BEAUFORT COUNTY

Transportation Sales Tax

2026 Referendum — November

VOTE “NO”

A briefing on the proposed $780 million, nine-year Penny Sales Tax… and why voters should reject it again this fall.

A Decade of Penny Tax Attempts

Beaufort County has asked voters for a transportation penny tax FOUR TIMES since 2018.

2018

TST-3

PASSED

29 projects promised.

As of mid-2026, only 6 of 29 are complete.

Just 2 of 11 roads and 4 of 18 sidewalk/path projects

After nearly 8 years.

2021

TST-3 Retry

DEFEATED: 72–28%

Voters rejected a second penny-tax attempt, citing the slow pace of the still-unfinished 2018 project list.

2024

TST-4

DEFEATED: 55–45%

Rejected again.

2026

Proposed TST

ON THE BALLOT

$780,000,000 over 9 years.

Project count has been reported as 66, 83, 84, and 87 depending on the count.

The list itself is disputed.

Sources: campaign correspondence citing County project-status data; 2026 Transportation Sales Tax Project List (Beaufort County, 5/7/26).

YES

Our roads are crumbling. Some intersections are genuinely dangerous.

- The county doesn't need a referendum to start fixing the most dangerous intersections. Staff could triage and engineer those locations now, with existing funds and better priority management..
- The 2026 project list contains real safety fixes, but no ranking by danger level.
- Money spent selling this referendum could instead have funded engineering for the school-safety fixes residents are told to wait years for.

BUT...

Needing repairs isn't the same as needing this plan.

The real question isn't whether our roads need help — it's whether this referendum is how we actually get it fixed.

1

Track Record & Trust

"Have they really earned the right to ask for another $780 million?"

- Only 6 of 29 projects promised under the 2018 TST-3 are complete after 8 years.
- Just 2 of 11 road projects, and 4 of 18 sidewalk/multi-use path projects.
- One of the two finished road projects (Donnie Beer Circle) is widely seen as only a minor safety improvement.
- Two straight defeats since ~ 2021 and 2024 ~ followed the same pattern of promises.

6 of 29

2018 TST-3 projects actually completed

2

Fiscal Burden

"Just a penny" mischaracterizes what this actually costs.

- Framed by the county as just "a penny," but in reality represents roughly a 16–17% increase to the local sales tax rate.
- County tourist-share figures are disputed: College of Charleston survey data cited by residents shows tourists paying 24–28% of local sales tax, which is well below the county's claims.
- No independent, peer-reviewed verification of the county's own tourist-contribution numbers has been produced.
- Residents, not visitors, would carry most of this bill.

16–17%

Effective increase to the local sales tax rate

3 Process & Transparency

Nobody can even agree on what's actually on the list.

- The referendum's own project count has been reported as 66, 83, 84, and 87 in different county materials.
- Ballot wording reportedly says the county “may,” not “shall,” complete the listed projects, and permits altering scope or cost after passage.
- TAC's project-prioritization process seems to have no consistent, published criteria (safety, congestion, cost) for ranking projects.

4

Different project counts reported in county materials (66 / 83 / 84 / 87…)

4

Oversight & Management

No "referee" means no accountability when projects run over, or goes sideways

- No independent construction-management oversight (like BCSD's CLOC : "The Beaufort Method") has been proposed for the TST program.
- No stated penalties for contractors who run over budget or behind schedule, and no completion incentives.
- County Engineers, not construction-management professionals, remain responsible for day-to-day delivery; that's a very different skill set than program management.

$0

Penalties for contractor delays or cost overruns

5 Ethics & Fair Play

County PR is supposed to be informational & neutral. It is not.

- A county-funded consultant (NP Strategies) was hired to produce referendum-related materials; contract cost and scope were not proactively disclosed and required a FOIA request to pursue.
- SC Ethics Commission guidance (AO2018-004) requires county-funded ballot-measure materials to be balanced, not partisan. Many residents believe the county's messaging is clearly promotional.
- Realtor and Chamber groups have reportedly spent roughly $180,000 on pro-penny tax mail advertising in 2018 alone, on top of the county's own messaging.

$180K

Reported Realtor/Chamber pro-tax mail spend in 2018 alone

6

Budget Priorities

Why create new taxes before closing an existing leak?

- A separate property-tax exemption loophole (Act 145) is already costing the county an estimated $9.4M per year from 31 exempt developments (so far).
- A legislative moratorium on new exemption applications didn’t take effect until mid-2026, and only lasts one year. Since SCDOR is a “black box”, with no reporting requirements, more exemptions may be filed that we’re not aware of.
- Residents question why new taxes are being sought before lost collections are recovered and revenue leaks are closed.

