto:ashancock@revds.com)

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## Mandated & Unfunded Legislation

### Foundation Principle

Without the authority to levy taxes or even collect fees for services, Alabama counties constantly struggle to provide an adequate level of services to ensure health, safety and prosperity of local citizens. Alabama's constitution provides protection from the enactment of mandated and unfunded responsibilities onto county government to ensure the financial integrity of the commission. The Association strongly supports the intent of Alabama's constitutional language prohibiting the enactment of unfunded mandates and opposes the establishment of such mandates through federal or state administrative actions.

### Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

- To amend the unfunded mandate constitutional amendment to provide that the exemption for defining crimes apply only to provisions of the law defining or amending a crime.

### Legislative Policy

In addition to its strategic goals, the Association has adopted the following legislative policy consistent with this Foundation Principle:

- Opposition to federal and state efforts to require county

government to assume any financial or programmatic responsibilities that are currently financed and/or administered at the federal or state level.

- Opposition to any mandated and unfunded requirement that counties assume new programs established by the federal or state government.

- Opposition to any federal or state legislative, administrative, or regulatory directives requiring county government to assume inspection, public safety, permitting responsibilities or other duties currently performed by the state or federal agency.

- Opposition to any legislative or regulatory directives requiring counties to provide housing, supplies, equipment or other expenses for a county coroner or other county officer.

- Opposition to state agencies administratively eliminating state services within a county for budgetary or other reasons without legislative approval.

## County Operations & Budget Authority

### Foundation Principle

The county governing body serves as both the legislative and administrative branch of government at the local level – carrying out both budgetary duties as well as providing administrative leadership for many functions. The budgetary,

personnel and administrative functions carried out by the county commission are essential to the financial and operational health of county government in Alabama. The Association opposes any efforts that will obstruct the commission's ability to effectively govern and to maintain the administrative and financial well-being of the services delivered by the county commission.

### Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

- To provide statutory language establishing the county commission is a party to any contract authorizing or requiring the expenditure of county funds, providing for the use of county property, or addressing salary, benefits, or duties of county personnel.
- To allow the county commission to agree to contract with outside counsel in cases of dispute over commercial property and appropriate funds for that representation from the county's reappraisal budget.
- To allow retiring department heads to temporarily contract with their former employer to provide transitional assistance.
- To allow services to be included in the current bid law exemption for certain purchases made through U.S. Communities or other approved government cooperative purchasing programs.



- To provide that the county commission sets the hours of operation of county offices.
- To clarify statutory language related to use of county warrants and bonds.
- To protect counties, officials, employees, or agents against liability for official actions provided there is no change in the statutory damage cap for awards against counties.
- To require municipalities to provide animal control services within its jurisdictional limits or contribute a pro rata share of services provided by the county.

### Legislative Policy

In addition to its strategic goals, the Association has adopted the following legislative policy consistent with this Foundation Principle:

- Opposition to changes in the current CDARS Program and public depository law that could result in greater risk to the stability of county deposits.

- Belief that the Open Records Law adequately protects a citizen's right to access of public documents.

- Opposition to efforts to remove or increase the current statutory damage cap in actions brought against county officials or employees or to repeal the prohibition against punitive damages.

- Opposition to any efforts to require counties to pay attorney fees.

- Support for the county commission role in adopting and enforcing the county budget and opposition to any efforts to weaken or direct the county commission's exercise of this legislative authority.

- Opposition to requiring the county commission to vote or take action on a particular measure or issue.

- Support for limiting use of out-of-state cooperative programs for purchases available on county joint bid list.

## Election Administration

### Foundation Principle

Alabama's election laws must maintain an unquestioned level of integrity and objectivity while avoiding the wasteful spending of limited local and state resources. Likewise, the reporting and disclosure requirements placed on candidates only serve to bolster such efforts to garner public confidence in the election process. The Association supports efforts to eliminate many of the unenforceable and overbroad provisions of Alabama's election law while not generating additional unnecessary costs or burdens at the local level.

