

# Addressing Citizen Environmental Concerns with Proper Perspective

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# Polling the population on pollution

Gallup surveyed 1,009 U.S. adults in March 2023 to determine **how worried** the public overall is about certain environmental issues...

Climate change

Air pollution

Extinction of plant & animal species

Loss of tropical rain forests

Pollution of drinking water

Pollution of rivers, lakes, & reservoirs

# Polling the population on pollution

Causing the respondent a **great deal of worry**....

Pollution of drinking water	<b>55%</b>
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Pollution of rivers, lakes, & reservoirs	<b>50%</b>
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Extinction of plant & animal species	<b>40%</b>
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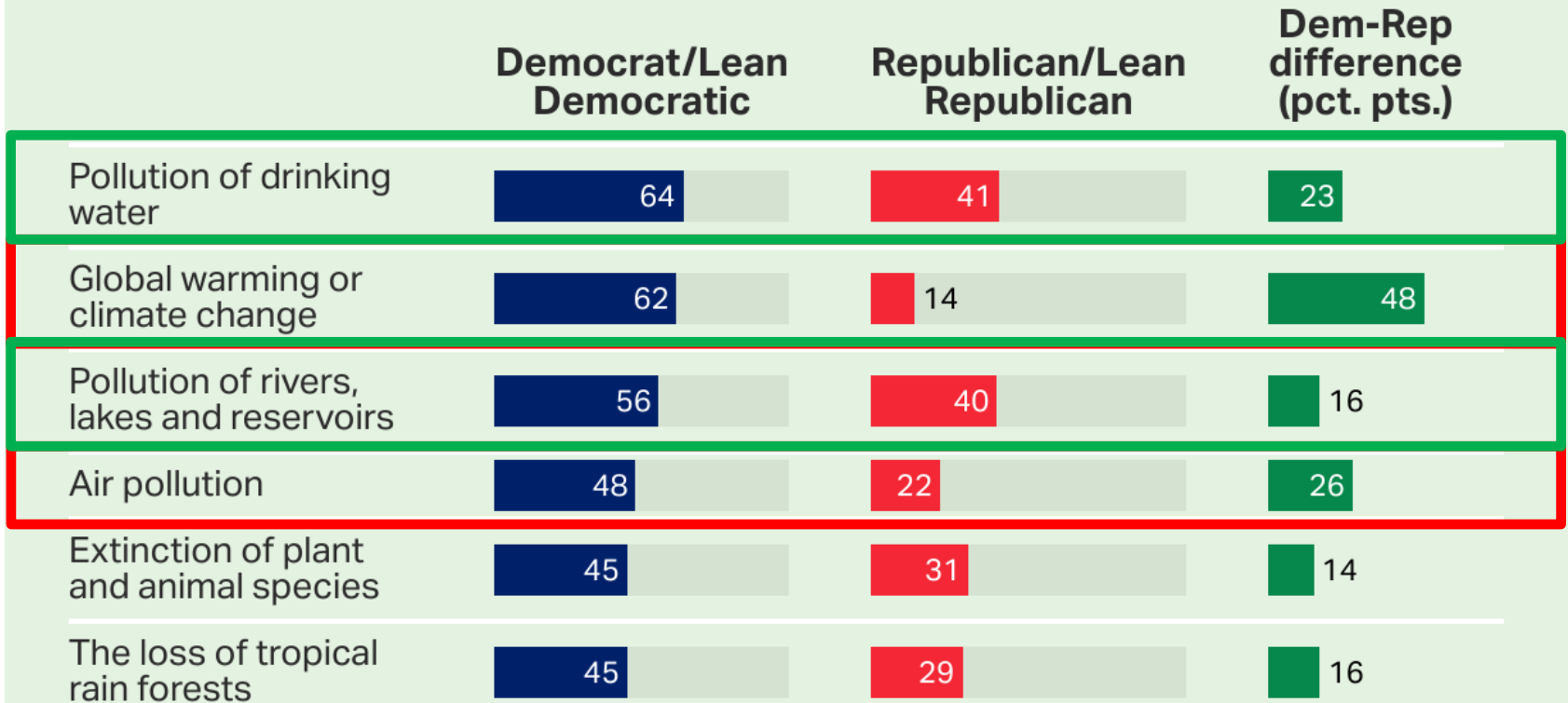
Climate change	<b>39%</b>
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Loss of tropical rain forests	<b>39%</b>
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Air pollution	<b>38%</b>
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# Elephants are red, donkeys are blue....

