

I-74 four-lane to Lumberton opened

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Johnny Woodard
The Laurinburg Exchange
Laurinburg, North Carolina

Good news for motorists who travel on U.S. 74 to points west.

The 19-mile, \$100 million portion of a new four-lane road that runs from U.S. 74 in Maxton to N.C. 41 in Lumberton is ready for travel. The stretch of road, branded Interstate 74, was officially opened in a ceremony late last month.

Joe Bailey, a Department of Transportation resident engineer, said construction on the new road started in December of 2004 and should be completed by this December. There is still some minor work to be done, he said.

*The 70-miles per hour speed limit signs scattered over the 19 miles may be a welcome site to motorists who were used to driving on the old two-lane, 55-mph, path to and from the Lumberton area.

When completed, I-74, one of DOT's Strategic Highway Corridors, will connect Michigan to South Carolina. This most recent expansion means that there is now a full four-lane link between Charlotte and Wilmington.

*The DOT engineer for Scotland County, Charles Vick, said he expects the opening will thrill a lot of motorists. The speed limit on the alternative U.S. 74 is 70 mph - quite a change from driving on the old two-lane stretch at 55-mph.

"I think it'll be great," Vick said.

Ron Riggins of the Scotland County Tourism Board said he expects that the opening of the four-lane highway will help tourism and the economy in Scotland County.

"Any time there is a more direct route opened up to Scotland County, there is going to be a positive impact," Riggins said.

Riggins predicted that more truck and traveller traffic through Scotland County would be a result of the work.

"This is the expansion of an important economic corridor to our area," he said.

Riggins said the only drawback has been confusion by some motorists over the way the exits have been numbered on I-74. U.S. 74, which overlaps with I-74 on the new stretch of road, has exits that are numbered similarly to those on I-74.

According to Riggins, this has caused some concern, particularly since the exit for Laurinburg shares a numerical title with an exit that breaks off towards Lumberton.

"Many people use GPS navigation these days. Hopefully that won't prevent them from exiting off in Scotland County," Riggins said.