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Historic I-385 project opens early, under budget

ROB THOMPSON/THE CONNECTOR

Officials cut the ribbon on the recently completed rehabilitation of a section of I-385 in Laurens County. Shown, from left are: Commissioner Ken Willingham, South Carolina Executive Director for American Concrete Pavement Association (Southeast Chapter) Bill Dubose, Commissioner Harrison Rearden, Commissioner Eddie Adams, Gregory Adams, Commission Chairman Daniel Isaac, SC Secretary of Transportation H.B. 'Buck' Limehouse Jr., Deputy Secretary for Engineering John Walsh and McCarthy Improvement Company Project Manager Nick Wolf.

By Bob Kudelka

When SCDOT closed Interstate 385 in January for a rehabilitation project, it was the first time in South Carolina that an interstate highway was closed for a non-emergency project.

What's more, it was something that has only been done a handful of times across the United States.

Yet just 6½ months later, state and local officials gathered in Laurens County to laud the 15-mile rehabilitation project for its efficiency.

Transportation Secretary H.B. Limehouse Jr. said the project not only was finished ahead of schedule and under budget, it produced much needed jobs in Laurens County and across the state.

"This is a red-letter day in the annals of the Department of Transportation," Limehouse said during the July 23 project completion ceremony. "It was a tough project; we got a lot of criticism early on. We thought we were right. We stood tall. We said, 'We're going to do it the right way.' Not only have we finished this job ahead of time, but we have a quality project that's going to last a long, long time."

Using an innovative construction plan to "get in and get out quickly" greatly reduced costs. The total savings attributed to the closure plan was $34.6 million when compared to a traditional staged construction plan over three years.

The $34.6 million in savings will go toward needed highway projects in the Upstate including the widening of I-385 near Woodruff Road

Limehouse thanked the major employers in the area such as Wal-Mart, BMW and Michelin for the early endorsement of the project and for their support.

Limehouse also applauded the efforts of the SC Highway Patrol to keep the work zone safe for workers and motorists alike.

The ceremony's invocation was delivered by SCDOT Commissioner Harrison Rearden, of the 6th Congressional District.

Deputy Secretary for Engineering John Walsh gave an overview of the project. Walsh said when the original road, US 276, was renamed I-385 years ago, there was a commitment to raise the highway to interstate standards.

"I'm glad to report that once this project is complete, it will be up to interstate standards," Walsh said. "It's a good day for the SCDOT and, more importantly, for the public."

The I-385 rehabilitation proj-

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