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**Catherine Huff**  
President / Owner

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### Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

- To eliminate the requirement that the county commission set and fund school tax elections for municipal school systems.
- To provide a more efficient process for counting write-in ballots following an election.
- To alter the current process for appointment of boards of registrars to authorize the county commission to appoint the members based upon job qualifications, provided the funds to pay the salaries and benefits of the board of registrars remains at the state level.
- To allow the county commission, in its discretion, to assume responsibility for the absentee election function when there is a change in the office of circuit clerk.

### Legislative Policy

In addition to its strategic goals, the Association has adopted the following legislative policy consistent with this Foundation Principle:

- Support for legislation authorizing the Secretary of State to implement a pilot program for the use of electronic poll books to be utilized at polling places, with county commission consent, provided all costs are paid by the state and all poll workers are properly trained.
- Opposition to eliminating a runoff election except in the most extreme circumstances where the outcome of the primary is inevitable.
- Support for any legislative or administrative efforts aimed at eliminating waste and reducing state and county election expenses, provided such efforts maintain the integrity of the election process.
- Support for authorizing counties to satisfy election-related publication requirements by posting information on a public website and making copies available at the courthouse.

## Environment, Land Use, & Public Works

### Foundation Principle

County government's role in the effective administration and enforcement of Alabama's law affecting environmental issues, land use and public works administration is often confusing. Counties lack land-use authority, but are required to grant initial approval for landfills. Counties seek to enhance the delivery of services by improving their public facilities and programs, but often are impeded by federal and state regulations, inspections, and prohibitions that do not serve the public's best interests. The exercise of extra-jurisdictional powers by municipalities further clouds the role of county government. The Association seeks legislative and administrative solutions to these conflicts and encourages all related agencies to interact with counties to ensure the proper delivery of services and the enforcement of requirements and regulations.

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### Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

- To more clearly define the county commission's responsibilities in granting host government approval of new or expanding landfills.
- To allow for local laws to grant a county broader use of solid waste fees collected for garbage services or as tipping fees, provided the use is connected to the provision of solid waste services.
- To limit the exercise of municipal powers or taxation outside the jurisdiction's corporate limits.
- To require all police jurisdiction limits be reduced to 1½ miles outside the corporate limits of the municipality regardless of the population of the municipality.

### Legislative Policy

In addition to its strategic goals, the Association has adopted the following legislative policy consistent with this Foundation Principle:

- Opposition to any statutory or administrative increase in fees charged by a state agency if such increases will be paid by county government or county-established agencies.
- Support for restoring state EMA revenues in the state general fund budget to ensure both state and county EMA programs receive proper funding.
- Support for shifting state responsibility for flood plain management from ADECA to an agency interacting more directly with FEMA.
- Support for improving existing solid waste laws and better defining the roles of all stakeholders.

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■ Opposition to municipalities using unconventional annexation procedures to avoid the legal responsibility to maintain public roads included in newly-annexed areas.

■ Support for increasing the minimum cost of the construction project amount that requires the county to employ the services of a licensed general contractor or architect.

■ Opposition to relaxing or eliminating competitive bidding requirements for construction projects or granting a contractor sole responsibility for selecting the successful bidder.

■ Opposition to allowing a project manager to approve construction contract changes without approval of the governing body and/or compliance with the public works law.

## Revenue Protection

### Foundation Principle

Counties are partners with the State of Alabama in the collection of

revenue and the delivery of services funded by the collection of such revenue. Many taxes collected by the counties as well as the state are earmarked for distribution between the two levels of government to ensure the provision of services. Likewise, the Legislature considers the abatement or exemption of many taxes levied by or on behalf of the county commission. County services cannot be funded during either the short- or long-term if the necessary revenue is interrupted. The Association opposes mandated abatement or exemption of the local proceeds of any taxes as well as the alteration of the allocation formula used to distribute tax proceeds between the state and its counties.

### Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

● To create a more fair and equitable ad valorem tax system provided it does not eliminate annual

reappraisal, reduce tax revenues or increase current exemptions.

● To remove any defects in state tax laws resulting in a discriminatory tax structure provided it eliminates discrimination without creating new or expanding exemptions or tax credits.

● To ensure there is no cost to local government for use of the ONE SPOT sales tax remittance system.

● To collect unpaid debts due the county by other governmental entities by intercepting the entity's portion of ad valorem taxes.

