

I-73 slogs forward; no funds assured

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By the end of this year, South Carolina's 60-mile section of Interstate 73 should have all its final federal approvals, and some of the rights of way for the road will be purchased.

But the S.C. portion is not slated to be ready to drive on until 2014, and there is still no guaranteed stream of money to build it.

The highway was designated a toll road two years ago, but highway planners believe tolls alone will not be enough to pay for construction, which is estimated at \$2 billion.

I-73 was designated by Congress in 1991 as one of 40 high-priority corridors for new interstates.

Its original track was Detroit to Charleston, but it has been changed to start at S.C. 22 between Aynor and Conway and to end at Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., at the Canadian border.

It would be the first interstate highway to connect to the Grand Strand.

A second connection would be achieved if I-74 is finished.

That road is planned to branch off I-73 near Hamlet, N.C., and travel east to Brunswick County, N.C., where it would loop southward and connect to S.C. 31 near North Myrtle Beach.

North Carolina has completed or is building parts of I-73 and I-74. West Virginia has built a small section of I-73, and Virginia recently approved plans for a major section of the road.

Plans are stalled in Ohio and Michigan, but those states could route I-73 along existing highways such as I-75.

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