

## Grand Strand officials hear I-73 optimism

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Grand Strand mayors, city officials and representatives from the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, in the nation's capitol hoping to get a slice of new President Barack Obama's anticipated federal stimulus money, heard a more optimistic forecast for the planned federal highway I-73 today than in the past few days.

South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham over the weekend said he didn't believe the \$2.4 billion road from Michigan to S.C. would be likely to receive funding as part of the \$825 billion federal plan because it would be viewed as an earmark.

But at a meeting on Capitol Hill with legislative representatives and lobbyists, city and county leaders were assured the project would not be labeled as such.

Ryan Bowley, legislative director for Congressman Henry Brown, who represents parts of Horry, Georgetown and Charleston counties, said the U.S. Department of Transportation would decide where road money would go, not Congress, making the \$480 million S.C. is poised to get a grant, not an earmark.

In addition, officials learned the Senate's proposed bill calls for a \$5.5 billion in grant funds for long-range surface-transportation projects of national significance. That money would go to projects that aren't necessarily ready to begin right away but would be finished up within the next few years, which chamber President and CEO Brad Dean said I-73 would qualify for.

Brown briefly addressed the afternoon gathering and presented the same optimistic view, having just returned from a meeting between Obama and Republican legislators.

"I'm hoping we can get a sizable amount for I-73," Brown told the more than 50 Grand Strand representatives gathered to ask him for support.

Myrtle Beach City Councilman said he was happy to hear the early afternoon message.

"Listening to [Graham] and our governor, I thought maybe we'd be coming up here in the dark," Chestnut said. "We also need to remind them that the Grand Strand is the cash cow for the state. You have to feed the cow, because if the milk dries up, we're all in trouble."

The Grand Strand delegation flew in to Washington, D.C. this morning and after a series of meetings today and Wednesday morning, will fly home again Wednesday afternoon. This afternoon, delegation members will hear from S.C. Sen. Jim DeMint, then attend a reception with Brown at one of the House office buildings.