



Transportation and Motor Vehicles

Contains Recommendations*

Driver Education

Other Reports

Motor Fuel Funds

* Until the follow-up review is completed, recommendation status shown is based on the agency's response and is subject to change.



Performance Audit Division

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Driver Education

Certain aspects of the driver's education program could be improved

BACKGROUND

In response to fatal crashes among teenage drivers, Joshua's Law (2005) instituted requirements for driver's education courses, which must be approved by the Department of Driver Services (DDS). In fiscal year 2023, DDS regulated more than 200 driver training schools, with more than 85,000 students completing a driver's education course.

Joshua's Law also established the Georgia Driver's Education Commission (GDEC) to maximize participation in driver's education and training. GDEC implemented its scholarship program in 2017 to offset the cost of driver's education courses. In fiscal year 2023, GDEC awarded more than 6,000 scholarships with a total redeemed value of \$2.2 million.

This audit examined the extent to which DDS's driver's education program adheres to statutory and industry standards and improves safety outcomes. The audit also determined how GDEC funding for driver's education scholarships compares to course costs and demand.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

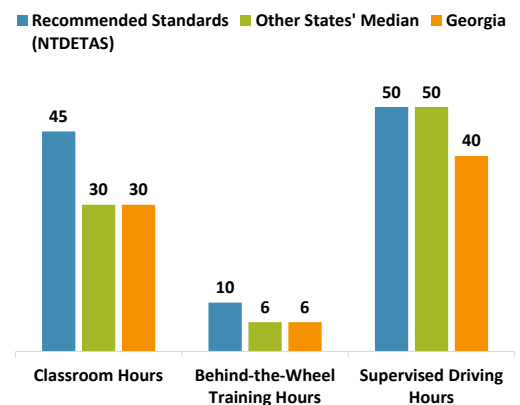
- DDS should explore options to better align the driver's education program with recommended standards.
- GDEC should continue to monitor scholarship demand and consider programmatic changes, such as adjusting eligibility requirements if needed.
- The General Assembly should consider establishing a driver's education fund that would prevent scholarship funds from lapsing.

KEY FINDINGS

We identified areas in which DDS could improve its driver's education program based on recommended standards. We also found that driver's education funding serves a small portion of teen drivers and that research on safety outcomes is mixed.

Georgia's requirements are comparable to other states but do not meet recommended standards.

- Requirements related to classroom instruction, behind-the-wheel training, and supervised driving are less stringent than recommended standards but similar to most other states.



- The classroom portion of driver's education can be completed virtually, either synchronously (instructor-led) or asynchronously (self-paced course). Other

states commonly allow for virtual driver's education, although some do not permit asynchronous courses. Recommended standards include requirements for asynchronous and synchronous virtual courses, some of which DDS lacks.

- DDS curricula standards partially align with recommended standards, but do not address some topics. In addition, the curricula review process is lengthy, and currently approved curricula are outdated.

Georgia designates funds for driver's education scholarships, but these scholarships serve a small portion of teen drivers.

- GDEC offers scholarships for driver's education; however, the scholarships are limited, and program changes have generally limited eligible applicants.
- GDEC's inability to retain funds limits the number of scholarships awarded. Since fiscal year 2019, GDEC reported remitting \$1.4 million in unused funds, which equates to approximately 3,400 additional scholarships.

Research on the driver's education effectiveness is mixed; however, a Georgia study found better outcomes among teens who obtain classroom instruction and behind-the-wheel training.

- Young driver related fatalities declined over several decades but have fluctuated in recent years. Fatality trends have likely been driven by many factors including teens waiting longer to obtain licenses, licensing restrictions, improved vehicle safety technology, and traffic law education and enforcement. Nationally, research on the effectiveness of driver's education is mixed.
- A 2021 Georgia study found that drivers completing in-person instruction and behind-the-wheel training with an instructor experienced better outcomes than drivers completing virtual courses and parent/teen driving guides (e.g., the number of serious injuries and fatalities were 35% lower).

Driver Education

Final Status Pending – Follow-Up Review will be completed in 2025

Finding 1: Georgia’s basic course and training requirements are comparable to most other states; however, also like other states, they do not align with all recommended standards.	
No recommendations	
Finding 2: DDS should monitor the use of virtual driver’s education courses and consider establishing additional requirements.	
DDS should improve its data system so the agency can identify and track participation in synchronous virtual courses and use this information to monitor accessibility.	Status Pending
As it begins to track synchronous virtual courses, DDS should consider the feasibility of providing this information to students on its website.	Status Pending
To better align with recommended standards, DDS should implement additional guidelines for both asynchronous and synchronous virtual courses.	Status Pending
Finding 3: DDS could improve curricula standards and the processes for approving and monitoring curricula.	
DDS should develop behind-the-wheel instruction guidelines that establish the minimum skills students must demonstrate.	Status Pending
DDS should continue to explore alternatives to the current curricula approval process, including the development of a statewide curriculum.	Status Pending
If DDS chooses to maintain its current process, DDS should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. update its curricula standards; b. improve guidance and documentation of the curricula review process; c. require providers to document where curriculum standards are met; and d. require approved curricula to undergo subsequent periodic reviews. 	Status Pending
DDS should implement a post-course evaluation for participants to complete.	Status Pending
Finding 4: GDEC scholarships help offset the cost of driver’s education, but on a small portion of students are served.	
GDEC should increase advertisement of the scholarship.	Status Pending
GDEC should continue to monitor demand based on application volume and analyze trends. If the eligible applicant pool becomes insufficient in future years, GDEC should consider strategic programmatic changes, such as adjusting eligibility requirements.	Status Pending
The General Assembly should consider establishing a driver’s education fund that would prevent scholarships from lapsing.	Status Pending
Finding 5: The extent to which driver’s education improves safety outcomes is unclear.	
No recommendations	



