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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

S.C. Comptroller Richard Eckstrom Says Gas Tax Spending Will Be Online

Columbia, S.C. – S.C. Comptroller Richard Eckstrom today announced that spending from the recently-enacted road funding law will be published online.

Eckstrom says his office has spent recent months developing procedures to track revenues generated by the new law – which raises fuel taxes and vehicle registration fees – and post the expenditure of them on the web. He expects to begin posting monthly, itemized reports of this information within the next few weeks.

"Many South Carolinians were understandably concerned about the increased burden the new law places on them with these new taxes and fees," Eckstrom said. "At the very least, they deserve to see how this money is spent."

"And transparency in gas tax spending will provide an extra layer of oversight and accountability," he said. "The more sets of eyes viewing these expenditures, the better."

Spending on roads by the Department of Transportation had already been available on the state's Fiscal Transparency Website. Yet due to the high level of public interest in the gas tax law, Eckstrom wanted to also produce a separate report highlighting just the disbursements from the additional tax revenue generated by the new law.

Eckstrom noted that the new law included no funds for tracking or transparency efforts. "The Comptroller's Office existing budget is absorbing the entire costs of the project, which means my staff and I are working to devise a low-cost way to use technology to collect and publish this information and to present it in a way that's useful and informative to the average citizen," he said. "Still, we're on pace to roll out the project sooner than I had anticipated."

Eckstrom in 2008 unveiled the state's pioneering Fiscal Transparency Website, which provides monthly itemized check registers of spending by each state agency. Although other states

followed suit with online check registers, South Carolina is believed to be the only one to accomplish such an initiative with no additional funding and with no legislation requiring it.

Since its launch, the statewide transparency program has been continually updated and enhanced to provide as much useful information as possible, Eckstrom said. In addition, it has been expanded to include local governments. Dozens of towns, cities and counties have voluntarily joined the online check register initiative, which served as the model for legislation requiring all S.C. school districts and public colleges and universities to do the same.

The gas tax spending transparency project is the latest extension of the initiative.

"Transparency promotes efficiency and accountability, and it fosters public trust," Eckstrom said. "Hopefully, this added public oversight will help ensure that the increased taxes and fees being imposed on us will be used to fix and maintain our roads, as those who authorized the increases told us they'd be."

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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