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I-73 northern leg inches toward completion at tonight's hearing

By Tonya Root - The Sun News

The next step in finalizing the northern route of Interstate 73 will be today during a public hearing in Hamlet, N.C., on the proposed route from I-74 to I-95.

Grand Strand officials are closely watching the process because they want to see both the northern and the southern routes built soon.

"For many along the Grand Strand, the top priority is to secure interstate access by building the southern leg of I-73, which will connect the Grand Strand to Interstate 95," said Brad Dean, president of the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce. "However, for the entire region and the benefit of long-term economic development, we want to see both legs, the northern and southern legs, built to completion."

Transportation officials today will hear from residents during the final public hearing on the proposed northern route. Written comments may be submitted until Sept. 28.

Federal highway officials as well as N.C. and S.C. transportation officials will hold the open house and formal public hearing on the proposed project, which runs between I-95 near Latta and I-74 near Hamlet. The southern section between S.C. 22 in Horry County and I-95 in Dillon County has already received most of its approvals and is near to receiving its construction permits.

Residents can request an opportunity to speak at tonight's hearing but must register during the open house before the formal hearing begins at 7 p.m., according to a news release. A two-minute time limit will be imposed on speakers.

Tonight's meeting is the second such hearing on the northern route and comments taken from the meetings will be used to make any adjustments in the route of the road. Officials announced July 19 that after studies the central route was chosen as the preferred path over western and southern options in that area. It was chosen out of a 600-square-mile area and had the least impact, officials said.

Residents will view aerial maps of the preferred route, which is outlined as a half-mile-wide corridor. The actual footprint of the interstate will be about 400 feet wide and include six interchanges.

The northern preferred route begins at I-74 and continues to S.C. 79; to U.S. 15 near Bennettsville and then to S.C. 381 near Clio before continuing to S.C. 34 in Dillon and linking to the southern route at I-95.