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STUDY: INTERSTATE TO DRIVE DEVELOPMENT  
Zane Wilson The Sun News

When Interstate 73 has completed its march across the landscape, more will change than just the path of the new road.

With a new road comes development, and the state Department of Transportation's study estimates more than 4,100 acres of land in addition to the highway will be impacted with additions such as homes, gas stations, stores and other construction. Those figures are only for the section of I-73 between I-95 and the planned junction with S.C. 22, also known as Conway Bypass. Detailed studies of the section between I-95 and North Carolina are not complete.

Development encouraged by the highway is one of the issues that concern groups such as the Coastal Conservation League. League members and their attorneys have attended all the planning sessions for the highway since work began in the summer of 2004.

"There's no question that I-73 is going to have significant impacts that will significantly change the landscape," said Nancy Cave, north coastal director for the Coastal Conservation League.

The organization is especially concerned with what it calls secondary impacts of the highway, such as stores and gas stations.

At the same time, part of the highway's purpose is economic development, so changes in land use are welcomed by many of the road's supporters.

"We want to develop that western part, those rural areas that heretofore have remained undeveloped," said state Rep. Alan Clemmons, R-Myrtle Beach, president of the S.C. I-73 Association.

The Coastal Conservation League knows one of the purposes of the highway is economic development, so land impacts should be no surprise to them, he said. But the group's involvement has resulted in "some give and take," Clemmons said.

One result is that I-73 is being designed to minimize impacts by limiting the number of interchanges with other roads, he said.

"The more interchanges you have, the more sprawl will be created," Clemmons said.

The interchanges that are planned are calculated to stimulate economic development where it is most needed, Clemmons said.

Much more additional growth will occur without the highway, at least in Horry County, according to the DOT's Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The 500-page document details the factors the DOT studied to arrive at its decision for the preferred route.

Up to the year 2030, the Dillon County population is expected to increase by 430 people, Marion by 1,800 and Horry by 138,690.

The expected population change is reflected in projected figures on how much land will be impacted by normal growth that will occur without I-73.

According to the DOT report, Dillon County would see growth on 82 acres, Marion County on 374 acres and Horry County on 30,349 acres.

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