



March 14, 2025

**RE: 3.11.2025 SMITH COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT PRESENTATION ROAD BOND PROJECTS**  
**UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ABOUT SMITH COUNTY ROAD BOND PROJECTS**

**SMITH COUNTY JUDGE AND COMMISSIONERS:**

*On February 24, 2025, Grassroots America, called for a full public accounting of Smith County Road Bond Projects, saying "After receiving numerous complaints from Smith County citizens, we conducted an audit of Smith County Road Bond project documents. Our audit revealed that the Smith County Road Plan promised to the taxpayers is dramatically behind schedule and over budget. We call on the Smith County Commissioners Court to adopt a "business urgency" approach, work with the County Engineer to assemble all the facts and hold a public meeting in the very near future to inform citizens."*

At Commissioners Court on March 11, 2025, the County Engineer and Auditor responded with a presentation of the 2017 and 2021 Road Bond financials and the infrastructure work done with those bond funds. The forty-five-page presentation provided a detailed overview of projects in "closed out" Phase 1 and current status of Phase 2 road projects. Likewise, the financial overview was thorough. It is important to note that with one exception (#5 below), ***the summary GAWTP presented to the Court on February 24<sup>th</sup> detailed the same financial and completion data as was presented to the court on March 11<sup>th</sup>, confirming both budget overages and schedule slippage.*** Specifically:

- The **Phase 1 bond (\$39.5 million)** promised **376.5 miles** of improved roads.
  - Only **204.5 miles were completed** with bond funds
  - **\$3.5 Million of supplemental funding had to be applied to complete the additional 175.2 miles of basic maintenance.**
- The **Phase 2 Bond (\$45 million)** promised **282.2 miles** of improved roads.
  - Just **99.1 miles have been completed** to date
  - Just **38.4 miles are contracted or planned** to date
  - Nearly **145 additional miles have not yet been contracted.**
  - **Supplemental funding of \$10 million** has already been appropriated

What was missing from the March 11<sup>th</sup> presentation were several critical points GAWTP had previously requested to be discussed. The failure to address these has **clouded the goal of total transparency on the financials and deliverables.**

1. The presentation stated a commitment to "complete the Smith County Road Bond Program." **Specific completion dates were not presented nor even discussed.** The public has no benchmarks against which progress can be measured or against the FY26 completion, which was promised to the voters as the expected deliverable.

2. The financial report documented the current funding balance and additional **\$20 million of bond sale authorizations**. However, there was **no estimate of the funding required to complete those improvements** due to inflation or other factors. **Transparency requires both notification and quantification of risk.**
3. Degradation has been reported on projects already completed. There was no discussion on this potentially significant financial risk to the taxpayers. There was no discussion regarding a need to perhaps extend the County's current practice of a one-year contractor's bond to two years. Again, this is an important topic that should have been discussed to protect taxpayer investments. **Transparency requires a full discussion of project quality and what can be done to protect taxpayers.**
4. The response to the above three issues will define the taxpayer exposure to the **potential Interest & Sinking Fund (I&S) tax rate increase in the FY 2026 budget**. **Transparency requires disclosure of I&S tax rate impact as soon as possible so that the Commissioners Court can get to work cutting costs in other areas of the County Budget to ease the burden on taxpayers.**
5. The Auditor reported that **\$2.2 million in Interest Income** has been earned from the bond fund investments. This was new, and good, news. However, what was missing from the report was the approximately **\$40 million in interest expense**, an incremental cost to the taxpayers. **Full transparency requires both good and bad news.**
6. No official has been charged with updating the **strategically important Transportation Infrastructure Plan**. That is critically important to prevent future crises that may require additional bond propositions. **Full transparency in problem solving requires both short- and long-term strategic plans. (Should the Commissioners Court utilize a community task force approach, we strongly recommend that contractors who intend to bid on future projects or who have financial interests in those bidding companies are disqualified from serving on the task force.)**

Unfortunately, the Court's agenda packet did not include the slide deck. No opportunity was thus available to analyze or reinforce these concerns under "public comments." Public comments can often stimulate the Court's deeper discussions or an exploration of new concerns.

Moreover, this was styled on the agenda as a "presentation" agenda item, not a "discuss, consider and take any necessary action" item. ***There will be no opportunity for public comments or formal debate for SIX MONTHS until the first semi-annual update.*** Road conditions affect virtually everyone, every day. Road conditions are important not just to residents and businesses but to those providing public services – schools, emergency services, and law enforcement.

The taxpaying citizens of Smith County want, need, and deserve better from the Smith County Commissioners Court. A schedule of pending road projects must indicate to taxpayers WHEN and HOW the specific roads they travel every day will be fixed. **Transparency depends upon our remaining six questions being fully discussed in public and answered.**

**We strongly urge members of the Smith County Commissioners Court to require full transparency of themselves as the administrators of Smith County.**



JoAnn Fleming, Executive Director  
Acting President



Thomas Fabry, Board Member  
Chairman, Government Watchdog Committee