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Motor Fuel Funds

Slowed growth in motor fuel funds did not impact current transportation projects

BACKGROUND

This special examination of Motor Fuel Funds was conducted at the request of the House Appropriations Committee.

Motor Fuel Taxes

The state imposes an excise tax on motor fuel in the state. The excise tax applies to gasoline, fuel oils (diesel), liquid petroleum gas, aviation, and special fuel. The current rate is \$0.287 per gallon for gasoline and \$0.322 per gallon for diesel.

Tax Administration

The Department of Revenue (DOR) is responsible for performing the functions necessary to administer motor fuel taxes, including licensing and collecting payments for motor fuel taxes. An average of \$1.8 billion has been collected from motor fuel taxes annually since fiscal year 2016.

Use of Motor Fuel Funds

Motor fuel funds are primarily appropriated to the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and must be spent on the construction and maintenance of state roads and bridges. In fiscal year 2020, about \$1.9 billion from motor fuel funds were appropriated to GDOT. Motor fuel funds accounted for half of GDOT's total appropriations for fiscal year 2020 and 96% of all state funds. While each GDOT program except Intermodal receives motor fuel funds, Routine Maintenance,

Capital Construction, and Local Maintenance and Improvement Grants received 76% of the amount appropriated to GDOT.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

This report is intended to answer questions posed by the House Appropriations Committee. It does not include findings with recommendations.

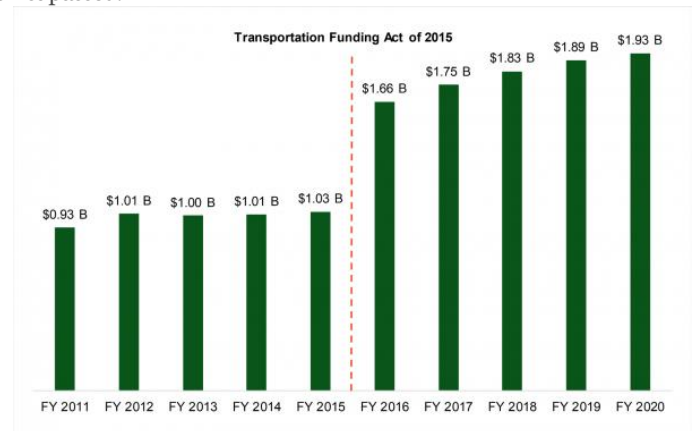
KEY FINDINGS

While motor fuel revenue and its related appropriations have increased annually over the past five fiscal years, the growth rate has slowed. The slowed growth in motor fuel revenue has not impacted current state transportation projects.

Motor fuel tax revenue growth resulting from the Georgia Transportation Funding Act of 2015 has slowed in recent years.

- In the five years prior to the Georgia Transportation Funding Act of 2015, annual motor fuel tax revenue averaged approximately \$1.0 billion, compared to \$1.8 billion since the Act passed.

- Motor fuel tax revenue increased annually from almost \$1.7 billion in fiscal year 2016 to almost \$2.0 billion in fiscal year 2020. About 96% of fiscal year 2020



motor fuel tax revenue was derived from the state excise, while interest accounted for about 4% of total revenue.

- Ideally key findings are included in the report WWF and the creation of this section simply requires pulling the existing key finding statements and converting the primary points in the WWF paragraphs into bullets.

Gasoline and diesel consumption are key drivers of motor fuel tax revenue, which is also affected by the annual tax rate adjustment.

- Factors affecting gasoline and diesel fuel consumption, which comprise nearly all monthly taxable gallons sold, explain changes in motor fuel tax revenue.
- Strong relationships were found between fuel consumption and key factors, including the labor force, transit usage and vehicle miles traveled.
- Between fiscal years 2017 and 2020, adjustments to the state excise tax rate resulted in approximately \$228.3 million more revenue than if the state excise tax rate were not adjusted.

Slower growth in motor fuel tax revenue has not significantly impacted current state transportation projects.

- The Georgia Transportation Funding Act of 2015 generated approximately \$4 billion in additional revenue, which allowed GDOT to increase the number of funded transportation projects.

In order to maintain budgetary compliance, GDOT's committed funds must be reported in the year in which they are spent. As a result, between 6% and 24% of GDOT's annual appropriations has been reserved.