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EDITOR'S PICK

## RUSSELL MCMURRY: Georgia well-positioned for infrastructure plan

GUEST EDITORIAL: GDOT has a number of southwest Georgia projects ongoing

By Russell McMurry May 13, 2018



This week is National Infrastructure Week. There will be events across the nation to bring awareness to the criticality of infrastructure conditions and the need for investment. The Georgia Department of Transportation is focused on improving both the state of good repair of our infrastructure and investing in mobility enhancements to our transportation network in order to facilitate growth and improve the quality of life for all Georgians.

For the fifth consecutive year, Georgia has been named the No. 1 state for business. As a state, we recognize that one of the vital components for that success is our transportation network. Building and maintaining solid infrastructure is an integral part of Georgia's success.

With great support from Gov. Nathan Deal and the Georgia legislature, we are now making historic levels of investment in our state's infrastructure, resulting not only in improvements today, but also allowing us to plan for the future. GDOT is repaving roadways and replacing bridges across the state, along with conducting routine maintenance to keep state highways safe and in good repair. This extends to southwest Georgia. Currently, GDOT is widening State Route 133, a major north-south corridor for rural Georgia, reconstructing about 66 miles from the Lowndes/Brooks county line to Dougherty County. Additionally, GDOT continues to make improvements on Interstate 75 with interchange reconstruction projects, two ongoing and two scheduled for bid in the next year.

As Georgia is focused on the state's infrastructure, the Trump administration is focused on the nation's infrastructure. The president's proposal, "Building a Stronger America," emphasizes the need for critical infrastructure improvements that will help continue to propel our great nation forward. While it appears that the president's proposal will not advance this year, I am encouraged by the many Congressional hearings that have already been held thus far. I've yet to hear any member of Congress say they disagree with infrastructure investments.

Among other key points, the president's plan focuses on streamlining the regulatory and permitting process. The president has made it a priority to shorten the often lengthy timetable to gain approvals for new highways, bridges and other projects. The plan also empowers state, local and private partnerships to drive infrastructure investments. These elements and others are integral to helping Georgia continue to develop and improve our transportation network at its current pace. At GDOT, we employ public private partnerships (P3) — and have done so for a number of years — that allow the state to better allocate the resources we have for transportation by leveraging private-sector and innovative capital. These partnerships often result in accelerated project completion and reduced costs for taxpayers.

The president's plan calls for at least \$1.5 trillion in additional investments to rebuild infrastructure, with the federal government providing \$200 billion. Of those funds, \$100 billion will create an incentives program to leverage state, local and private investments. Under this proposal, Georgia is well-positioned for success due to our major mobility

investment projects, which include rebuilding key interchanges that are bottlenecks such as Interstates 16/95 and Interstates 20/285; the widening of Interstate 16 in Chatham County and I-85 in Gwinnett, Barrow and Jackson counties; commercial vehicle only lanes on Interstate 75 outside of Macon, and multiple express-lane projects.

Leaders at state and national levels recognize that critical improvements must be made to the nation's infrastructure. With a commitment from the Trump administration and federal lawmakers to facilitate improvements that will continue to transform our transportation network, the administration's "Building a Stronger America" initiative would provide an opportunity that will help Georgia and the nation continue to move forward in addressing our critical infrastructure needs.

*Russell McMurry is commissioner of the Georgia Department of Transportation.*