

Lawmaker argues Upstate has been shorted in transportation funding

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COLUMBIA — A powerful state senator who also serves on the board that makes transportation loans is asking highway department officials to find the money to finish improving Interstate 85 to the North Carolina border, arguing that the Upstate has been shorted in transportation funding over the years.

The request came after the State Transportation Infrastructure Bank delayed action on selecting which projects will receive funding as a result of this year's appropriation by lawmakers for road and bridge repairs.

The Department of Transportation board had sent the bank a list of seven recommended projects to be funded using \$550 million in bonds made possible by \$50 million in legislative appropriations. Three of those projects concerned improvements along I-85.

Sen. Hugh Leatherman of Florence, a member of the bank board who chairs both the Senate Finance Committee and the Joint Bond Review Committee, told bank and transportation department officials that more transportation funding has gone to projects from the Midlands to the coast over the years than the Upstate and he believes more should be done to alleviate congestion along I-85.

"If you go back and look over a 10-year period or a 15-year period, I think from the Midlands to the coast has got the majority of the interstate money," he told *The Greenville News*. "We've got to change that. We've got to get some relief up to the Upstate."

To help do that, Leatherman asked Department of Transportation officials to look for funding to complete the last segment of improvements to I-85 from Greenville to the North Carolina border, a 10-mile portion that would cost \$171 million to widen to six lanes and improve three interchanges.

That segment was already included in another project that the transportation department has submitted for funding help to the bank board but the stretch to the border was unfunded.

The other proposals related to I-85 submitted to the bank include a project to improve the I-85 and I-385 interchange, at a total cost of \$240 million; one to improve 25 miles of I-85 in Greenville and Spartanburg counties, including ramps and widening of mainlines, at a cost of \$241 million; and widening 16 miles of I-85 in Spartanburg and Cherokee counties at a cost of \$262 million.