% Who worry "a great deal" about each



March 1-23, 2023

GALLUP®

## Going with the flow

- Many people are **really concerned** about the **water resources** they **rely on** every day
- **More concern about water resources** than about other “hot” environmental topics
- **Broad concern** about water resources **across the political spectrum**



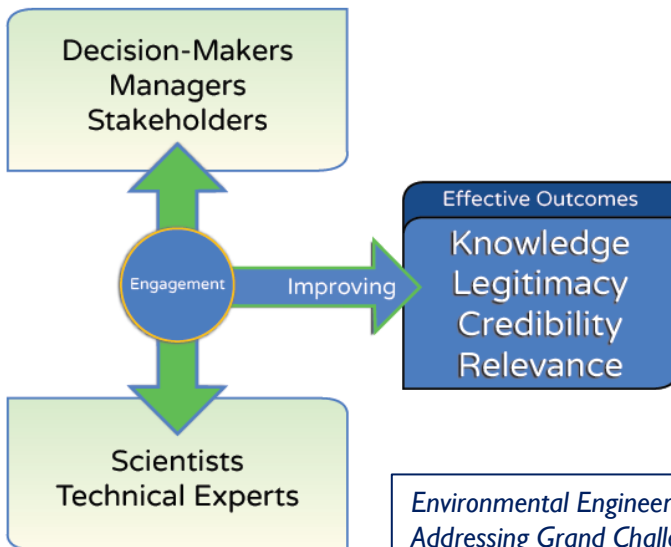
# Engaging with citizens & facing challenges



## ALABAMA SECTION ASCE 2022 REPORT CARD FOR ALABAMA'S INFRASTRUCTURE

### (Two) Recommendations to Raise the Grade

- Facilitate the **public's awareness** of stormwater challenges and the ways citizens can **participate** in **solving stormwater problems**.
- Establish and increase the amount of **funding ...** through **stormwater user fees** and utilities.



greenbiz.com

*Environmental Engineering for the 21st Century:  
Addressing Grand Challenges (NASEM, 2019)*

# ALDOT & the environment

- Protect **natural resources, ecosystems, & public health** to *reasonable* degrees
- In **balance** with other ALDOT responsibilities



*“While providing a safe, efficient, economically-sound, and **environmentally-sound transportation system**, it is the policy of the Alabama Department of Transportation to **promote the preservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural resources** of the State of Alabama*

- *through internal and **external communication, coordination, and cooperation** and*
- *by integrating the principles of environmental stewardship, innovation, and compliance into the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of Alabama’s transportation facilities.”*

# What does all this mean for ALDOT?

- ALDOT's stormwater management & pollution prevention activities...
  - enjoy **mainstream support**
  - are *mostly* **non-controversial**
- But we must **consider public priorities**
  - as we implement "**less popular**" environmental measures
  - to earn **buy-in**
  - in **encouraging** citizens to **help** us





# The public's priorities

- What stormwater-related issues does the average Alabama citizen care more about?
  - **Litter/trash/debris/dumping**
  - **Drainage problems**

*Based on citizen reports received through  
ALDOT's Environmental Concern  
Submission Form*



# Hitting home(s)



## Rare 1,000-year rain events keep adding up

At least 5 of them have happened in the U.S. in 2022



# Eyes on the ground...looking out for litter

## Share Your Environmental Concern

We invite citizens to share with us possible environmental issues they observe or general concerns they have about ALDOT environmental activities. We especially encourage citizens to report the following:

Excessive litter



ALDOT Mobile Area  
@ALDOTMobileArea

Want to make a difference in your community? Help keep our roadways clean by joining the Adopt-A-Mile program today! [alpals.org/content.cfm?pa...](http://alpals.org/content.cfm?pa...)



TOP STORY

'Trash Costs Cash': ALDOT campaign highlights costs of littering



WSFA 12 News

According to the ALDOT, almost \$1 million was spent in 2010 to clean up litter along the roadways. (Source: KPLC)

