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Funds for I-73 route get nod

By Zane Wilson - The Sun News

The state Department of Transportation will spend about \$80 million in Interstate 73 money it has on hand to buy rights of way for the road's path, the agency's board decided Thursday.

Also on Thursday, the DOT voted to spend \$2.1 million immediately on two safety improvement projects at major Horry County intersections.

The I-73 money, most of it awarded by Congress, is for the road that will be the first interstate to lead to Myrtle Beach, and is intended to connect Horry County with Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. The 60-mile path of the road in South Carolina is nearly through the planning stage.

About \$84 million was awarded for I-73 planning and construction over the last few years. About \$80 million remains in the account.

The DOT Commission told Transportation Secretary Buck Limehouse to start buying rights of way for I-73. The money will be used for right of way plans, property title verification, appraisals and purchases, the commission said.

"The commission's action is a prudent move," Limehouse said in a news release. "Property values are increasing every day, so we will begin the process of acquiring property for I-73 rather than letting the remaining funds sit idle."

Many legislators hoped some of the money would be used to build the key I-95 and I-73 intersection, said state Rep. Tracy Edge, R-North Myrtle Beach. Edge is a co-chairman of the S.C. I-73 Association.

But it is probably a good idea to buy the rights of way before prices go up, Edge said.

The Horry County improvements are two of 11 projects the DOT Commission ordered done as quickly as possible with an additional \$21.5 million in federal money that was received this year.

In Horry County, the U.S. 501 and Elm Street intersection in Conway will be redesigned and have turn lanes added, at a cost of \$1.1 million.

The intersection of U.S. 701 and S.C. 410 is also up for a redesign, a \$1 million project.

Four of the other projects are bridge replacements.

The nearest one is U.S. 378 over the Great Pee Dee River at the Florence-Marion county border.

The largest project is a major upgrade of the I-26 intersections at Remount Road and Aviation Avenue in Charleston. It will receive \$7.55 million of the new money plus \$35 million in interstate highway funds.

The DOT said all the projects meet the new standards that went into law this summer, and all have plans in place and were simply awaiting money.

"Despite all of our needs, these additional federal dollars allow us to improve more bridges and intersections, and to leverage other federal funds to help relieve congestion on an interchange on I-26 in Charleston County approximately one year earlier than was previously possible," said Joe Young of Georgetown, DOT commissioner for the 1st Congressional District.

Local projects

I-73 rights of way to get about \$80 million

U.S. 501-Elm Street intersection will get \$1.1 million

U.S. 701-S.C. 410 intersection will get \$1 million

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