

# Richland looks at transit options

## Lexington also considers adding penny to sales tax for bus system

By JOY L. WOODSON

[jwoodson@thestate.com](mailto:jwoodson@thestate.com)

Richland County Council is considering three options to help eliminate cuts to the regional transit system.

In addition to considering the penny sales tax question the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority wants the county to put on the November ballot, Richland County wants to look at two other options:

- A \$30 vehicle registration fee, which would bring in an estimated \$7.6 million in revenue.
- An unspecified property tax increase that would generate between \$8 million and \$11 million for the authority.

The transit authority operates with an \$11 million annual budget, but officials say they need \$25 million to expand and improve the bus system.

Richland County Council member Mike Montgomery said he did not favor the transit authority's proposal, which he said was "thin on the details and it's very fat on the revenue."

On Friday, the transit authority asked Richland and Lexington counties to consider during their Tuesday meetings putting the 1-cent sales tax increase on the ballot in November.

The sales tax increase would generate \$69 million in Richland and Lexington counties and the city of Columbia annually. One-fourth of that would be spent on the transit authority. The rest would be used on roads and other infrastructure.

Richland County Council members complained Tuesday that there was no detailed breakdown of ridership numbers.

County Council Chairman Tony Mizzell said the transit authority has taken no leadership in educating council members and has handled the issue poorly.

In Lexington County on Tuesday, leaders voted to consider putting a question on the ballot, but did not commit to doing that. The decision followed an hour-long executive session. There was almost no public discussion.

By state law, counties have until Aug. 14 to formulate and add questions to the November ballot.

The transit authority has said it will cut services by 85 percent if another funding source is not found soon.

Montgomery called it “an unwelcome threat.”

Reach Woodson at (803) 71-8692

The State June 21