

I-95 gets OK for tolls

Thursday, Nov 15, 2007 - 06:21 PM Updated: 10:06 AM

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SCNOW.com

The federal government has granted South Carolina permission to charge tolls on Interstate 95, but there is no plan in place to charge tolls, according to a S.C. Department of Transportation spokesman.

“We have been given approval, but there is no plan in motion (to charge tolls on I-95),” Pete Poore, SCDOT communications director, said.

I-95 enters the state in Dillon County, passes through Florence County and runs south into Georgia.

In August, SCDOT officials said the state had applied for the right to charge tolls on Interstate 95 as a part of the “Corridors of the Future” pilot program.

South Carolina, along with North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia and Florida, had asked the Federal Highway Administration for permission to post toll booths on the interstate. The funds collected from the tolls on I-95 would be used for the “refurbishment and maintenance” of the interstate. All states included would have to agree to collect the tolls on I-95, and legislation in South Carolina would have to be changed to allow for tolls to be collected on I-95.

Poore said tolls are just one option that could be used as a means of generating revenue to fund infrastructure and reduce congestion in the states included.

According to a story that ran Thursday in The Greenville (S.C.) News, tolling on I-95 could go into effect in the spring, in which motorists would pay a toll only if they used newly constructed express lanes and opted to pay. That article, which cited SCDOT Secretary of Transportation Buck Limehouse as the source, said the SCDOT plans to toll portions of Interstate 26.

Poore said the state does not have FHA approval to charge tolls on I-26. Poore did say congestion on I-26 between Columbia and Charleston is a concern, and more traffic, because of planned port expansion, would increase the number of vehicles on I-26 out of Charleston.

Poore also described the approval to allow tolls on I-95 as a “tool in the box” as the SCDOT looks for funding sources.

Any tolls installed on interstates would be the first in South Carolina.

In August, federal officials approved a request by the state to allow tolls on Interstate 73, the proposed interstate from Myrtle Beach to Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. If built, I-73 would run through four counties in South Carolina, including Marlboro, Dillon, Marion and Horry counties.

In August, Limehouse said I-73 was accepted as one of five pilot projects in the nation that will be allowed to use toll funds for construction.

Officials said it's the first time the federal government has allowed for tolls to be collected to finance the building of an interstate.

State legislation was passed in 2006 that will allow for toll collection to help finance I-73 construction once it is built.

The cost for I-73 will be close to \$2 billion and could take at least 10 years to complete.