# But when is a litter issue *urgent*?

Two different submissions about litter from one *vigilant* citizen

Not pretty...but between ALDOT pickups



After ALDOT pickup a few days later

Citizen helped us monitor outcomes of litter control measures

Assessment: Not urgent

**Explained** to citizen that ALDOT would not do immediate pickup (“**triaging**” issues )



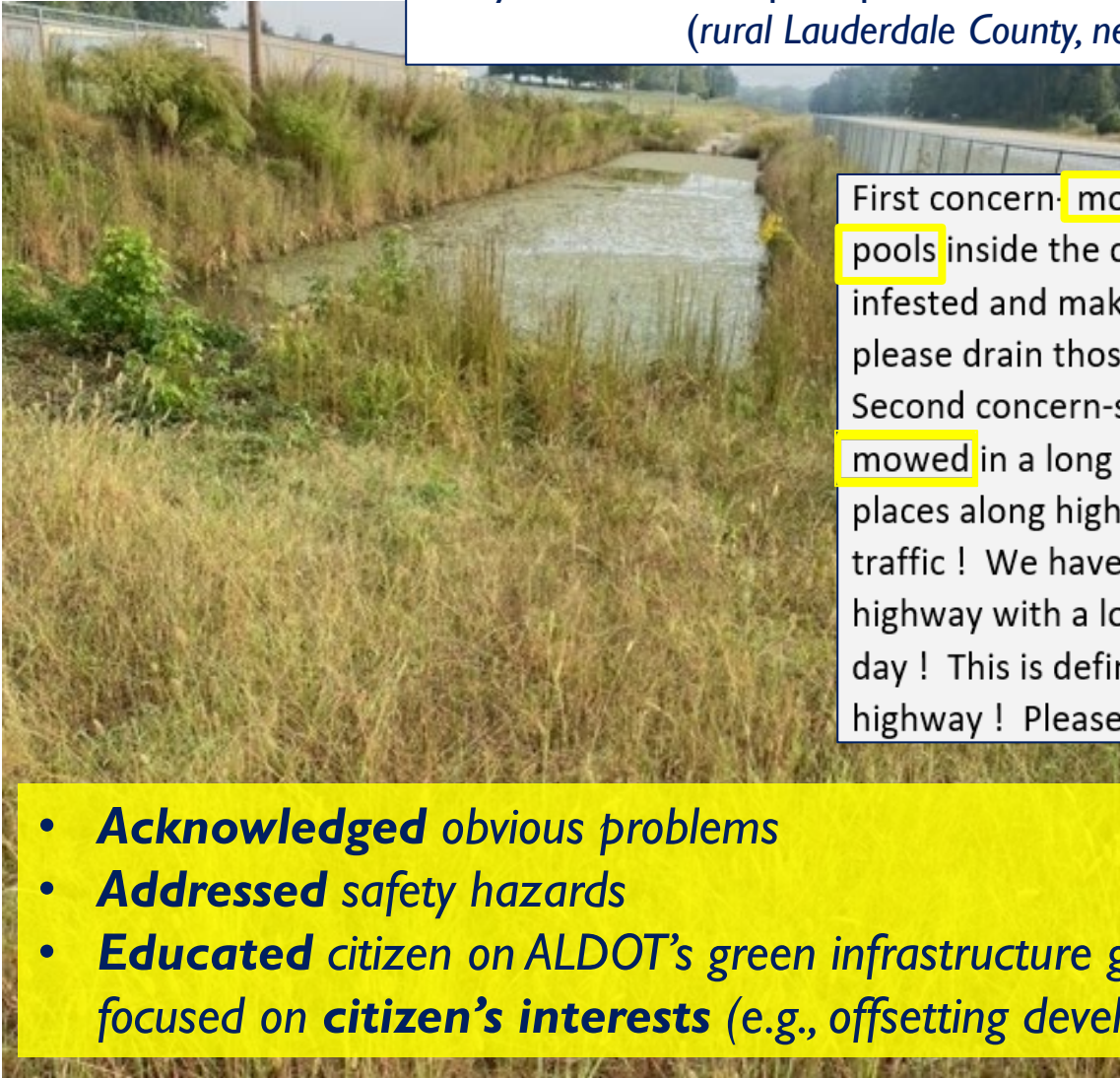
# Other important issues?

- Construction site management
- Post-development impacts
- Pesticide application
- Invasive plant species
- Snow & ice control side effects
- Industrial pollution
- New pollutants of concern
- Habitat preservation
- Misc. others....



# The *roadside to swale* is not paved with good intentions....

Early ALDOT attempt at post-construction stormwater management  
(rural Lauderdale County, near AL-TN line)




*One citizen's feedback*

First concern: **mosquitoes** are horrible due to the **pools** inside the chain link fences ! The water is infested and makes living nearby miserable ! Please please drain those!!

