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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Eckstrom Kicks Off Online Gasoline Tax Reporting

Columbia, S.C. – South Carolina motorists began paying 2 cents more per gallon for fuel plus several vehicle-related fee increases July 1, the first phase in a six-year series of tax and fee hikes that are expected to raise billions of dollars to fix and maintain the state's roads and bridges.

So how much new tax money has been generated? How much has been spent? And what has this new money been spent on?

State Comptroller Richard Eckstrom is aware that the taxpayers of South Carolina are asking themselves these questions, and starting today he is providing the answers.

The S.C. Fiscal Transparency Website has been expanded to show the amount of money collected and spent thus far from the new gasoline tax and other fee increases. Also shown are the specific sources of the money collected, the total for each source, and the state agency that is collecting it.

This information will be updated every month and will be expanded to include data as it becomes available about specific highway projects that are being funded by the new taxes and fees.

When fully implemented the fuel tax increase will total 12 cents per gallon, which eventually will increase the state's fuel tax from 16 cents to 28 cents per gallon. The increase is being phased-in over six years at the rate of an additional 2 cents per gallon per year. The fuel tax, combined with a bevy of vehicle-related fee increases, is expected to generate $625 million per year when fully implemented according to state estimates.

The law that imposes these new costs on South Carolinians, Act 40 of 2017, says **all of that money** – not most of it or part of it, but all of it – must be spent to improve the state's **existing** roads and bridges, not to build new projects.

Eckstrom says taxpayers deserve to know that is actually what's happening, and to be fully informed about how much the state is collecting from them to make it happen.

"Whether a motorist pays in small increases at the gas pumps or pays large amounts when buying and registering a car, Act 40 mandated that hundreds of millions of additional dollars would be collected from taxpayers and transferred to state government," he says.

"The law's justification for imposing these new taxes and fees was that additional money was needed to fix our state's ill-maintained highway system. Because Act 40 used the condition of our state highways to justify raising our taxes by $625 million a year in perpetuity, it's essential that as that money is collected everyone will be able to see that it's being identified, properly accounted for, and used for no other purpose but to repair, maintain, and improve our state's existing highway system."

Eckstrom launched the S.C. Fiscal Transparency Website in 2008. At the time it was among the first of its kind in the nation. The site initially featured online checkbooks that he created for each agency of state government. Since then Eckstrom has expanded the site to include all school districts and state-supported colleges and universities in South Carolina. The site also has been expanded to include reports showing annual amounts paid to state vendors and other information of particular interest to the public, such as details of the monthly purchases each state agency makes using state purchasing cards.

Unlike many other states that have contracted with commercial vendors to design and maintain their transparency websites, the S.C. Comptroller's Office receives no additional funding to provide or maintain its site, choosing instead to use existing staff and internally-available technology.

In addition to advising other government entities on ways to provide better financial transparency, Eckstrom's office is responsible for monitoring expenditures by state agencies as a safeguard against them overspending their budgets. His office also processes vendor payments for state agencies, and it administers and processes the statewide payroll.

Eckstrom is the first certified public accountant to serve as South Carolina's comptroller general.

For more information please contact Eric Ward, public information director, at 803-734-2538; 803-206-6293 or eward@cg.sc.gov.

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