### Legislative Policy

In addition to its strategic goals, the Association has adopted the following legislative policy consistent with this Foundation Principle:

■ Opposition to altering the current interest rate on tax sale proceeds, unless such change will not result in a decrease in purchaser participation in tax sales or reduction in tax sale proceeds paid to counties.

■ Support for apportioning ad valorem tax collection costs among all entities entitled to a portion of the proceeds of the tax.

■ Support for modernizing the business licensing process provided it does not result in a loss of state or local revenue or repeal existing local business licensing laws.

■ Opposition to authorizing a local legislative delegation or legislatively-created committees

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to direct how local revenues should be distributed.

■ Support for the work of the Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement Commission provided there is no effort to repeal or restrict counties' authority to collect, audit and/or enforce local taxes.

## **Economic Development and the Alabama Trust Fund**

### **Foundation Principle**

Alabama counties play an ever-growing and vital role in the state's economic development efforts; providing services,

financial support and community leadership necessary to attract and retain important employers. Counties must be able to access the revenue necessary to carry out this function and must be included in any reforms and initiatives that alter Alabama's law regarding economic incentives and requirements. Revenue from the Alabama Trust Fund is essential to meeting these goals and must be protected from unnecessary raids and expenditures. The Association will actively oppose any removal of revenue from the Alabama Trust Fund and seeks to be a partner in those economic development efforts that emphasize a partnership between the state and its counties.

### **Strategic Goals**

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

- To shift 20 percent of the corpus and future oil lease and royalty payments of the Alabama Trust Fund into the County and Municipal Government Trust Fund which would thereafter operate as a separately-maintained Trust Fund for counties and municipalities.
- To require local government consent for any exemption or abatement of any local sales or use tax.

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- To prohibit municipalities and industrial development authorities from abating county taxes without consent of the county commission.

### Legislative Policy

In addition to its strategic goals, the Association has adopted the following legislative policy consistent with this Foundation Principle:

- Support for requiring that BP settlement monies be used to restore any funds previously withdrawn from the Alabama Trust Fund.
- Opposition to the withdrawal or diversion of money currently earmarked for Alabama Trust Fund.
- Opposition to any economic development legislation or programs that mandate the expenditure of county revenues or abate county taxes without county commission consent.

## Alabama's Prisons & County Jails

### Foundation Principle

Alabama's prison system faces a crisis not unlike the crisis duplicated on a daily basis in each of the 67 county jails. The watchful eye of the federal courts, the never-ending expense of providing jail services, the growing costs of health care and the training and compensation for officers presents a challenge well beyond the reach of a county commission devoid of revenue-generating powers. On the other hand, an efficient

local law enforcement agency and jail is necessary to maintain order and to ensure the safety of all Alabamians. The Association is gravely concerned that all reform efforts, statutory changes or administrative rules be considered only in light of direct, indirect and unintended consequences generated at the county level.

### Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

- To advocate for an executive or legislatively-created study commission to comprehensively review the state's juvenile justice system and make recommendations for adequate municipal participation and state funding and administration of all programs related to the care, detention, and custody of juveniles, including costs of temporary housing in county facilities.
- To clarify that persons on parole, probation or participants in diversion programs are legally and financially state inmates for all purposes, even when held for temporary confinement in the county jail or awaiting hearing or transfer to a state facility.

### Legislative Policy

In addition to its strategic goals, the Association has adopted the following legislative policy consistent with this Foundation Principle:

- Opposition to requiring mandatory training for sheriffs, sheriffs' deputies, or other county employees without county commission approval.
- Opposition to any prison reform implementation activities that significantly increase costs of or create unsafe conditions in the county jail.
- Support for any legislation necessary to correct any consequences of prison reform implementation that negatively impact the operation of the county jail.
- Opposition to pleading down Class D Felonies for the purposes of convicted persons serving time in county jails.
- Support for providing that non-indigents serving sentences in the county jail be required to pay a portion of the cost of incarceration, including medical expenses.
- Support for U.S. Congress repealing the requirement that persons detained in state or county correctional facilities forfeit their Medicaid benefits immediately upon arrest.
- Opposition to any requirement that county government pay for the use of state inmate labor.
- Opposition to imposing mandated and unfunded jail standards or other procedures.

