VIEWPOINTS

I-385 project a success

By H.B. 'Buck' Limehouse Jr.
Secretary of Transportation

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The widening of I-385 in Laurens County is one of the biggest success stories for SCDOT. The construction of this project was completed nearly three weeks ahead of schedule, opening on July 23. The early completion was no small feat since the job was scheduled to be finished in only eight months, an extremely short period of time in highway construction.

We asked the public to work with us as we closed 15 miles of northbound interstate highway, which was an unprecedented technique in South Carolina. Our engineering staff suggested multiple detour routes around the project and some drivers also found their own alternatives.

Let's take a look at what the public got in return for the temporary lack of use of 15 miles of interstate. The time alone is significant. Had this project used a traditional interstate widening plan, construction would have taken up to three years to complete. To go further with that idea, the traditional method would have required lane closures, reducing traffic on I-385 in Laurens County down to one lane in both directions. The congestion and back-ups created would have frustrated the most patient drivers, particularly those who use this interstate regularly.

The accelerated schedule to complete this work not only saved time, but saved money, lots of money, in the range of $34 million. For a cash-strapped agency like SCDOT, the opportunity to save $34 million and apply it to other projects in the Upstate significantly influenced our planning.

The closing of the northbound lanes also made this a safer project for both drivers and construction workers. The workers were free to work unencumbered on the closed interstate, instead of doing their jobs virtually inches away from traffic. Motorists were safer too as there were no work zones, lane closures, lane shifts or narrowed lanes to drive through.

The construction phase only required eight months, but the planning and thought that went into this project began in 2007 with a series of discussions between the design and construction teams to make sure we could find the best outcome for the project and the public.

Here's what's been accomplished since January 4: I-385 in Laurens County now meets interstate standards. The highway has four-foot inside paved shoulders, 12-foot travel lanes and 10-foot outside paved shoulders.

The cost savings allowed our engineers to resurface the highway with high-grade concrete which provides a smoother surface and should remain in excellent condition and maintenance-free for decades.

I-385 in Laurens County is without a doubt a success story and we at SCDOT are certainly proud of the job done by our staff including Deputy Secretary John Walsh and Mark Lester and Rob Perry from the Upstate Regional Production Group, retired District 2 DEA Phillip Brooks and current DEA Christy Hall. District 2 Construction Engineer Lee Neighbors and Laurens County Resident Construction Engineer Nick Waites.

We also wish to thank the McCarthy Improvement Company and its subcontractors for doing an outstanding job in record time. We appreciate all the support we received from the Federal Highway Administration and the corporate citizens such as Walmart, BMW and other businesses in the affected area, plus the support of many citizens and state and local elected officials.

I should note that the I-385 project completion comes on the heels of what was another major success story for the summer of 2010. That was the replacement of the northbound and southbound I-77 bridges at Exit 62 in Chester County.

When the cracks in the beams were discovered in April, an emergency contract was issued and a plan was put into motion. Our local SCDOT staff in that part of the state prepared the interchange for the detours around the bridges.

Traffic was closed on the bridges on June 7, and United Contractors finished the job of replacing two interstate bridges in a remarkable 23 days, which was one full month ahead of schedule.

But we're not here to pat ourselves on the back. Maintaining the South Carolina's highway system is our job.

The real winners are the citizens and visitors who will use safe and efficient interstates in Laurens County and Chester counties and the taxpayers of South Carolina.

State of SCDOT 2010

Report to the General Assembly details revenue picture, highway and mass transit issues

Transportation Secretary H.B. Limehouse Jr. in April sent his 2010 annual "State of SCDOT Report" to the members of the General Assembly, providing an account of the agency's progress over the past year and an in-depth look at where SCDOT is and where it's heading.

The 19-page report provides information concerning the size of the state's transportation infrastructure system, which is the 4th largest state-maintained system in the country. Comparisons are made to other state highways systems, and the most-traveled roadways in the state are highlighted.

One entire section of the report is devoted to SCDOT's revenue situation, with a breakdown of each revenue source and how each has fared both over the decades and in the current economic downturn. One section (page 10) provides a translation of how revenue dollars are spent on the highways in terms of the average cost of widening a highway per lane mile, resurfacing a highway per lane and other examples. This section also provides a breakdown as to how other states fund their highway systems.

The Transit section outlines the funding programs for mass transit, future financial needs for mass transit and the status of high speed rail in South Carolina.

The final section deals with SCDOT's accountability and transparency. This section reports how SCDOT has complied with the reporting and auditing of the agency as required by Act 114 (SCDOT Reform Act) signed into law in 2007. Details are also provided as to how the agency has fully implemented the majority of recommendations put forth in the 2006 audit conducted by the Legislative Audit Council (LAC), and how SCDOT has responded and complied with a 2009 Performance Audit by MGT of America.

The State of SCDOT 2010 report is available on the SCDOT web site: www.scdot.org under "Quick Links" at the bottom of the list: http://www.scdot.org/default.shtml. Or it can be found under "Publications." http://www.scdot.org/inside/default.shtml