$9.4M

Estimated annual county revenue lost to the Act 145 exemption loophole

Not Just Us: Charleston County's Cautionary Tale

Charleston County's similar transportation sales tax “discussion” shows what it actually takes to win back skeptical voters

The Backdrop

- 2024: Charleston County's half-cent sales tax (centered on the Mark Clark Extension) was rejected by 61.4% of voters. An even bigger defeat than Beaufort's '24 result.
- 2026: County leaders spent roughly a year on public outreach before finalizing a new project list, including multiple rounds of community meetings.
- The 2026 measure is structured as an extension of an existing tax, not a new increase: the local rate doesn’t change.

What Charleston Did Differently

- Council rewrote the ballot language itself, moving from projects the tax “may include” to projects it “will include,” specifically to close the loophole Beaufort's ballot measure still has.
- Funding was reallocated in response to public pushback (e.g., shifting money from one large project to flood mitigation and other community priorities).
- Even with those changes, the measure still draws organized opposition = the safeguards reduced, but did not eliminate, voter skepticism.

Even a county that added ballot certainty, cut the rate impact, and ran a year of public process is still fighting for votes. Beaufort's 2026 draft offers none of those safeguards.

Conclusion:

Our roads need help, but this is not the way to do it.

VOTE "NO!" ON THE 2026 TRANSPORTATION SALES TAX

The county hasn't finished what the 2018 tax promised, can't agree on how many projects the 2026 list even contains, and refused to adopt the suggested independent oversight model. Until that changes, we are a "no".

What Would Take to Earn Our Support Next time?

Three conditions that a future referendum would need to meet.

1

Professional Project Management

Hire a nationally recognized, independent Project & Construction Management firm — before, not after, voters are asked to approve funding. This is the single change credited most with BCSD's on-time, on-budget bond record, at a cost of roughly 3–4% of total project budget.

2

Dramatically Smaller Scope

Right-size the ask. Instead of a sprawling, loosely defined $780M/9-year list, prioritize the most dangerous locations first — a smaller, better-defined package that can be delivered and verified before asking for more.

3

Insulate the T-CLOC from Political Influence

Create a Transportation CLOC (citizen oversight committee), modeled on BCSD's, reporting directly to the County Administrator — not County Council — to avoid any appearance of political influence, while still providing regular public updates.

Source: Robert Priest, 10-year Dataw Island resident and BCSD CLOC member — correspondence and June 8, 2026 remarks to County Council. Views are his own.

$200,000 Your Tax Money For Re-"Education" = Propaganda

No Trust?

NO VOTE!

Your 3/4 of a Billion Tax $$$
87 Maybe or Maybe Not Projects
For 9 Years ~ Do You Trust Them?
I Don't! ~~ VOTE NO!

Do You Trust Them?

A 16.7% Tax Increase?

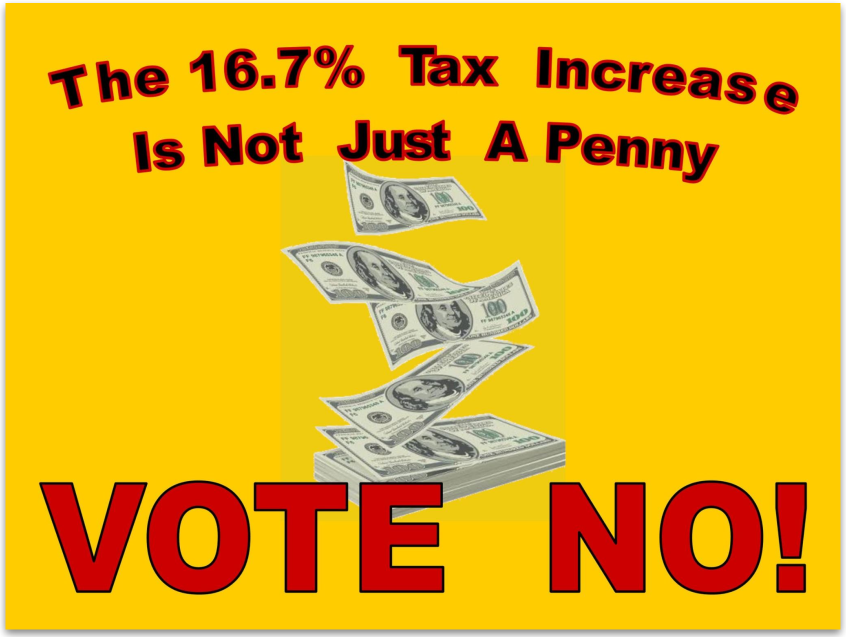
Is It Public Education ~ or ~ Propaganda

It's 87 Projects With No Promise To Complete Any!

Vote No!

The 2026 Sales Tax Costs You Each $4000

Do You Trust Them?


The 16.7% Tax Increase
Is Not Just A Penny
VOTE NO!


A 16.7% TAX INCREASE
IS NOT JUST 1 PENNY!
VOTE NO!


Another Sales Tax?
You Got To
Pass The Bill,
~
To See
What's In It!
VOTE NO!