SCDOT celebrates 50th anniversary of Interstate Highway System

By Bob Kudelka

SCDOT commemorated the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate System on June 2 in Columbia with a celebration and news conference.

Speakers included Executive Director Elizabeth S. Mabry; Bob Thomas, of the Federal Highway Administration; Adjutant General Stan Spears; South Carolina State Representative Ronny Townsend; South Carolina Secretary of Commerce Joe E. Taylor; South Carolina Department of Public Safety Director Jim Schweitzer; and Marion Edmonds of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. Kristen Lominack, Director of State Government Affairs, presided.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Federal-Aid Highway Act on June 29, 1956, creating the Highway Trust Fund. Since that time, interstates have become our social and commercial lifeline.

The news conference was held in front of SCDOT Headquarters, where sponsors created a festival-like atmosphere by providing exhibits including a movie theater showing a video on the interstate system, a coloring area for children and an interactive game of vehicles, representing users of the interstate.

Taking up a large portion of the block was the Aspen Aerial, a 62,000-pound "bridge snooper" vehicle used by SCDOT. The machinery's long arm can extend from atop bridges to allow employees in a two-person bucket to inspect beams, caps and piers underneath bridge decks.

Other vehicles on display included law enforcement cruisers and emergency vehicles, an 18-wheeler, a military Humvee, a 2006 Ford Mustang GT and a 1956 Ford Fairlane.

Various police cars and highway equipment lined Park Street in front of SCDOT as part of the 50th anniversary celebration of the Interstate Highway System. Included in the vehicle display was a 1956 Ford, a car from the era of the beginning of the Interstate Highway system.

John Rawl spoke of what the interstate system has meant to him.

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Preferred route for I-73 announced

By Bob Kudelka

SCDOT reached a major milestone in the development of Interstate 73 in May with the announcement of the preferred alternative route for the southern portion of the highway and the signing of the draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Project Manager Mitchell Metts said the preferred alternative -- chosen from eight out of an original 141 possible routes -- has the least impact to wetlands; the fewest farms impacted; the lowest cost; and the least impact to cultural resources.

The announcement was made during the news conference at the Columbia Convention Center where guests included US Congressman Henry Brown; Commissioner John N. Hardee; Commissioner Bobby T. Jones; Commissioner Marvin L. Sumter; former Commissioners Gary Loftus and L. Morgan Martin; several state legislators; representatives of resource agencies; and interested citizens.

Brown said I-73 will not only benefit tourism but will improve job opportunities for people in rural areas.

“It's a win-win for everybody,” Brown said.

State Highway Engineer Tony Chapman and FHWA Division Administrator Bob Lee signed the draft EIS. A final EIS and Record of Decision are scheduled to be completed in the spring of 2007.

"To get to where we are today, during the past 18 months we've been involved with 35 different state and federal agencies to balance concerns to come up with one corridor," Lee said.

Executive Director Elizabeth S. Mabry noted the historical context of the milestone. She said that 50 years ago, President Eisenhower had a vision of nationwide interstate system. His vision became a reality, and in South Carolina 28 counties are touched by 844 miles of interstate, she said.

"Ironically, there is no interstate connection to the Grand Strand, and the Grand Strand is the heartbeat of tourism and tourism is the heartbeat of the economy in South Carolina," Mabry said.

Lee said of the top four driving destinations in the country, Myrtle Beach is different from Orlando, Fla., Anaheim, Calif., and Las Vegas, Nev. because it does not have an interstate.

“We aim to fix that,” Lee said.

Metts said the Project Team chose a route from the 1,500-square mile study area for the Southern project beginning Interstate 95 in Dillon County and heading to Myrtle Beach through Marion and Horry counties. I-73 will incorporate 23 miles of existing SC Highway 22 to save “a tremendous amount of money,” he said.

The draft EIS contains a complete evaluation of 141 lines drawn as possible routes over the past 18 months.

Patrick Tyndall, FHWA Project Manager, called the project “unprecedented in scope and magnitude.”

“From a financial standpoint...this is the largest public works project ever done...”

By Elizabeth S. Mabry
Executive Director

I-73 in South Carolina,” Tyndall said. It’s larger that the Cooper River Bridges Replacement Project in Charleston and the Lake Murray Dam project in Lexington County.

Across the county, you can literally count on one hand the number of highway projects that we’re doing today of this magnitude,” Tyndall said.

Tyndall said he was adding up the number of state and federal laws that must be followed in developing an interstate highway and stopped when he reached 50.

“This is complex and difficult, but we’re doing it. There is no wizard sitting behind a green curtain at DOT and just pick where roads are going to go.”

Early on, Mabry and Lee made personal visits to agency heads concerning I-73. This executive level of coordination resulted in creation of the Agency Coordination Team (ACT).

