

'An exciting time to be at DOT'

An interview with Deputy Secretary of Finance and Administration

By Bob Kudelka

Justin Powell had been with SCDOT less than a year when the COVID-19 pandemic struck in early 2020.

As Deputy Secretary for Finance and Administration, Powell would have a key role navigating the choppy waters of an uncertain gas tax revenue stream as the virus spread around the globe and travel dropped in the Palmetto State.

On April 23, 2021, more than a year after the pandemic began, Powell sat down with The Connector for an update on where the agency stands as well as the outlook for the future.

Overall, from a financial point of view, how has SCDOT fared under COVID?

"Because of our proactive actions last spring and summer, the DOT has weathered it very well and is well-positioned to keep

moving forward because of what we did early on. We're faring very well.

We appreciate the creativity of the DOT team to tighten the belt and find creative ways to keep our business moving forward. Very early on, we cut our internal operating budget by 12 percent. Our construction program and our 10-year Strategic Plan never stopped or had to be deferred because of the outbreak. That is a huge point of pride, and it positions DOT well as we get out of the COVID situation."

How are the latest revenue trends looking for SCDOT?

"In the past few weeks, traffic has gotten close to 2019 volumes as vaccine availability has become more prevalent. By comparison, after COVID-19 hit we experienced a 40-45 percent drop in traffic during the first wave that eventually leveled off to a 5-10 percent drop."

There seems to be a lot of tourism activity in South Carolina and it's only April. Is this a good sign, and what does it mean for SCDOT?

"Certainly we have a large portion of our gas tax that comes from out of state. So the more people traveling should be a positive for gas tax receipts. The spring break season is just ending and it takes a few weeks for us to see the results so we're waiting to see how this pans out."

What is your outlook, from a financial standpoint, for the future at DOT?

"We've done what we needed to keep moving forward. We've got lots of discussion underway about infrastructure investment on the national level, so that could mean new opportunities for the agency."

"I think it's an exciting time to be at DOT."



Justin Powell
Deputy Secretary
for Finance and Administration

SCDOT and GDOT work together on I-20 bridge widening

By Brittany Harriot

The South Carolina Department of Transportation, along with the Georgia Department of Transportation, are currently working to replace and widen the existing I-20 bridges over the Augusta Canal and Savannah River.

The project spans within the city of Augusta, Georgia and the city of North Augusta in Aiken County. The purpose of the roughly \$84 million project is to replace the existing bridges with new structures to improve safety and operations along I-20. The area will also see widening from four to six lanes to increase capacity.

This is one of the main goals of SCDOT's Strategic 10-Year Plan to improve our state's roads and bridges.

"The interstate through here was one of many interstates around South Carolina that needed additional capacity. It was one of the first interstates identified with the new gas tax and additional funds coming from state legislature that had that additional capacity," said **Adam Humphries** who is the project manager for the I-20 Widening and Bridge Replacement Project.

Construction is currently ongoing with crews working with SCDOT to complete grading work and drainage improvements in the median of the interstate.

Beginning in the Spring of 2021, traffic changes are expected to take place with drivers needing to shift towards the median to assist with the completion of the project.

The expected completion date for this project is in the Spring of 2022.



Work is ongoing at I-20 at Martintown Rd. (Exit 1) in Aiken County on Sept. 24, 2020.