

I-73 should qualify for stimulus money

By [Amanda Kinseth](#) WPDE News

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Grand Strand leaders head to Washington, DC Tuesday to lobby for federal stimulus money.

Monday, South Carolina Department of Transportation Commissioner Danny Isaac announced Interstate-73 should qualify for some of that cash, which would bring thousands of jobs to our area.

Last week, SCDOT officials didn't think I-73 would qualify for federal funding because it wasn't shovel ready, but because of some changes in the stimulus bill wording, Isaac says it will be ready on-time.

"I think the assumption, I can't tell you what the definition is, the assumption of shovel ready was a project that was ready to start tomorrow," said Isaac.

He says the Interstate-73 project is not ready to start tomorrow.

But, the Federal Highway Administration House Stimulus Bill, at least the current version, gives shovel-ready 18-months of wiggle room, and says the project doesn't have to be done all at once.

So, Isaac says crews could build I-73 piece by piece, starting with an interchange on I-95.

"Let's build the interchange. There's no reason in the world we can't have this interchange designed and ready to go to construction long before August of 2010," said Isaac.

Brad Dean, President of the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, is part of the group of Grand Strand leaders that head to Washington, DC Tuesday to carry forth the message that the Grand Strand has infrastructure needs.

"We don't want to be forgotten in the stimulus or otherwise," said Dean.

After all, the point of stimulus money is to stimulate the economy.

Studies show the I-73 project would generate more than 7,000 jobs in counties where the percentage of unemployed is in double digits.

"These people desperately need jobs. This project puts people to work immediately," said Isaac, pointing out I-73 project would stimulate the economy way more than resurfacing roads, for example.

Once it's complete, Interstate-73 would be a straight shot from Michigan all the way to Myrtle Beach.

Officials with the Northeastern Strategic Alliance, or NESAs, will hold a committee meeting in Columbia Thursday to talk about the I-73 project.

The committee will find out the status of funding for the interstate, through any stimulus plan.

Sunday, US Senator Lindsey Graham has said he thinks it is unlikely the I-73 project would get any funding because it would be an earmark.