

Tolls on Interstate 95 just another Band-Aid

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A new suggestion is afloat to add tolls to Interstate 95 in South Carolina in order to widen it. But the state legislature should insist on "first things first."

Before approving new funding streams for the S.C. Department of Transportation, the legislature must first be convinced the millions of dollars the department already has are being spent wisely.

That's not the case, judging by the most recent measure. A Legislative Audit Council report showed poor management resulting in more than \$50 million being wasted.

DOT has been so political for so many years -- even generations -- the notion of giving it new piles of money to play with is alarming.

This comes at a time the department is pursuing a brand new interstate highway -- Interstate 73 to funnel motorists into Myrtle Beach.

It comes as U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn is pushing an expensive bridge to nowhere that no one else seems to want.

It comes at a time that gaping potholes can't even get fixed on the existing -- and overburdened -- lanes of I-95.

It comes as growth within the state has added drastic new demands for road projects. That growth is expected to continue for many years to come.

It comes as the state is told it needs to do \$3 billion worth of bridge repair and maintenance.

All this while the weak-kneed legislature has left the DOT stuck back in 1987. It's been that long since the DOT's primary funding source -- a 16-cents-per-gallon gasoline tax -- was changed. That simply will not work.

A toll to widen I-95 would stick one more Band-Aid onto a very sick patient.

The legislature must put first things first. It must have proof that DOT is trustworthy. Then it must give DOT the means to logically attack a prioritized to-do list that is devoid of politics.