ACT, made up of 15 state and federal agencies, met 19 times over the past year and a half with an average meeting time of 4 hours. Leaders also articulated an extensive public involvement plan with a needed level of coordination. The Project Team developed an I-73 web site, www.I73inSC.com, visited churches and schools; gave surveys to 5th graders to take home to their parents and held public information meetings.

“We rode on the back of pick-up trucks, sat on tailgates, porch and drank lemonade,” Tyndall said. “This is what public involvement is all about.”

Tyndall recalled being summoned to a meeting at a house and finding that the furniture had been moved out of the living room. About 20 neighbors were sitting in the back of the room and the wall had a map with pushpins and yarn showing an alternative route.

“We listened and actually took the map back to the office and figured out ways to improve the alignment near that community,” Tyndall said.

Another thing, the Project Team attended a “spirited” meeting in Anoray that set a new SCDOT attendance record for public meetings at 620.

“We went back to the drawing board after that meeting and made improvements,” Tyndall said.

Protecting farms that had been in families for generations was a key concern.

“We heard from a ton of farmers,” Metts said.

Metts said the final eight alternatives out of the original 141 were each pretty good routes.

The Preferred Alternative was selected over the other routes because it would have the least wetland impacts (384 acres), in both acreage and wetland value, the least impact to farmland (1,708 acres), the least impact to potential historic resources, and had the lowest relative cost.

Often times in highway development, the least expensive route is usually not the route with the least wetland impact, but fortunately that is the case with the preferred route, Metts said.

“ ‘We’re looking to the private sector to see what ideas they may have to finance, construct and maintain I-73’ ” Metts said.

“We’re not sure what we’re going to get to the end of the day, but we’ll continue to start that conversation early.”

The alignment of the Preferred Alternative would begin in the southernmost interchange with I-95, and from there would extend southeast on the western side of Latta where it would have an interchange with U.S. Route 501, would cross to the east immediately north of Temperence Hill, then extends southeast where it would intersect with S.C. Route 41A. It would continue southeast and would have an interchange with U.S. Route 76 on the western side of Mullins. Once south of Mullins it would angle slightly east and cross the Little Pee Dee River at the existing S.C. Route 917 crossing. It would have an interchange with S-308, then continue southeast on new alignment to an interchange with S.C. Route 22 near Bakers Chapel, about two miles west of the S.C. Route 705/S.C. Route 22 interchange. The interchange with S.C. Route 22 would be designed so that the traffic movement from I-73 to S.C. Route 22 would be the predominant movement through the interchange. It then would follow S.C. Route 22 to its terminus with U.S. Route 17 near Briarcliffe Acres.
Lone AAH volunteer honored for dedication

By Bob Kudelka

SCDOT Commissioner Bobby T. Jones was driving down a road near Lake Wateree in Kershaw County one day and noticed a lone woman by herself picking up trash from the roadside.

Jones was surprised to see the same woman there two weekends later, again alone and picking up trash. He pulled over and got out to thank her for keeping the road clean.

It turns out that Paula Daugherty is very dedicated when it comes to her involvement in the SCDOT Adopt-A-Highway program. By herself, Daugherty has picked up nearly 2 tons of trash and debris since 2005, according to Billy Nowlen, SCDOT Right of Way Foreman for Kershaw Maintenance.

“I think it’s amazing,” Nowlen said.

Daugherty named her one-person AAH Group to honor a friend who died five years ago. As the AAH sign on Carl Horton Road signifies, Daugherty’s labor is done in “ MEMORY of Alex Horton.”

“His father, Carl, built one of the first roads in the area, and Carl Horton Road was named for him,” said Commissioner Bobby T. Jones, who learned of Daugherty’s efforts through his constituent, SCDOT Adopt-A-Highway Coordinator, Salena S. Smalls.

“Paula Daugherty does this in addition to her job at Blue Cross/Blue Shield of South Carolina during the week and as a receptionist at the Colonial Inn on Sundays,” Jones said.

Daugherty, who has three sons and seven grandchildren, said she hasn’t asked for help and prefers to do the job by herself.

“I enjoy doing what I do,” Daugherty said. “It’s kind of my time.”

SCDOT appreciates the work of all South Carolina Adopt-A-Highway volunteers, who last year collected more than 1.5 million pounds of trash from the state’s roadways, said Tina Hembree, Adopt-A-Highway coordinator at SCDOT.

Daugherty adopted 2.5 miles of Carl Horton Road and 1.6 miles of SC Highway 97.

“During 2006 through mid-July, Daugherty had collected 115 bags weighing 1,710 pounds. In addition to the usual cans and small paper and plastic debris, she’s also picked up tires, wood and pipe.”

Nowlen, who lives in the area, recently spotted her lugging a large truck bedliner from a gully. “It’s a tremendous service,” Nowlen said. “It’s sort of what we do.”