■ Opposition to changing current law providing for feeding of prisoners unless the changes provide that the state pay all costs of feeding prisoners.

■ Opposition to legislative or administrative efforts to put reserve deputies in regular law enforcement position.

■ Opposition to amending Alabama's work release law to allow wages paid to the county to be expended for purposes other than just the costs of the individual inmate's incarceration.

■ Support for comprehensive legislation to clarify and/or implement procedures for county inmates working outside of the jail, either through work release or other programs.

## Justice and Public Safety

### Foundation Principle

The State of Alabama is responsible for administration of state courts and public safety agencies and for providing public health and mental health services for the citizens of this state. The Association believes the Alabama Legislature should adequately fund each state agency responsible for delivery of these critical government services and opposes any legislative or administrative efforts that mandate counties to assume any responsibility for these state functions or that force county government to assume state

functions due to the state's failure to adequately meet its financial or administrative responsibilities. Additionally, since local government plays an important role in providing emergency services at the local level, the Association urges the Legislature to ensure there is adequate funding for local programs and that state and local agencies work in partnership for the safety and well-being of all citizens of this state.

### Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

● To improve and expand spay-neuter services throughout the state, provided there is no requirement that counties fund such services.

● To provide adequate funding to ensure that ambulance services are available throughout the county.

● To protect the county commission against the payment of any costs or penalties issued as a result of any local elected official defying a validly-issued court order.

● To establish a state-wide uniform pistol permit fee provided that current local laws on distribution are not repealed and all fees are distributed to local government.

### Legislative Policy

In addition to its strategic goals, the Association has adopted the

following legislative policy consistent with this Foundation Principle:

■ Support for legislative or administrative procedures to reduce or eliminate county costs for transportation of mental health patients.

■ Opposition to prohibiting state law enforcement officers from conducting investigations or providing other services on county roads.

■ Opposition to any legislation authorizing a person to carry a firearm in a vehicle without a valid pistol permit.

■ Support for shifting regulation of certain prefabricated storm shelters from the Department of Finance to the Alabama Manufactured Housing Commission.

■ Belief that the statewide 911 Board should conduct only those activities delegated by the Legislature which include studying the operational and financial condition of current 911 systems and recommending a long-term plan for the most efficient and effective delivery of 911 services in Alabama.

■ Belief that 911 services are best provided through locally operated and administered boards without statewide coordination and encouraging the statewide 911 Board to seek meaningful input from existing 911 district boards and personnel in developing its recommendations for the long-term plan.

■ Support for adequate funding of state supplements paid to counties with a certified county EMA director.

■ Support for legislative and administrative efforts to implement state-funded video conferencing for certain court appearances and to expand the use of video court proceedings in the state.

■ Belief that debris placed on the right of way of a state road following a disaster event is the responsibility of the State of Alabama and should be removed at state expense.

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## Rural Transportation

### Foundation Principle

The county commission is responsible for proper construction, maintenance, and repair of all roads and bridges in the county road system. The Association believes it is essential that the county commission have adequate federal, state, and/or local funding to meet the many needs of its rural transportation system. Additionally, the Association believes that, in order to keep roads and bridges properly maintained for the safety and well-being of the traveling public, the county commission must have broad regulatory

authority related to the use of county-maintained roads and bridges, including the ability to collect reimbursement from persons or entities causing damage to those roads and bridges.

### Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

● To provide adequate funding of road and bridge projects so long as counties receive an equitable portion of funding utilizing the current gas tax formula.

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[paul.winn@morganstanley.com](mailto:paul.winn@morganstanley.com)

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### Legislative Policy

In addition to its strategic goals, the Association has adopted the following legislative policy consistent with this Foundation Principle:

■ Support for allowing the county commission to call a local referendum to impose a renewable temporary local gasoline and motor fuel tax to fund specified local road and bridge projects.

■ Opposition to any measures, including budget appropriations, which would divert taxes currently earmarked for roads and bridges to other state functions.

■ Opposition to reducing the current level of federal or state funding for county road and bridge projects.

