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City hosts I-73 group
Meeting seen as sign of 6 states' interest in road

By Zane Wilson - The Sun News

COLUMBIA --For the first time in more than a decade, officials from the six states in the Interstate 73/74 corridor will gather to rally around the highway that has been mostly a paper concept since it was designated in 1991.

The group will meet in Myrtle Beach Thursday and Friday as part of an effort led by Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce President Brad Dean to revive the I-73/74 Corridor Association.

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., has said it is essential for all six states along the highway route to push for the road as a team or it will be difficult to get any steady federal money for it.

"We're excited, all six states will be together for the first time in years," Dean said. "The corridor association is quickly becoming energized."

Interstate 73 was fifth on a list of 43 new interstate highway routes designated by Congress in 1991 as high priority corridors. The law did not put any money into the roads, however.

The original designation for I-73 was from Detroit to Charleston, but public hearings and official decisions since then resulted in the change from the Myrtle Beach area to Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., at the Canadian border.

North Carolina decided to build I-74 between I-73 near Hamlet running east to Brunswick County. An agreement between the Carolinas brings I-74 south from Brunswick County to meet with S.C. 31.

Almost a year ago, the West Virginia-based director of the I-73 Corridor Association turned his files and title over to Dean, saying that after 15 years, the job needed new energy.

North Carolina has built parts of I-73, and West Virginia has designated a small portion of it. Virginia recently got permits to build most of its portion of the road, and South Carolina is nearing approval for construction permits for the phase between S.C. 22 and I-95.

Michigan and Ohio dropped planning for the road in the late 1990s, saying there was not enough money and public support to continue.

Dean said that is one reason it is significant to see the new interest from people in Ohio and Michigan who want to help form the new association.

"We are encouraged by the support and the genuine interest in all six states," he said.

None of the six states has located enough money to finish their part of the road, and Graham said getting them together as a team is one way to do that.

On Thursday, the group will gather in the afternoon to draft bylaws and decide other organizational issues. In the evening, there will be socializing at Thoroughbred's Chophouse and Seafood Grill.

They get down to business Friday at the Myrtle Beach Convention Center with remarks from Graham and an update on progress.

They will also confirm the new board and appoint an executive director, Dean said.

"We'll begin to talk about the next steps," Dean said.

The first step is likely to be a corridor association gathering in Washington with the delegations from those states. Graham has said he wants to arrange such a meeting if the association is reactivated.

Graham has been a consistent supporter of I-73, saying it is part of a three-point plan for the economic future of the entire Pee Dee Region.

The other two parts are a regional airport and an international trade center in Myrtle Beach.

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