

Posted on Wed, Jun. 06, 2007

Attempt to get funds for I-73 dies in Senate  
Plan would give \$5 million per year to launch project

By Zane Wilson - The Sun News

COLUMBIA --An attempt to get permanent state funding for Interstate 73/74 failed Tuesday when the Senate refused to agree to it.

But the proposal could come back up if the Senate decides it wants the bill the House attached the funding to, said Rep. Doug Jennings, D-Bennettsville.

Legislators are supposed to end the session Thursday, but that date is up in the air.

The House attached a measure giving I-73/74 \$5 million a year to a Senate bill on state procurement procedures. The funds would have allowed the state Infrastructure Bank to issue bonds to start building the road.

A committee of three representatives and three senators was assigned to work out the differences, and the Senate members refused to go along with the House change.

"We'd just as soon lose the whole bill as swallow that," said Sen. Nikki Setzler, D-West Columbia.

Jennings and Rep. Tracy Edge, R-North Myrtle Beach, who was also assigned to the conference committee, said the House members would not agree to let the bill go forward without the I-73/74 money.

This was the second attempt to get long-term funding for I-73 into this year's budget. The House included the same provisions in the budget bill, but the Senate cut it out.

"We see this as a way to direct and provide for the state Infrastructure Bank annually to keep I-73 as a priority," Jennings told the conference panel.

The Infrastructure Bank is a state program that provides financing for large road projects.

It is also important for the state to make a commitment to the road for it to be able to get long-term federal money, said Jennings, who is chairman of the North Eastern Strategic Alliance's I-73 committee.

Sen. Thomas Alexander, R-Walhalla, said he supports I-73 but could not agree to direct the Infrastructure Bank on how to spend money.

"We might as well do away with the Infrastructure Bank if we do that," he said. "I just can't go along with it."

Setzler also said that the provision has no end date and the Senate could not agree with permanent funding.

Jennings and Edge said no further action on the bill will be taken unless the Senate is willing to agree to the I-73 money.