■ Opposition to weakening Alabama's law related to weight or axle-spacing restrictions on state and county roads or to add new exemptions to such laws.

■ Support for providing that fines collected from persons convicted of driving overweight vehicles on county roads and bridges be distributed to the county's road and bridge fund.

■ Opposition to establishing a commission to administer the Alabama Department of Transportation.

■ Opposition to any changes to current law setting speed limits on unposted county roads.

■ Support for amending current motor fuel and gasoline tax

statutes to include taxation of any alternative fuels utilized to propel any motorized vehicle.

■ Support for amending Alabama's severance tax law to ensure that

counties receive proceeds sufficient to ensure proper maintenance and repair of roads and bridges utilized for the transportation of materials severed within the county. ■

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## From the Cover

# drive

DEVELOPING A ROAD  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
VISION FOR EVERYONE IN

# ALABAMA

### Supporting Economic Development Butler County Road 50

The modern automotive industry depends on precise logistics and just-in-time delivery from a vast and complex network of suppliers. Because of ATRIP, Butler County had the necessary resources to resurface about 9 miles of CR 50/Honoraville Road, a critical link connecting 3 suppliers in Crenshaw County to a pair of Tier 1 Hyundai suppliers in Butler County.

© James Martin | Dreamstime.com  
Hyundai factory in Montgomery, Alabama

## Working Together to Develop a Road and

# DRIVE Alabama & The Future of Alabama's Roads

Transportation and infrastructure development was a top priority for previous generations, but, as the nation's priorities have shifted in the last 50 years, many states –

including Alabama – are now frantically working to develop a 21st century vision for transportation infrastructure.

And Alabama is constantly on the move. Vehicle travel in our state has increased faster than in the nation as a whole – and faster than Alabama's population growth – since 1990, according national analysis from TRIP.

Improving and expanding Alabama's transportation infrastructure spur economic development, sustain quality jobs, keep us competitive in international markets, and enhance our citizens' quality of life. Doing little beyond simply maintaining existing roads and bridges equals children arriving to school late, employees



## From the Cover

### Boosting Quality of Life Winston County Road 12

Winston CR 12/Wilson Bend Road is the only access for \$30 million worth of development (approximately 600 acres) along the shoreline of beautiful Lewis Smith Lake. ATRIP invested \$1.8 million (80% federal, 20% local) to provide needed roadway maintenance and safety improvements to this route. Residents have “rejoiced” over how easy it is to get to the nearby town of Arley, where business has picked up noticeably, especially at top lunch spots.



## Infrastructure Vision for Everyone in Alabama

who can't clock in on time, or goods that aren't delivered efficiently. End result: everyone suffers.

Road and bridge infrastructure impacts almost every aspect of Alabama's 4.85 million residents' day-to-day lives. That's why county engineers, elected officials, and citizens from across the state have come

together to form **DRIVE Alabama** – a coalition designed to educate the public about the critical role that local road and bridge infrastructure plays in citizens' quality of life.

“The decaying condition of Alabama's local transportation systems is evident to even the most casual observer,” said Richie Beyer, Elmore

County engineer and former president of the National Association of County Engineers. “County engineers get daily questions about how we prioritize the road and bridge projects in our counties. With the high volume of travel, we thought this was an ideal time to educate the public about how

local transportation infrastructure projects are funded and how these projects connect with our daily activities.”

Currently, Alabama's 67 county governments maintain more than 59,000 miles of roads and 8,600 bridges. Crumbling pavement, sinking bridges and deteriorating shoulders

## From the Cover



### **Saving Public School Dollars One-lane Truss Bridge, Cleburne County**

Public schools in Cleburne County will save \$600,000 a year when the new bridge on County Road 18 opens. At present, 9 school buses carry hundreds of students on a 17-mile detour every school day because the one-lane truss bridge has a stringent weight restriction. This is an ATRIP project costing about \$2 million (80 percent federal/20 percent local).

© Flashon | Dreamstime.com  
Line Of School Buses

## Working Together for Everyone in Alabama

are commonplace, and these transportation issues have a noticeable impact in both urban and rural areas alike.

