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What should be Charleston's priority for a sales tax referendum? The city wants to hear from you.

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The City of Charleston is seeking input from residents as it sets a priority list for projects for a potential 2026 referendum to extend the half-cent transportation sales tax. Changes along Maybank Highway are among some of the proposed projects.

FILE/HENRY TAYLOR/STAFF

CHARLESTON — City Council's Traffic and Transportation Committee wants to hear from residents as it sets a priority list for road and infrastructure projects funded through a potential 2026 referendum that would extend the half-cent transportation sales tax.

The levy, which is added on top of the 6 percent tax imposed by the state on most purchases, helps offset the cost of widening overburdened roadways, the addition of bike lanes and sidewalks, and the expansion of public transit.

Without it, Mayor William Cogswell warns, there isn't money to fix the traffic issues he hears constant complaints about from residents.

After Charleston County voters overwhelmingly rejected an extension last year, officials across the region are reviving the discussion.

Estimates expect a 2026 transportation sales tax to raise about \$4.25 billion over 25 years, a 21 percent decrease from the \$5.4 billion expected from the 2024 tax if voters had approved it.

Of that \$4.25 billion, city's portion based on population would total just over \$2 billion, according to Cogswell's rough estimates.

The transportation committee has been meeting for weeks to refine Cogswell's list of priority projects. County Council has asked localities to provide a list of their priorities by Dec. 1.

On Nov. 18, at 3 p.m., the committee will review all of the projects at City Hall, and there will be a public comment period during this final meeting.

Here is the proposed list of the city's priorities, and rough cost estimates:

Johns Island's estimated allocation: \$225 million

- Widen Maybank Highway between the Stono River and River Road — though Cogswell hopes this project will be funded (estimated cost: about \$10 million) ahead of another referendum vote
- Add a southern pitchfork and roundabout on Maybank Highway, potentially eliminating the light at Fenwick Hall Allee, where the northern pitchfork meets Maybank

- Widened portions of Main Road between Chisholm to Plow Ground roads and improve the intersection at Main and Maybank
- Improve intersections and slow traffic flow along Maybank Highway from River and Main roads, where it can't be widened

James Island's estimated allocation: \$238 million

- Add a second turn lane to Folly Road at the Maybank Highway intersection — similar to the widening of Maybank on Johns Island, Cogswell hopes this might get done ahead of a potential 2026 ballot
- Add a left turn lane from Maybank Highway onto Riverland Drive for drivers heading toward Johns Island; while preventing left turns onto Riverland Drive for those heading off Johns Island
- Partially raise Harbor View Road
- Beautify Folly Road improvements already in the SC DOT pipeline

West Ashley's estimated allocation: \$1.12 billion

- Select widening of Savannah Highway, or US 17 South, along with drainage, intersection and safety improvements
- Improvements at the intersection of Glenn McConnell Parkway and Magwood Drive
- Partially raise Ashley River Road and safety enhancements

Peninsula's estimated allocation: \$500 million

- Flood mitigation improvements to Lockwood Drive and Hagood Avenue, which would tie in the western portion of the Battery Extension project, as well bike and pedestrian access

- Flood mitigation improvements along East Bay Street, Concord Street and Morrison Drive, which will tie in to the eastern portion of the seawall
- Improvements along Calhoun Street
- Add bike lanes and sidewalks along Huger Street

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Ali Rockett covers the city of Charleston, from inside City Hall to outer West Ashley. She previously worked at papers in Virginia and her home state of North Carolina.