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I-95 designation lifts hopes for new interstate
Federal funding may extend to other highways

By Zane Wilson - The Sun News

A special designation that gives Interstate 95 more money and other perks is expected to boost the chances for I-73 as well, supporters say.

On Sept. 10, the federal Department of Transportation named I-95 from Virginia through Florida one of six nationwide "Corridors of the Future," and immediately awarded \$21 million for improvements, just to begin.

"The importance of this designation is that it gives these corridors a higher profile in seeking federal dollars and investment in I-95 projects from the private sector," said S.C. Transportation Secretary Buck Limehouse.

But the designation is also important for I-73, said Brad Dean, president of the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce and director of the National I-73 Corridor Association.

"Though the benefits obviously correspond to I-95, I-73 was included as an extension of I-95," Dean said.

South Carolina's portion of the I-95 corridor plan says that "additional construction of interstate capacity approximately 50 miles from I-95 is planned to facilitate the movement of people and freight, including I-73, I-26 and I-20, connecting to seaports, freight transfer stations, airports and other intermodal facilities."

That means work on that part of I-73 can be included in the corridor project.

And besides giving I-73 a higher profile when money is handed out, the designation also offers accelerated review of experimental features, expedited commitments for credit assistance, conditional approval for private activity bonds, priority for tolling and access to expert help.

"Ultimately it comes down to how we, as a state, approach this special designation, but clearly the U.S. DOT is giving us some alternatives we have not had before," Dean said.

Along with the designation of I-73 as a "road of national and regional significance," and being given special tolling status, "it would seem that these actions, when combined, open doors that were not open to this project a few years ago," Dean said.

These developments give extra hope to the group that is flying to Washington Tuesday to lobby Congress for more money for I-73, he said.

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