

State of South Carolina

Office of the Governor

NIKKI R. HALEY
GOVERNOR

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COLUMBIA 29201

June 8, 2016

The Honorable Hugh K. Leatherman
President *Pro Tempore*
111 Gressette Building
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

The Honorable James H. Lucas
Speaker of the House of Representatives
506 Blatt Building
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Members of the General Assembly,

Each of us, along with the media, the business community, and citizens across South Carolina, have watched with great interest the long process that brought S.1258, commonly referred to as “the roads bill” to my desk for signature.

In September of 2014, the House announced a special committee of thirteen members to study our transportation system. The Senate followed suit, less formally, the following spring, with six members tasked with working through our infrastructure issues. Experts were called. Testimony was taken. The Department of Transportation was included. Recommendations were made. A bill was introduced, then debated in Ways and Means and on the House floor. Amendments were offered and different options vetted. It then went to the Senate, to the Finance Committee, where a similar process unfolded.

Whether I agreed with the policy that came out of each step in this process or not, one thing is undeniable – it was a serious undertaking that gave this issue the consideration it deserved.

I revisit this in full not because I think you don’t remember it, but because what happened last week was precisely the opposite – and the public deserves to fully understand that contrast. In the waning hours of a two year legislative session, a deal was cut, out of the public eye, and a new plan appeared in the Senate. It had not been studied. It had not been vetted. Secretary Christy Hall, respected by us all, was not consulted. It passed anyway. The very next day the legislation was approved by the House, and here we are, with what *The State* newspaper calls, “...the worst of all the awful governance plans that were floated over the past two years...”

So let us all be honest about what we accomplished in this bill: incremental and incomplete reform, or put a different way, far less than the people of South Carolina both expect and deserve from us.

This bill does move South Carolina marginally forward by replacing General Assembly selection of Transportation Commissioners with gubernatorial appointment, but let's be clear: that "progress" is little more than window dressing. The process for confirmation and removal of commissioners is deeply flawed. A legislative delegation can kill any nomination without a reason, without a hearing and without a vote. The governor can hire a commissioner but he or she does not have the ability to fire one – not without asking for permission first. At its core a bill that has been publicly celebrated as landmark reform simply preserves the status quo: South Carolina will remain a state where the legislature, all 170 members of it, controls our transportation system.

So nothing will change. The regional horse-trading that has been the driving force behind the arbitrary way we select road projects will continue. Political power will reign over logic and reason. And the statewide plan South Carolina so desperately needs will remain a pipe dream – unless and until the General Assembly acts.

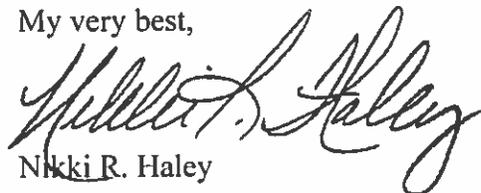
The funding components in S.1258 demonstrate that the consistent and prioritized use of taxpayer dollars lead to significant investments in transportation. While this funding stream is not of the magnitude or sustainability to address the long-term needs of our highway system, it is true that we have taken a step forward. It is also true that we must find a permanent fix to funding our roads and bridges, the type of fix that does not exist in this legislation.

All that said, and setting aside my disappointment with this "makeshift solution," as *The Post and Courier* rightly calls it, I have today signed S.1258 into law. I have done so for one reason and one reason only – it is a better option than what we will have without this bill: a full reversion to the even more unaccountable and defective system that was replaced in 2007.

Back in March, in response to the Senate's passage of their initial remedy to our infrastructure problem, Speaker Lucas decried the bill as "deceptive" and lamented that it will "mislead the public." While I may not agree with his characterization of the policy in question at the time, I do share the Speaker's sentiment – we, as the elected leaders of South Carolina, must not deceive the public. And to claim this law as anything close to a victory, to represent it in any way as a true solution to our infrastructure problems, is to do just that.

One month from now we will start a new fiscal year, a new budget cycle, and the process of planning for next year's fiscal and policy initiatives. I am confident that, once again, roads will be at the top of our agenda. It has to be. Our business is unfinished.

My very best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nikki R. Haley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nikki" and last name "Haley" clearly legible.

Nikki R. Haley