



Morning News

WEDNESDAY MARCH 22, 2017

TODAY'S WEATHER
Clearing and cooler.
High 68, low 33.
DETAILS 2A

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The Voice of the Pee Dee

75 cents

Group: Poor roads take high toll in Pee Dee

FRONT PAGE

BY JOSHUA LLOYD, Morning News jlloyd@florencenews.com

FLORENCE — Florence-area drivers are paying an average of about \$1,300 annually because of shoddy road conditions, according to a Washington-based research group.

The same group, TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit organization, released data Tuesday indicating that South Carolina road condition costs motorists in the state an additional \$5.4 billion each year due to high vehicle operating costs, traffic crashes and congestion-related delays.

“TRIP finds that throughout South Carolina, two-thirds of major, locally and state-maintained urban roads are in poor or mediocre condition, ten percent of locally and state-maintained bridges are structurally deficient,” according to the group. “And the state has the highest rate of fatal traffic crashes in the nation.”

Notoriously bad road conditions across the state have been a constant point of contention in the Statehouse for the past decade. Attempts have been made in the past to fund road repairs in the long term but most have failed.

Most recently, the South Carolina House passed a bill that would increase the state’s gas tax by 2 cents a year for the next five years and increase the cap on the vehicle sales tax from \$300 to \$500, as well as add \$60 to \$120 fees for hybrid and electric vehicles every two years.

The state’s gas tax hasn’t been adjusted since 1987, and is among the lowest in the nation.

If adopted, the bill would also create a “motor carrier road user fee” for out-of-state truckers, and reform governance of the state Department of Transportation’s Highway Commission.

Greater Florence Chamber of Commerce President Mike Miller said road conditions are hurting business and tourism in the area. He said he’s not surprised that an independent nonprofit group has decided to throw its voice into the expansion.

“It costs our citizens quite a bit, and from productivity standpoint it costs some of our companies millions of dollars every year,” Miller said. “By not fixing our infrastructure it gives the perception to tourists and business visitors that we don’t care. That’s not the impression we want to leave on people thinking about relocating here.”

According to TRIP data, the average vehicle operation cost for the area is \$472, while safety costs run \$539 and congestion costs are \$272 annually.

These conditions are only going to get worse, increasing the additional costs to motorists, if greater investment is not made available at the state and local levels of government,” said Will Wilkins, TRIP’s executive director. “Without adequate funding, South Carolina’s transportation system will become



MOVING FORWARD PROGRESS 2017

54-PAGE SPECIAL SECTION INSIDE

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Breaking ground



McLeod Health’s GE Healthcare executives along with state and local leaders broke ground for GE Healthcare’s \$40 million expansion. From left to right: McLeod Health’s Dr. Sharen Corneill, GE shop operations executive Dale Wolf, Governor Henry McMaster, Florence County Economic Development Partnership Chairman Buddy Brand, Florence County Council Chairman Kent Caudle and state Rep. Phillip Lowe.

Construction on \$40 million GE Healthcare expansion to begin this summer

FLORENCE — GE Healthcare held a groundbreaking Tuesday afternoon at its facility on West Radio Drive for its \$40 million capacity expansion, which is expected to begin construction this summer.

GE Healthcare will expand its production of MRI components to accommodate several new products in the company’s portfolio, according to the South Carolina Department of Commerce. The 500,000-square-foot facility will grow both in size and in personnel as approximately 100 new jobs will be created.

Dale Wolf, shop operations executive at GE Healthcare, explained that the catalyst for the expansion came from the desire to have GE’s supply chain under one roof. Wolf said the expansion consists of new equipment as well as materials from other warehouses moving into the Florence facility.

“We’re really trying to improve the customer experience and get the entire system treated from one site,” Wolf said. “We’re trying to simplify it.”

Wolf said GE Healthcare currently ships just five percent of the total number of parts of its MRI imaging system. After the expansion is complete, Wolf said, GE expects to ship 100 percent of the system from the Florence plant.

LOSE → WIN
FLORENCE'S BIGGEST LOSER 2017

FOOD
Tips for losing weight and keeping it off.
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THE BEST CLASSIFIEDS IN THE PEE DEE

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