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## SUMMIT DISCUSSES PLAN TO FUND I-73

Zane Wilson The Sun News

With the S.C. section of Interstate 73 well along in the planning stage, it's time to get down to serious work on how to pay to build the road, supporters say.

A summit on how to fund the first interstate highway to connect to Horry County will be held in Columbia from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday, featuring business and federal and state government officials.

The S.C. I-73 Association organized the meeting along with U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham.

Graham will speak on what role the federal government might play in funding the 60-mile S.C. section of the road.

"As we near the completion of the planning phase, we must now charge forward into the funding phase," said state Rep. Alan Clemmons, R-Myrtle Beach, president of the I-73 Association.

Besides Graham, others who will make presentations on possible funding approaches are Don Leonard, chairman of the state Infrastructure Bank; Betty Mabry, director of the S.C. Department of Transportation; Patrick Tyndall, I-73 manager for the S.C. office of the Federal Highway Administration; and Jim Taylor of Mercator Advisors, a consulting firm that has worked on public-private partnerships.

The agenda also includes updates from representatives from other states that the 800-mile road is planned to traverse.

The highway is planned to connect Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., at the Canadian border, with S.C. 22 near Myrtle Beach. Besides Michigan, it will pass through Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina. Parts of the road already are built in North Carolina, and some are under construction in West Virginia.

Although the S.C. portion of the highway has received about \$83 million so far, and has been designated a toll road, there is no specific plan for how to pay the expected \$2 billion for construction, or who will pay what part.

Federal highways normally are built with the federal government paying 80 percent and the states 20 percent, but that formula is subject to change so that the state would have to pay more. The toll is not expected to be enough for the state's share.

“You got to start somewhere, and this is the first formal meeting to get something started on the funding,” said Brad Dean, president of the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce. The chamber is a major supporter of the highway and helped organize the event.

“Now is the right time,” while the road is still in the planning stage, Dean said.

Plans for the section between Interstate 95 and S.C. 22 near Aynor should be complete in about a year and a half. The section between I-95 and the junction with I-74 in North Carolina should have completed plans about six months later.

Part of the discussion is a public-private partnership, which DOT has said it is seeking. What form that would take and who might apply is still uncertain.

“We have to look beyond the traditional means of funding interstates if we're going to build this road any time soon,” Dean said.

The meeting will also feature an announcement “which affirms South Carolina's leadership position in pushing the landmark project forward,” said a spokesman for Graham's office.

The meeting will be in Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center, Richland B and C rooms, 1101 Lincoln St.

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