

Massive support for interstate to Myrtle Beach

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WPDE

We have more results from our exclusive NewsChannel 15-Zogby poll. This week, we've been highlighting some of the issues facing South Carolina.

The following results are good news for those who support building an interstate highway to Myrtle Beach.

We asked two questions. The first, whether South Carolinians feel it's important to build an interstate to Myrtle Beach. A clear majority say yes, it's important.

Statewide:

66% - important.

33% - not important

1% - unsure.

When asked whether an interstate should be built to Myrtle Beach for hurricane evacuation purposes, the number jumps. Not only that, the number who believe it's "very" important is higher in the midlands and lowcountry, than it is here on the coast.

Statewide:

82% - important

18% - not important

Essentially, Interstate 73 would be a bypass to Highway 501. For the Grand Strand, it could mean less traffic, more tourists, and new jobs and industry.

Myrtle Beach has entertainment, golf and hotels, but no major interstate to get here. It has hurricanes, high winds, and heavy rain, but no easy way to get out.

"When we're evacuating in a hurricane, where do you go? I live on the south end. My evacuation route is to actually drive towards the hurricane. We just don't have the roads to get people out," says Brad Dean the Executive Director of the I-73 Corridor Association.

Dean says Myrtle Beach is the largest tourist destination without interstate access. Many of the visitors drive from Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, and some make the long trek from Michigan. All would be connected with I-73.

"The first thing they see is traffic, and the last thing they remember is traffic, so I think they would support it as well," says Dean.

"If we can cut down on travel time to have more time to relax, I'm all for it," says Tina Mulcahy, West Virginia.

I-73 faces several holdups, including funding, but Dean plans on using the poll results to sell the interstate idea to federal and state lawmakers. Another potential holdup for the interstate is the path. It cuts through several homes and environmentally sensitive areas.

In South Carolina, I-73 would cross the border near Bennettsville and connect to Highway 22. If and when completed, it would extend all the way from Sault Ste Marie, Michigan and end in Myrtle Beach.