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STATE SPENDING PLAN

Senate aims to cut local projects
In budget, Strand funds are fraction of House version's

By Zane Wilson - The Sun News

COLUMBIA | The Senate Finance Committee version of the \$7.3 billion state budget cuts the \$5 million for Interstate 73/74 the House set aside to start saving for the state's share of the costs.

Several other local allocations were cut, some to 10 percent of what the House suggested.

The finance committee's version of the spending plan is set for floor debate in the Senate next week.

Finance Committee Chairman Hugh Leatherman, who supports the I-73 project, said he will support funding the road where he can, but that it would be "a long, long time" at \$5 million a year to pay for the \$2 billion road.

But State Rep. Tracy Edge, R-North Myrtle Beach, who got the allocation put in the House version of the budget, said the intent is to save some money for the State Infrastructure Bank to use to issue bonds to pay for the state's share - probably 10 percent - of the construction costs for the 60 miles of the road in South Carolina.

"That's a perfectly rational way of funding the road," Edge said. If the Senate doesn't like the idea, it should come up with another one rather than cutting the money, he said.

Edge is a member of the House Ways and Means Committee, which writes the first draft of the state budget.

The bill will go to a conference committee of both sides to work out the differences. "We need to insist on restoring that," Edge said.

Edge said the Senate's other cuts may have been "for negotiating power." Those cuts included beach renourishment and stormwater pipe projects, which were slashed from \$5 million each to \$500,000. Leatherman said he is amenable to adjusting allocations to what the House wants when the bill goes to a conference committee, but he would not call the cuts a bargaining chip.

"You have to be able to compromise when you get to that," meaning the conference committee, Leatherman said.

The Senate added some projects the House did not include, but Leatherman said they are all justifiable. "I think everything we have in our budget is a need," he said.

While the Senate committee's proposal slashes a \$25,000 allocation for the S.C. Hall of Fame in Myrtle Beach, it adds \$950,000 for a bean museum in Lake City. The town is in Leatherman's home county, but not in his district.

Leatherman said millionaire businesswoman Darla Moore of Lake City and other local interests are putting up most of the money for the bean museum and it is a project that, like many other sites in the state, can help bring tourism to less-populated areas, he said.