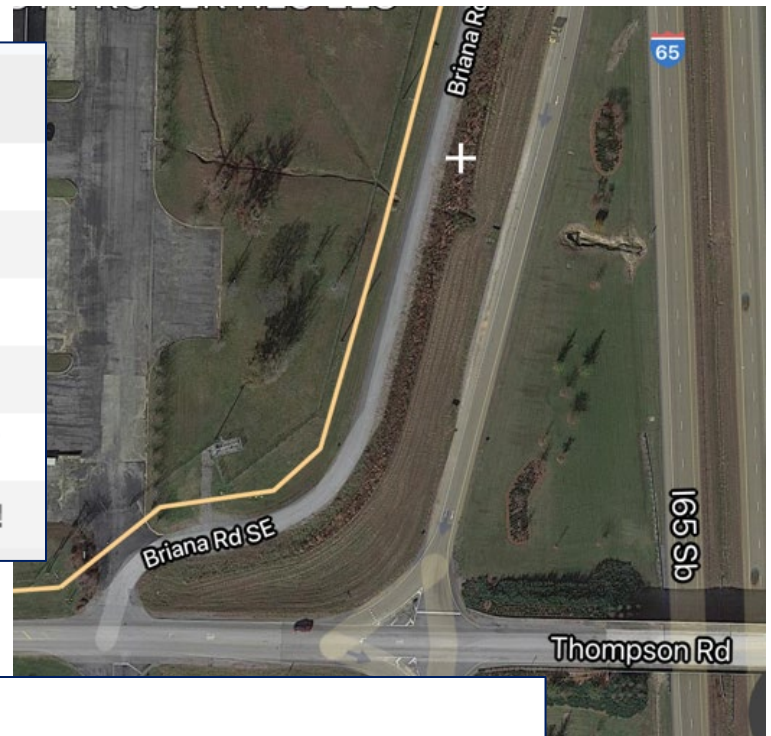
Second concern-state roadsides have not been **mowed** in a long time making it impossible in some places along highway 43 north to see oncoming traffic ! We have Rogers High School on this highway with a lot of teenagers traveling it every day ! This is definitely a **hazard** to all of us using this highway ! Please mow the roadsides and medians !

- **Acknowledged** obvious problems
- **Addressed** safety hazards
- **Educated** citizen on ALDOT's green infrastructure goals...  
focused on **citizen's interests** (e.g., offsetting development impacts)