The number of fatalities on rural roads is 200 percent higher than in more urban areas. Rural residents and landowners are also particularly aware of weight-restricted bridges, which cause costly & time-consuming

detours for school buses, emergency vehicles and trucks hauling heavy loads for a full range of agribusiness operations. The old “farm to market roads” are as important now as ever.

Alabama’s county governments are facing a \$133 million shortfall in annual revenues needed to provide adequate maintenance

and improvements to the county road and bridge systems. While county engineers from across the state welcome discussions about increasing resources for county roads and bridges, the primary objective of the DRIVE Alabama campaign is to educate the public about the silent crisis affecting Alabama’s road and bridge systems.

“It’s true that we need a collaborative solution to address this problem, but more importantly, the public and elected officials alike need to understand what ignoring this issue will mean to Alabama’s future,” said Beyer.

For more information on DRIVE Alabama, visit [www.drivealabama.org](http://www.drivealabama.org). The campaign is also active on Facebook and Twitter. ■





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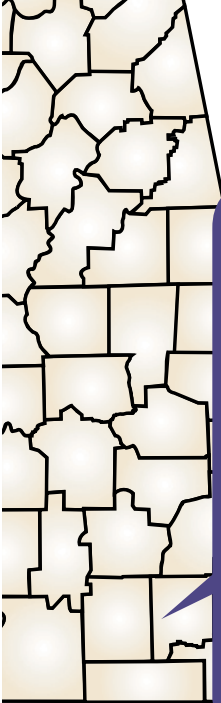
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## A voice from Alabama's 67 counties...

**Derek Brewer, CEA**  
*Dale County Engineer,  
& President, Association of  
County Engineers of Alabama  
(ACEA)*



**Q** Why did county engineers come together to lead the DRIVE Alabama coalition?

**A** County Engineers, better than anyone, understand the importance of identifying the needs of our infrastructure as well as the critical nature of proper timing of infrastructure maintenance and repairs, so instead of standing silently on the sideline we are “ringing the bell” to bring attention to our grossly underfunded county infrastructure.

**Q** What difference does it make in a family's everyday life when county roads and bridges receive proper upkeep and safety improvements? What about for the business sector?

**A** When county roads and bridges are adequately funded, it ensures they can be properly maintained. This provides a safer infrastructure for everyone to drive on, from our 80-year-old grandmother going to get her hair done to our 16-year-old daughter who is just learning to drive. The farmer, loggers and businesses deserve good roads to drive on, and in my

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opinion unrestricted weight limit bridges and good rural roads are the first step in our ongoing effort to recruit economic development.

**Q** What about federal funding? Is money available from that source to help with local and rural roads?

**A** There is federal funding for local transportation, but there are a couple of significant factors that limit its impact. Most Alabamians get along just fine without knowing that federal resurfacing funds can only be applied to a certain category of roads called major collectors. So, for us in Dale County, that leaves out about 60 percent of our paved roads. Not to mention by the time you jump through all the hoops to get the federal money, it is only worth about \$0.50 on the dollar. And yes,

you heard that right: if we use county money, it will resurface about twice the miles.

**Q** As county engineers talk to more and more people about Alabama's long-term infrastructure needs, what do citizens find most interesting? Are there any common misconceptions?

**A** The first thing we tell them is that we have not had a gasoline tax increase since 1993 and we have had a 300 percent increase in the cost of construction materials and equipment. Then you tell them they pay an average of approximately \$130 per year in gas tax and they can't believe that is all. The most common misconceptions are that we've got plenty of money, and that we receive diesel fuel tax at the county level – both of which are untrue.

**Q** Say you bumped into a neighbor in the grocery store checkout line. The neighbor asks you about DRIVE Alabama, and you've got – at most – 30 seconds to explain why Alabama needs to develop a road and infrastructure vision for everyone. What would you say?

**A** First, I'd tell them that ATRIP was a great program and identify the specific projects that we completed, such as the 40 miles of road improvements we did in Dale County. Then I'd tell them that it was just a small sample of what we could do with more funding in the form of a gasoline tax increase. I think that gasoline taxes are the fairest tax of all because they are essentially a user fee, and restricted by law to go directly back into the roads and bridges. ■



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Mary E. Pons ..... Association Counsel ..... mpons@alabamacounties.org

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