

MB sees chance for I-73 cash

Area tries to get in on next stimulus

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Lisa Fleisher - lfleisher@thesunnews.com
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As Democrats in Washington - including the president-elect - make increasing calls for another economic stimulus bill, Myrtle Beach businesses want to try to carve a slice of the pie for themselves.

The local chamber of commerce says its biggest looming project, Interstate 73, could benefit from a congressional desire to create jobs and build infrastructure - though the chances of getting any funding are unclear.

Part of the estimated \$2 billion needed to build the S.C. portion of Interstate 73 will likely be funded by tolls, but not all.

The chamber has been in touch with S.C. delegation staff to make sure the road, which would connect Myrtle Beach to Michigan, is on lawmakers' minds.

"We're hopeful there could be an infrastructure project included in that for the Grand Strand," said Brad Dean, president of the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce. Earlier this week, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi again said she would try for a stimulus package in a lame-duck session, and on Friday President-elect Obama pushed for swift action on such a bill.

"We are going to need to see a stimulus package passed either before or after inauguration," he said at a news conference. "We are going to have to focus on jobs, because the hemorrhaging of jobs has an impact, obviously, on consumer confidence."

There is no way to tell whether the funding is a possibility, Dean acknowledged. Representatives from various congressional offices also said it was hard to say what could or would be included in a stimulus bill, because discussions are in the early stages.

"It's too early to say," said Kevin Bishop, spokesman for Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C. "Is it a tax cut? Is it more government spending? Is it allowing people to keep more of their own money?"

Bishop said Graham's "basic position" is that people should keep more of their own money, but emphasized that Graham was a strong supporter of the road in general.

A spokeswoman for Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-Columbia, said the Majority Whip wanted to see a package with funding for infrastructure.

"The House hopes to pass a package in a lame-duck session that would put Americans back to work by investing in infrastructure projects," spokeswoman Hope Derrick said. "Included in this package would also be an extension of unemployment benefits. However, it's not clear the president and the Republicans and the Senate will support this approach."

Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C., will insist that new spending be coupled with lower spending elsewhere, said his spokesman, Wesley Denton.

"It must include long-term solutions that create jobs with lower taxes, reforming failed government programs, and expediting American energy production," he said in a statement.

The tourism industry will also push the Travel Promotion Act in the upcoming session, said Tom Sponseller, the president of the S.C. Hospitality Association.

Supporters say the bill would cost taxpayers nothing while encouraging and making it easier for foreigners to vacation in the United States.

Contact LISA FLEISHER at 626-0317.