

VDOT: No date set for I-73 construction

The state agency debunked a statement issued by a business organization last week.

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By Jeff Sturgeon
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State road officials said today they do not have a construction date for Interstate 73 in Virginia, countering a report by a large business organization Friday that work on the proposed highway will begin in 2011.

George Lester, chairman of JobLink, a group of community leaders in mid-state Virginia and North Carolina, declared last week that a draft Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board budget for 2008-2009 had given the long-awaited interstate project a green light.

Officials have chosen “the first public date ever designated for building I-73 in Virginia,” said a JobLink release, urging citizens to support the draft budget, which is up for public review until June 1. “There is funding available to start drawing up construction plans, and all of the approvals have been granted. This finally puts I-73 within reach.”

Monday, Virginia Department of Transportation officials disagreed. Not only is the project delayed by low levels of funding, all planning came to a halt last fall with the filing of a legal challenge by project opponents calling themselves Virginians for Appropriate Roads. The case is pending in U.S. District Court in Roanoke.

“At this point the I-73 project is on hold pending the outcome of the lawsuit,” VDOT spokeswoman Heidi Coy said.