Jones said: “Litter is something we deal with every day, I view it not only as unsightly but also dangerous as well.”

A little plastic bag can fly up and catch on someone’s windshield. “I’ve seen that happen and somebody loses control of the car trying to reach out and get it off the car.”

For Daugherty, the idea of picking up trash began with a single lampshade she noticed on the side of the road.

“I drove past that thing for a good three months and I thought, ‘Somebody ought to at least pick that thing up.’ It didn’t look like anybody else is going to do it, so I’m going to do it.”

Picking up a lampshade in 2005 evolved into spending every other weekend picking up trash.

Daugherty does this in addition to giving her services to the road. “It just makes me feel so good,” Ina Horton said. “She’s a charming lady. I know everybody knows her. I’m sure the citizens do, too,” Jones said.

“I think it’s amazing,” Nowlen said. “It’s kind of my time.”

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“During 2006 through mid-July, Daugherty had collected 115 bags weighing 1,710 pounds. In addition to the usual cans and small paper and plastic debris, she’s also picked up tires, wood and pipe.”

New I-85 interchange improves access

By Bob Kudelka

Two months ahead of schedule, SCDOT Executive Director Elizabeth S. Mabry and partners in the public and private sectors opened the Brockman-McClimon Road Interchange in July as part of the I-85 Access Improvements Project.

In addition to the Brockman-McClimon Interchange, improvements were made to the existing interchange for the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport. A continuous auxiliary lane was built on I-85 to connect the two interchanges.

Brockman-McClimon Road was widened, and portions of it were relocated to ease congestion and access to areas around I-85.

“This project is more than just an access road - it is about economic development,” Mabry said. “I’m here to tell you that all transportation projects are about economic development. That is how you gain people coming to your state. That is how you gain businesses, that is how you thrive, is to have a good transportation system.”

Commissioner F. Hugh Atkins said: “I think this project is a clear example of what happens when different government agencies cooperate and partner with private enterprise to bring good jobs and safe travel to all our citizens in South Carolina. I congratulate Betty Mahby and all our SCDOT employees for a job well done.”

Representing Gov. Mark Sanford, C.H. Maquire, chief of staff at the SC Department of Commerce, summed up the teamwork and coordination by saying, “This is a huge deal.”

Four partners pooled their resources for this the I-85 Access Improvements Project: The SC Department of Commerce; SCDOT; the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport and FHWA.

Mabry thanked state legislators for their efforts in making sure state funds were available. South Carolina Representatives Joseph G. Haffey and Lewis R. Vaughn attended the ceremony.

“We envisioned finishing it in about October of 2006,” Mabry said. “Here we stand on the last day of July, two months early. That is due to the commitment of the principle parties and Team United.”

A goal of the interchange is to make both residential and commercial traffic flow more smoothly. It is also expected to improve traffic for nearby BMW Manufacturing and the airport.

“We want to do many more of these projects across South Carolina,” Mabry said. Unfortunately, the funding is short. We are hoping and praying that we can get additional funds so we can bring more services and more projects to our state, ones that are so sorely needed.”

FHWA Division Administrator Bob Lee thanked the DOT Planning and Environmental staff for developing environmental documents and obtaining the required permits; DOT Traffic and Engineering staff for preliminary design so FHWA could approve the interchange reports; the innovative project team led by Christy Hall and Mark Lester for pulling the RFP together and the financing agreement take to deliver project on time and on budget; and Jim Tripplet of Team United.

“On behalf of Federal Highway Administration, we’re proud to work so closely with the DOT to deliver these kinds of projects as we have in the past,” Lee said.

Mabry gave special thanks to Project Engineer Ryan Miller, as well as the Greenville-Spartanburg Airport and area residents who worked with employees and the contractors. Miller said the design build project had its share of challenges, from summer rains in 2005 to dry weather this past summer. The project included six bridges – four over I-85.

“We couldn’t have asked for a better team,” Miller said. Tripplet also lauded the teamwork.

“This is the kind of work that we love best... put us to the test and tell us what you want done and let us have at it,” he said.

2006 STTAR Scholarship Recipients

Zachary D. Brannon ................................................................. University of North Carolina
Latoshia L. Carmichael .......................................................... Coker College
Callahan J. Cornell ................................................................. South Carolina State University
Madison R. Foutz ........................................................................ Clemson University
Derek J. Frick ............................................................................ Clemson University
Devon D. Gillette ........................................................................ University of South Carolina
Courtney E. Holden .................................................................... University of South Carolina
Patrick E. Holstad ....................................................................... University of South Carolina
Chase R. Martin ........................................................................... Coastal Carolina University
Courtney A. Porter ..................................................................... Lamar University
Sharon M. Rawls ......................................................................... College of Charleston
Judy A. Ryggs ............................................................................. Bob Jones University
Anita F. Smalls .............................................................................. Cokem University
Salome S. Smith .......................................................................... Charleston Southern University
Kimberly S. Truax ....................................................................... Ambassador Baptist College

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Walking a mile in their shoes...

