



Public Information

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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### **Q&A on the Richland County Transportation Penny Program**

(RICHLAND PIO) – For Richland County residents, the penny is paving the way toward progress.

Whether it's making roads wider, ensuring intersections are easier to navigate, paving dirt roads, expanding bus service, increasing public access to green spaces or providing safer travel routes for bicyclists and pedestrians, projects funded by the penny program are designed with a simple purpose: enhancing the quality of life in Richland County.

The Public Information Office recently talked with Richland County Transportation Director Rob Perry to give residents more insight into the transportation penny program.

**What is the Program Development Team and what is its role with the penny program?** The Program Development Team, or PDT, is a group of private firms hired by Richland County Council to manage the day-to-day design and construction of projects funded by the penny program, as well as efforts to inform the public about penny projects. The County's Transportation Department has oversight of the PDT.

**The PDT's contract with Richland County began in November 2014, two years after voters passed the one-cent sales tax referendum in 2012. What has been accomplished under the penny program and what can residents look forward to in the coming months?** We've completed more than 70 projects. We have approximately \$35 million awarded to construction companies to date with some major projects completing construction this year. In 2016, we will complete Greene Street Phase I, Lincoln Tunnel Greenway, several of our intersection improvement projects and our first sidewalk and our bikeway projects. We'll also continue to complete resurfacing and dirt road paving projects. In addition, we expect to deliver \$110 million in projects to construction this year alone. Some major projects include Hardscrabble Road Widening, Shop Road Extension Phase I, North Main Street Widening, Three Rivers Greenway Phase I, and more sidewalks, bikeways, resurfacing and dirt road paving projects. The penny program is expected to complete \$736 million in projects during the life of the program, which is 22 years, so \$110 million in less than five years is a high percentage of the overall goal.

**Why is the PDT necessary when the County has a Transportation Department?** The County's four-person Transportation Department is relatively small. (By comparison, Charleston County's transportation department has more than 20 employees.) The department has oversight of the PDT and design teams. In doing so, it

oversees preconstruction and construction contracting to ensure the day-to-day work of the PDT is performed satisfactorily. The staff also performs project and program coordination with other governmental agencies, such as S.C. Department of Transportation (SCDOT), the City of Columbia, S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

**How was the PDT selected?** The County advertised a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) in the spring of 2014, and used a two-step process for selection. In the first step, a staff evaluation committee reviewed submittals and narrowed the submissions to the top three teams. In step two, the top three teams were interviewed by County Council, which then voted to select one team.

**What is the purpose of the Significant Purchase Ordinance, which allows County Council a direct role in the procurement process, and how does it affect the penny program?** The Significant Purchase Ordinance directs County staff to bring requests for professional services contracts on the transportation penny program to Council before advertising for them. Council may choose to use this ordinance on a case-by-case basis when it deems the contract is of significance to the program and County. When used, staff must establish an evaluation committee on these solicitations to bring back a recommendation to Council. If Council accepts the recommendation, then Council chooses from the recommended list. The Significant Purchase Ordinance cannot be used, and has never been used, for construction contracting. State and County procurement code requires construction contracting to be bid, and ultimately awarded to the lowest, responsive bidder.

**Does the County contract directly with the public information service firms that are part of the PDT?** No, the County does not have a contract with the public information service firms or any other subcontractors on the PDT. As with any County contract, the County only contracts with the prime, or lead, contractor.

**The PDT oversees several functions related to the penny program, including subcontracting work (i.e., public information services). Does that mean the PDT selects which construction companies are awarded penny infrastructure projects?** No. The PDT does not award or contract with construction companies to build penny projects. The PDT produces documents called "Invitations for Bids" for individual projects. These bid documents are reviewed and approved by the County transportation and procurement staffs prior to advertisement. Bidders are directed in these documents to submit their bids to the County Procurement Department by a specified deadline. Once the deadline is met, the County Procurement Department provides the bids to the PDT. The bids are read aloud in a conference room in the County Administration Building during a meeting, which is open to the public. Upon completion, the PDT reviews the bids to ensure they meet the requirements of the Invitation for Bid document. After this review, the PDT provides a recommendation to staff to either award or reject the bids. If a recommendation to award is submitted it is then presented to Council for approval. Once awarded by the County, these construction contracts are between the County and the construction contractor.

**What is the mentor protégé program and its role in the penny program?** The County does not have a mentor protégé program in place yet, but the PDT contract includes mentoring or training for two of its subcontractors. Therefore, the PDT training is not a program or service operated by a Richland County office or department. Mentoring or training is permissible in federal, state and county contracting. The intent of the training included in the PDT contract is to ensure subcontractors are fully knowledgeable of everything required of them in the right-of-way acquisition component of individual projects. In addition, projects on the SCDOT network of maintained routes require following the Uniform Act to acquire this property, which is a federal law. So, it is extremely important to know the processes required to comply with the Uniform Act. Noncompliance can render a project ineligible for federal funding. The County is leveraging the sales tax funding to acquire federal

funding to supplement the program. Thus far, the Richland Penny Program has successfully acquired more than \$12 million in federal funding for individual projects.

**Richland County's Public Works Department has a Roads and Drainage division that has been extremely busy repairing damaged roads in the aftermath of the October floods. Why isn't this staff responsible for constructing penny projects?** The primary function of the Public Works Department is to maintain the County's network of roads. In Richland County that encompasses roughly 540 miles of paved roads and 230 miles of dirt roads. Managing pre-construction and construction contracting of hundreds of millions of dollars is not something municipal or county public works departments are accustomed to or equipped to perform. In addition, roughly \$500 million of the \$736 million in projects are improvements to the SCDOT network of roads. SCDOT designs and constructs roads to a different standard than municipalities and counties.

**What is the role of Transportation Penny Advisory Committee (TPAC)?** Council appointed the TPAC in spring 2013. Its function is to review, comment on and provide recommendations to Council regarding the penny program. Its duties were adopted by a majority vote of TPAC members June 17, 2013.

**Where can residents learn more about the penny program?** Information about the penny program, including project overviews, monthly progress reports, procurement opportunities and public meetings, is available online at [www.richlandpenny.com](http://www.richlandpenny.com). Residents also may call 1-844-RC PENNY.

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