# Planting messages

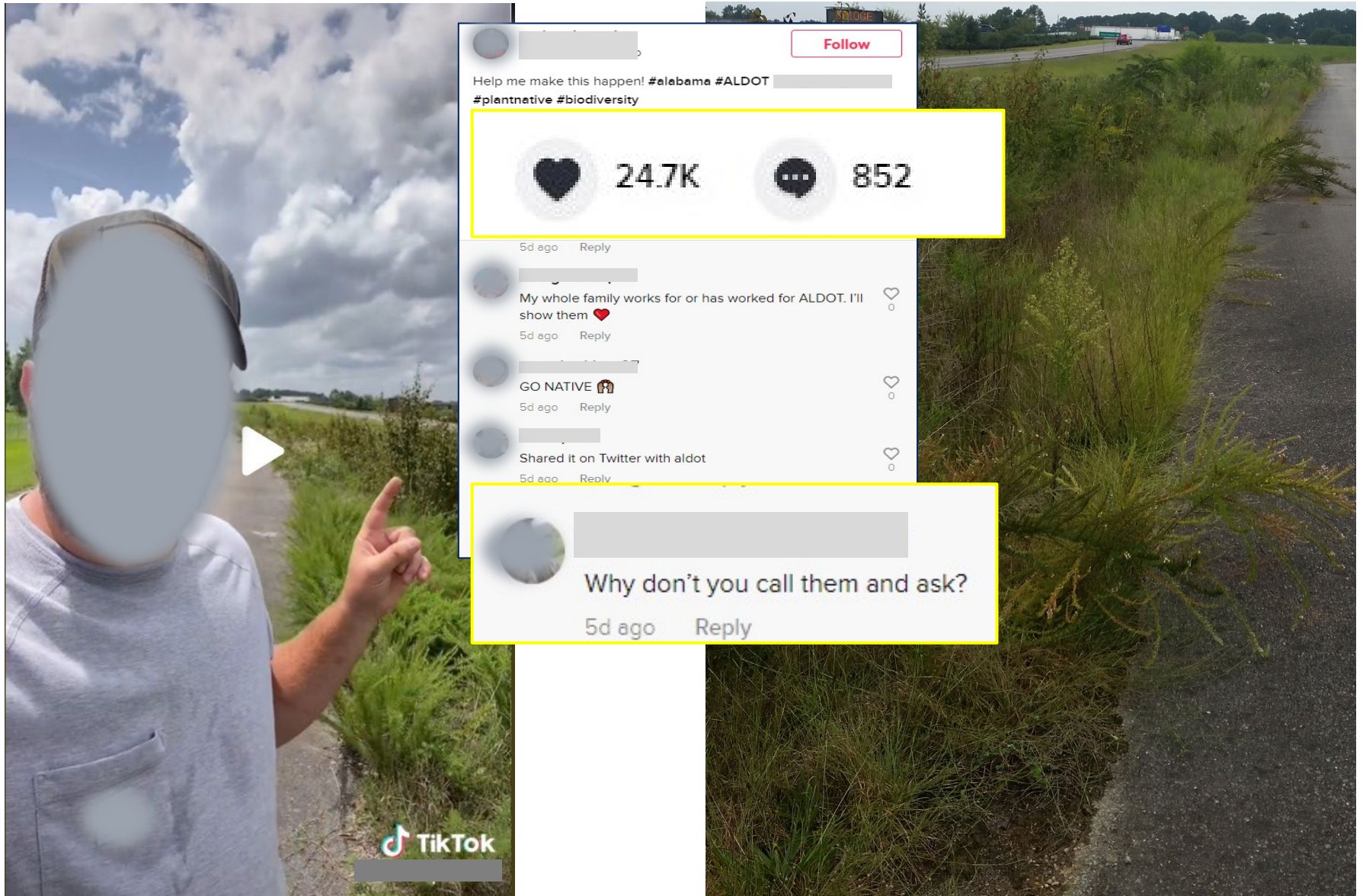
 **Environmental Concern Form**

Email	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]
County	Morgan
Route/Road Name	Don't know
Location	<a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/">https://vm.tiktok.com/</a> [REDACTED]
Describe Concern	Let this guy make Alabama beautiful!



Email	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]
County	Morgan
Route/Road Name	Interstate 65 at Exit 325, west side
Location	Interstate 65 at Exit 325, west side
Describe Concern	Intrusive vegetation growth - restoring this strip of land to a Native wildflower habitat.
Contact	[REDACTED] for leadership.

# Invasives & information spreading fast





# Building trust & killing weeds

Dear Citizen:

Thank you for using the ALDOT Environmental Concern Submission Form to notify us about the invasive vegetation observed on I-65 in Morgan County and to pass along [redacted]'s contact e-mail as well as a link to [redacted]'s TikTok video. We appreciate the passion [redacted] has for innovative roadside vegetation in his hometown, and we'll do what we can to accommodate that passion. To allow a citizen to perform work on our right-of-way may require traversing some hurdles, and I don't know what those specific hurdles would be. A more urgent consideration is whether the patch of land in question is indeed ALDOT's right-of-way. [redacted] mentioned [redacted] in his video, and a fence usually [redacted] our property boundary. Given the complexity of the situation, I'll [redacted] our senior [redacted] personnel [redacted] that they may [redacted]

In any case, I can say confidently that we'll address any invasive vegetation within our right-of-way appropriately. If it's possible to coordinate with [redacted] to do more than the basic vegetation management, the ALDOT [redacted]



ALDOT ROW sign... missing?

[redacted] profile picture [redacted]

Wow...my money was on aldot ignoring you. Good work.

6d ago Reply

[redacted] profile picture **Creator**

Got back real fast!

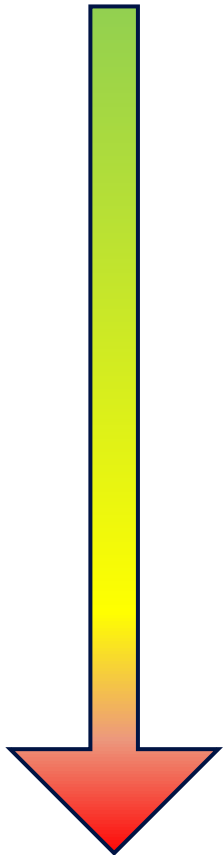
6d ago Reply

After ALDOT work



# The “balancing act” of response

*Easy /  
Straightforward*



*Challenging /  
Nebulous*

- **Acknowledge** any *legitimate* issue
- **Assess** the issue’s urgency
- **Address** the issue as urgency dictates
  
- **Explain** *honestly* the action(s) taken (or not taken)
- **Educate** *respectfully*... with a focus on public priorities

