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U.S. SENATE BILL WOULD DRIVE MONEY TO INTERSTATE 73 PLANS Zane Wilson The Sun News

A U.S. Senate budget committee on Tuesday awarded \$500,000 to the Interstate 73 project, but the allocation still has a long way to go, an aide said.

Sen. Lindsey Graham and Sen. Jim DeMint, both of South Carolina, asked for the money to be included in the budget of the Senate Transportation, Treasury and Housing and Urban Development Committee, said Graham's spokesman Kevin Bishop. It's not much when the highway is expected to cost \$2 billion, but it keeps the project alive and in the federal money stream, Bishop said.

Even if it is not much compared with the \$81 million awarded last year, local leaders are happy to see the money.

"We're pleased to see a continued commitment by the federal government to fund I-73, with much thanks to our congressional delegation," said Brad Dean, president of the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce.

"Five hundred thousand dollars is a small fraction of what we need to fund the entire project, but we know it will come little by little. This puts us one step closer to driving on I-73 someday," he said.

The full Senate must vote on the appropriation and that probably will not happen until after the elections in November, Bishop said.

"There's still a lot of appropriations work to be done," Bishop said. "We still have quite a ways to go in the appropriations process,"

He also pointed out this is the Senate's proposed version of the transportation budget for the upcoming federal fiscal year and he is not sure what the House plans to allocate for I-73.

I-73 is planned to connect Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., at the Canadian border, with Myrtle Beach. The Myrtle Beach area is the largest tourism destination in the country without an interstate highway connection.

The 90-mile portion of the road in South Carolina is in the planning stages. A proposed route for the section between I-95 and S.C. 22 was presented in late May.

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