

Trucking Headlines- August 21, 2007

South Carolina to fund I-73 with tolls

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South Carolina will build its portion of Interstate 73 as a toll road, becoming the first state authorized to do so by a new federal pilot program.

I-73 is proposed to run from Myrtle Beach, S.C., to Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. South Carolina's portion is anticipated to cost \$1.7 billion, according to the South Carolina I-73 Association, a non-profit group led by Myrtle Beach-area officials.

Each of the states I-73 will run through, including Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina as well as Michigan and South Carolina, can elect to toll for new construction, said Nancy Singer, a Federal Highway Administration spokeswoman.

The Interstate System Construction Toll Pilot Program was approved by Congress in 2005 as part of the latest long-term transportation funding bill signed by President Bush. Since then, "There have been numerous expressions of interest from states," Singer said.

Rules include:

Each applicant must show financing the construction with tolls is the most efficient and economical way to advance the project.

The state must agree not to enter into a non-compete agreement with a private party under which the state is prevented from improving or expanding roads in the vicinity of the toll facility.

Interstate maintenance funds may not be used on a facility for which tolls are being collected.

States have until Aug. 15, 2015, to apply.

In 2006, South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford signed a bill that authorized the state to toll I-73 to pay for construction, planning and operation.

The '05 transportation funding bill provides a second pilot toll program, the Express Lanes Demonstration program. This allows states to request approval to create tolled express lanes to reduce congestion and emissions. The U.S. Department of Transportation is authorized to approve up to 15 such projects through 2009.

The bill also authorizes states to convert High Occupancy Vehicle lanes to High Occupancy Toll lanes, with no limit on those projects.