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House Approves DOT Reform

Republicans initiate and move sweeping reforms through House

COLUMBIA – South Carolina's House Republicans ushered sweeping reforms to the state Department of Transportation Wednesday, bringing needed accountability to an agency found to be wasting millions in taxpayer money.

"The troubles uncovered at DOT surprised many of us, and these reforms quickly became our top priority for this session," said Rep. Annette Young of Summerville, chairwoman of the House DOT Study Committee. "I urge our colleagues in the Senate to take quick action."

The bill was approved overwhelmingly 104-3.

The legislation makes four major changes to the governance of the agency:

- **Board.** A new DOT board will consist of seven members, be required to have five years of experience in a related field, and must also live in the district they represent. A new Secretary of Transportation will be appointed by the governor. New board districts, modeled after the existing engineering districts, were created so counties are not split and the needs of the state's rural counties are better represented.
- **Oversight.** An internal auditor will report directly to the commission. The Legislative Audit Council will perform follow-up audits every three years.
- **Project Rankings.** The DOT will establish objective measures for ranking road projects to include: safety, economic development concerns, traffic volume, and pavement quality.
- **Project Approval.** The entire DOT board will must approve all contracts.

"These reforms will make DOT more accountable to the General Assembly and the Governor," said Rep. Adam Taylor, the House Assistant Majority Leader and a member of the DOT Study Committee. "This new structure will ensure much more oversight of how the DOT builds roads and spends your taxpayer dollars."

South Carolinians learned last fall that the DOT wasted tens of millions of taxpayer dollars and consciously misled the General Assembly. Speaker of the House Bobby Harrell immediately appointed a committee to study possible reforms.

"I am pleased to see that the House considers DOT reform to be an incredibly important issue," said House Speaker Bobby Harrell. "By passing this needed reform in our budget and as stand alone legislation, we are sending a clear message that we will not let an agency waste taxpayers' money. We should expect the highest level of accountability at all levels of government."