

News from U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC)

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US House of Representatives – Washington, DC

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Spratt Secures \$25 Million for S.C. Highway Projects

WASHINGTON – The multi-year transportation bill approved today by the House includes \$25 million in South Carolina highway projects requested by U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC), to be spent over the next six years.

“I am pleased that we were able to win funding for these projects,” said Spratt. “These are all projects important to our state.”

Spratt warned that “the funds are not in the bank yet.” He said the House bill must be reconciled with a Senate bill with different overall spending levels and overcome a Presidential veto threat. “Funding could be adjusted upward or downward, if we are able to get a bill at all,” Spratt said. “House passage does not mean the money is in hand, but it’s a big step. I will do now all that I can to keep this funding in place as the transportation bill moves through Congress.”

The bill is H.R. 3550, “Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users.”

Interstate 73 - \$10 Million

The largest of Spratt’s requests, \$10 million, is earmarked for a stretch of Interstate 73 running from Bennettsville to I-95. Spratt teamed with his House colleague, Rep. Henry Brown (R-SC), who added another \$10 million to the bill for I-73 from the S.C. state line to Myrtle Beach.

“Interstate 73 will cut through the Pee Dee and bring development to a region where jobs are sorely needed. In addition, I-73 will be a huge help to the millions of people who visit our beaches every year,” said Spratt; “and when hurricanes hit, it will make evacuations much easier.”

Spratt said the total cost of the South Carolina portion of the project is estimated at \$2 billion. Last year, Spratt helped the state secure \$2.5 million in federal funds and \$3 million the year before that.

“These funds are all down payments,” said Spratt, “but the funding still has a long way to go before I-73 is a reality, and federal funding alone will not be enough. The South

Carolina Department of Transportation will have to make I-73 a top priority and use state highway funds to match federal dollars.”

I-73 will run from Detroit to Myrtle Beach, going through Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina. Spratt succeeded in getting the interstate identified as a “Congressional High Priority Corridor” and routing it into South Carolina between Cheraw and Bennettsville. Though construction has not begun, a number of feasibility studies have been completed. Reps. Spratt and Brown are also seeking to have I-73 designated as a “Corridor of Regional and National Significance,” which would open the project to potentially larger levels of funding at the federal level.

Interstate 95/SC-327 Interchange - \$7 Million

Spratt also won \$7 million to upgrade the I-95/SC-327 interchange north of Florence to handle a larger volume of traffic, with new ramps and more lanes.

“The current interchange is obsolete,” said Spratt. “The on-ramps are so tight that trucks have overturned. Cars are forced to cross several lanes of traffic to enter the highway. And there have been delays that last for hours during peak tourist season. These upgrades will make a major difference.”

The interchange serves a newly established 700-acre industrial park being developed by Pee Dee Electric Cooperative. “This park is ready for development, and the interchange improvements are needed to help get the park well into the take-off stage,” said Spratt.

The I-95/SC 327 interchange is one of the major access points to South Carolina’s Grand Strand. Over 42,000 vehicles travel the stretch of I-95 daily, and close to 12 million visit the Myrtle Beach area each year.

“This project,” said Spratt, “will help drivers reach the beach safely and easily, and will spur economic development along the way.”

Last year, Spratt secured \$1.4 million in federal funds for the interchange. Spratt pledged continuing efforts to obtain additional funding in the future, but stressed that the South Carolina Department of Transportation will have to bear some of the cost for this project to be fully completed.

Bishopville Bypass - \$4 Million

For the “Bishopville Bypass” in Lee County, Spratt secured \$4 million.

“The Bishopville Bypass will draw business investment into a county that badly needs it,” said Spratt.

The 3.5 mile frontage road would run from US 15 south of town to SC 341, parallel to I-20, and serve the Lee County Industrial Park.

“The bypass will be an added plus for the industrial park,” said Spratt, “making it more attractive to businesses that can bring more jobs to the area. This is just a fraction of what is needed for the frontage road, but it’s an important step, and we hope that it will prime the pump for more funding from the South Carolina Department of Transportation.”

Last year, Spratt secured \$500,000 for the bypass.

Commuter Rail, Rock Hill to Charlotte - \$2.25 Million

Spratt also obtained \$2.25 million for the York County portion of the Rock Hill-Charlotte transit project, known as the “South Corridor Project.” The funds would go to design, land acquisition, and upgrades for a transit line extending from downtown Rock Hill to downtown Charlotte.

“The I-77 corridor between Rock Hill and Charlotte is clogged with traffic congestion,” said Spratt, “and total commuters using the corridor are expected to double in the next 20 years. Rail or transit service would ease that congestion and the pollution that comes with it.”

Rock Hill has already received an \$880,000 grant to conduct a feasibility study to identify what transit option would best meet the city’s needs. The city plans to explore commuter rail, light rail, and bus alternatives.

“The City of Charlotte has already started construction on a light rail line from downtown Charlotte to Pineville,” Spratt added. “Construction of the Rock Hill extension may not happen for a number of years, but securing this \$2.25 million will make sure York County is eligible for federal money when we are ready for it in the future.”

U.S. 521 in Lancaster County - \$1.75 Million

Spratt secured \$1.75 million to improve grade separation at the intersection of the Lancaster and Chester Rail Line and U.S. 521 in Lancaster County. This is part of a larger upgrade to the 20-mile rail corridor between the city of Lancaster and the town of Kershaw. The overall project will refit the 20 miles of abandoned track acquired by the Lancaster and Chester Railway Company. The upgrades will accommodate 286,000 lb. load limits for freight moving over the segment versus the current track which has a 265,000 lb. load limit.

“The rail line upgrade would bring a number of benefits to the Lancaster/Kershaw area,” said Spratt. “It would improve the economic development profile and make it a more attractive corridor for industrial development. It would also allow existing industry in the

corridor, like the Archer-Daniels-Midland (ADM) plant, to ship heavier loads and expand production.”

Spratt said the surrounding highways cannot handle truck weights in excess of 48,000 lbs., and a number of prospects companies have expressed a need for a 286,000 lb. rail spur before they are willing to invest in the area.

Spratt also said the project would help the environment by reducing the number of trucks on 521 by some 18,000 a year.

“Upgrade of the Lancaster and Chester Railway/ U.S. 521 intersection is an important piece of the overall project,” Spratt said. “This earmark does not bring this project all the way home, but it gets us another step closer.”

Lancaster and Chester Railway and several local governments along the rail route have voiced strong support for the project and have pledged \$2 million to supplement federal funds.

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