

## **Highway plan makes headway**

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South Carolina Secretary of Transportation H.B. "Buck" Limehouse Jr. and Federal Highway Administration Division Administrator Bob Lee signed the Record of Decision Wednesday for the northern segment of Interstate 73 that will end in Hamlet.

"The signing of the ROD is another major milestone for I-73 that is necessary as we work to identify the most viable measures to deliver the project," Limehouse said. "One of the potential methods for funding I-73 involves innovative financing through public/private partnerships. SCDOT is working to solicit interest from the private sector with the intention that we receive a proposal to finance, design, construct and maintain I-73 here in South Carolina. This milestone today would allow us to receive better proposals from the private sector."

The northern segment of Interstate 73 extends from I-95 near Latta, S.C. approximately 36 miles to Hamlet. The completion of the Environmental Impact Statement and the Record of Decision represents a major milestone for the \$1 billion project. Because the project crosses state lines a high level of coordination occurred among the SC and NC Departments of Transportation, Limehouse said. More than 25 different state and federal regulatory agencies were also consulted during the process to reach the best overall decision on location of the new interstate.

"This project involved unprecedented levels of agency coordination and public involvement and demonstrates that environmental streamlining, if done correctly, results in a better decision and a shorter timeframe," said FHWA Division Administrator Bob Lee.

Lee said the national average for processing environmental documents exceeds five years. However, because of the streamlined approach the I-73 project completed the environmental phase from Notice of Intent to Record of Decision in just 39 months.

This innovative approach to project development has gained the attention of FHWA Administrator Thomas J. Madison. Members of the FHWA and SCDOT project team will receive the Administrator's Award for their work in streamlining the project in a ceremony Nov. 5 in Washington, DC.

Coupled with approval of the ROD for the southern segment on Feb. 8, FHWA environment actions are complete on the I-73 corridor in SC leading from Hamlet to the Grand Strand/Myrtle Beach area allowing this important project to move to right of way

acquisition and final design as well as possible advancement as a public/private partnership.