



Town of Holly Ridge

Mayor's Message

MARCH 2, 2026



Happy Monday, everyone. I hope you had a great week and weekend. I wish you all a great week ahead. I cannot believe how fast time goes by since we are already in March. God bless you and your family, our Town, our County, our State, and our great Country.

Homeowners in Holly Ridge either have received or will receive the county's new tax assessment, and the assessed values have increased significantly. The county Commission Chair, Tim Foster, told me on Thursday that "We understand that rising property values can raise concerns about tax bills and household budgets, and the Board is committed to setting a responsible tax rate that supports essential County services while keeping residents in mind. "On our side in Holly Ridge, during the budget cycle and after the county rate is finalized, the council will consider actions to maintain revenue neutrality and decide whether to make any rate adjustments.

Over the past few months, the citizens of Holly Ridge have raised concerns about a range of issues, including schools, Infrastructure, transportation, and more. I intend to share data on each of those issues in my messages over the next few weeks, along with any updates. In this issue of the mayor's message, I am sharing details on the roles and responsibilities we work on that are critical to our strategic and growth plans. I hope to provide information that helps Holly Ridge citizens better understand our activities and efforts. In this issue, I want to focus on DOT.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is the state agency responsible for building, maintaining, and operating transportation systems across North Carolina. They have approximately \$5.2B out of the state's \$34B budget. Out of the funds the department spends, \$1.2B is on maintenance and \$2.2B on Construction (roads, bridges, etc.). The budget is divided into 3 buckets: state, regional, and local. A significant portion of the funds comes from the gas tax. [North Carolina is 2nd in the country after Texas in terms of state-controlled road mileage, with 80,000 miles, and 16th overall, with 229K miles of total roads.](#)

What NCDOT Does: Highways & Roads -Maintains more than 80,000 miles of state-maintained roads. The department builds and repairs highways, bridges, interchanges, and manages snow removal and storm response. The functions include DMV (Division of Motor Vehicles), Aviation Support, Public Transportation, Ferry Division, and Rail & Freight operations.

How It's Governed: DOT is currently led by the Secretary of Transportation, Daniel Johnson, appointed by Governor Stein; it works with the NC Board of Transportation, whose members represent the state's highway divisions.

Holly Ridge Area: NC NCDOT handles Maintenance and improvements on state roads, such as NC Highways 17 and 50 and nearby routes, including Sound and Holly Ridge roads; traffic signals; road resurfacing; and state-managed bridges. They also coordinate evacuation routes during hurricanes.

How Road Projects Get Approved & Funded in North Carolina. In North Carolina, road projects are prioritized through a data-driven system managed by NCDOT.

The Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) Law. North Carolina uses a formula-based system called Strategic Transportation Investments (STI). Projects compete for funding statewide based on scoring—not just politics.

Projects are grouped into tiers:

- Statewide Mobility (40% of funds) – Does not apply to Holly Ridge. Major highways, Interstates, Large congestion relief projects, Scored 100% on data (traffic volume, safety, cost-benefit, etc.)
- Regional Impact (30% of funds). Important regional roads, divided among 7 regions, 70% data-driven / 30% local input
- Division Needs (30% of funds) – Holly Ridge is in Division 3: Local projects in Holly Ridge include intersection improvements, widening, safety upgrades, using 50% data and 50% local input

How Projects Get on the List. Projects typically come from Holly Ridge, Onslow County, Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs), NCDOT engineers, and the public. We submit during the prioritization cycle (every 2 years).

How Projects Are Scored. Scoring considerations: Traffic volume, Crash history, Congestion, Economic Impact, Freight importance, Cost-effectiveness, benefit-to-cost ratio. For local tiers, the Holly Ridge government can assign priority points. **Our growth projections impact DOT planning scores.**

The 10-Year Plan (STIP). Funded projects are included in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)—a rolling 10-year plan updated every 2 years. Once in the STIP, the project moves through the following: Planning & environmental review, Design, Right-of-way acquisition, and Construction. Major projects can take years to complete, such as the Hampstead Bypass.

Where the Money Comes From. Funding sources include State gas tax, DMV fees, Federal highway funds, Bonds (when authorized), and Limited toll revenue (does not apply to Holly Ridge). North Carolina relies less on toll roads than other states.

Local Political Reality (Important). While STI is data-driven, local governments such as Holly Ridge and Onslow County matter in submitting projects and assigning local priority points. Advocating through the Division Engineer, coordinating land use planning. Suppose Holly Ridge wants widening, a signal, or a new connection. Town leadership must actively submit and score it. We are also working with local politicians, such as Representative Smith and Senator Lazzara, to support our projects.

Working with the North Carolina Department of Transportation isn't passive — we plan strategically dramatically increase our odds of getting projects funded based on our growth projection, such as Project Ajax. Here's how it's done effectively:

- **Align Our Land Use Plan with Transportation:** Our Comprehensive Plan/Land Use Plan shows: Future growth corridors, Commercial nodes, and Higher-density areas. Our transportation requests must match that growth pattern. If zoning allows high density but transportation planning does not support it, NCDOT will not prioritize upgrades.
- **Submit Our Projects Every Prioritization Cycle (Every 2 Years):** Holly Ridge should: Identify 3–5 priority projects, prepare cost estimates with Division engineers, and submit them through the RPO (Rural Planning Organization)
- **Use Holly Ridge Priority Points Strategically.** In the "Division Needs" tier, 50% of scoring comes from local input. That means: Town + County + RPO assign points.
Holly Ridge must: Coordinate early with the County, build political alignment, and avoid splitting points across too many projects. We must: Focused strategy beats scattershot submissions.
- **Build Relationships with the Division Engineer:** Holly Ridge is in Division 3. Therefore, we must meet quarterly with the Division Engineer, share development projections, Flag safety concerns early, and invite NCDOT to planning sessions. Projects move faster when staff relationships are solid.
- **Leverage Developers:** We require Traffic Impact Analyses (TIAs), Developer-built turn lanes, Cost-sharing for signals, and Right-of-way dedication.

Sometimes, a private project can fund 30–70% of an improvement, making the project more attractive in STI scoring.

Document Safety Data: Crash history significantly boosts scoring. We should: Track accidents at key intersections, submit formal safety concerns, and request safety studies. Safety projects often move faster than widening projects.

Considering an Interim Solution: If widening takes 10 years, can we add a turn lane? Adjust signal timing? Reduce speed limits? Add flashing beacons? Small wins build credibility.

Political Reality: The STI formula is data-driven — but: Strong advocacy matters, regional coordination matters, showing economic benefit matters, Towns that treat transportation as strategic Infrastructure (not reactive complaints) get better results. We are doing exactly that by connecting at the county, state, and federal levels to ensure more attention to our Town.

I hope this was a good read and useful. Please keep up with town events using our website. Please review our Strategic Plan under the government tab if you have not already. I will have office hours this week on Tuesday and Thursday, 1–4 p.m. I am available to discuss any subject by appointment, by phone at 336-865-0884, or by email. We do appreciate citizens' interest, and I have had many great discussions with them. I invite anyone interested to meet with me and discuss your ideas and concerns. We may disagree on issues, but we are open to discussing and hearing from you. I am available by phone at 336-865-0884 or via email at pparnian@hollyridgnc.gov. We appreciate your confidence and support. God bless you.

Mayor Pete Parnian