Job shadowing gives STTARs chance to appreciate daily maintenance operations

By Bob Kudelka

On a hot, muggy June morning, Barbara Jeffcoat, Maintenance Foreman for SCDOT, had some advice for the newest member of her work crew.

“We wear long sleeves and safety shoes, use sunscreen, take plenty of breaks, and use the buddy system – we have some diabetics out here,” she said.

And don’t wear light-colored clothing for the types of jobs they were about to do, she said.

“We don’t do cleaning bills out here,” Jeffcoat said.

Jeffcoat’s newest crew member was Sid Bacchus, an Assistant Program Manager who normally spends his days working on development of new highway projects.

For three days in late June, however, Bacchus and his fellow STTARs (Strategic Training for Transportation Agency Representatives) took part in a job shadow program. The 2006 class was the first to experience the job shadow program.

“The idea behind the job shadow program was to provide the STTARs an opportunity to find out what maintenance workers and foremen do out in the field,” said Susan Jones, Program Manager for Leadership Development.

“It also would give the maintenance personnel the opportunity to teach STTARs, as well as learn about the STTAR program.

“For the most part, we wanted the STTARs to have a real appreciation for what our maintenance workforce does,” Jones said.

The STTAR class teamed up with maintenance foremen in Lexington and Richland counties to participate in daily jobs such as fixing potholes or erecting signs.

“We like to see they get a good birds eye view from those who are down in the trenches,” said Drew Holden, Assistant Resident Maintenance Engineer for the West Columbia Section Shed.

As Holden spoke, STTAR Mark Nolt was literally down in the trenches – about 15 feet below in a ditch at Ermine Road off US 1.

Nolt, District 1 Traffic Engineer, was helping Holden’s employees use a Jet Vac machine to loosen up mud and silt and unclog the ditch and drainage pipe along U.S. 1 in Lexington County.

“It definitely gives you a better perspective... To see what happens on their end is really beneficial to me.”

-- Mark Nolt
District 1 Traffic Engineer

Nolt was again with this crew just to learn more about the job shadow program. The 2006 class was the first to experience the job shadow program.

“I appreciate daily maintenance operations. I spend my days working on development of new highway projects,” Bacchus said.

“Every time I visit a field office I am always impressed and was again with this crew just to see their determination and dedication,” Bacchus said. “They do a great job and they do a great job of helping me out quite a bit.”

“When they found out I was coming over here, a lot of them said, ‘I’ve got a job for you.’ But they’ve been pretty kind so far.”

Nolt and other STTARs said the job shadow program was a valuable experience.

“It definitely gives you a better perspective,” he said. “I do ask for their help a lot and they do help me out a great deal. To see what happens on their end is really beneficial for me.”

Bacchus, whose first day was spent landscaping, said, “I’m with a great group of guys who don’t mind sharing a bit of knowledge with me. I’m fortunate to get out here and see a different side of the DOT.”

Billy Jo Swygert, Program Coordinator in the Director of Maintenance Office, spent her time clearing limbs with Lexington Maintenance right of way foreman William Price and crew supervisor Roy Jenkins.

“Every time I visit a field office I am always impressed and was again with this crew just to see their determination and dedication, and positive attitudes, even though it was 95 degrees and no quick access to restroom facilities,” Swygert said. “Everyone gave me 110 percent and never complained and delivered a professional job. We’re spoiled here back at Headquarters in an air conditioned office and easy access to the bathroom.”

Dorchester County Sales Tax Authority, SCDOT sign agreement

Representatives from the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), Dorchester County Sales Tax Authority and Dorchester County signed an intergovernmental agreement Thursday for roadway projects in Dorchester County. The agreement will enable the Sales Tax Authority to use the local money generated by the sales tax program to fund transportation improvements on state maintained roadways.

Revenue from the sales tax is projected to provide $125 million for transportation improvements in the county over the next 25 years. The Dorchester County Tax Authority has hired the engineering firm of Davis & Floyd Engineering to manage this program.

Signing the agreement are, seated from left: SCDOT State Highway Engineer Tony Chapman, SCDOT Director of Finance and Administration Morgan Danny, Dorchester County Administrator Jason Ward, and Dorchester County One-Cent Sales Tax Authority representative Marshall Murdough. Watching the signing ceremony are, standing from left: Donnie Dukes, SCDOT Commissioner Robert W. Harrell Sr., Robert Clark, SCDOT Commissioner Marvin Stevenson, Tony Fallaw, Emmett Davis, Albert Heatley, Steve Ikerd, Mark Bilgrim, David Kinard, Robert Pratt, Wallace Ackerman, Jerry Timmons, and Federal Highway Administration SC Division Administrator Bob Lee.