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HEADLINE: Feds give OK for I-85 bridge project to start

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Feds give OK for I-85 bridge project to start

WASHINGTON The U.S. Department of Transportation gave the go-ahead to begin construction on the Interstate 85/Yadkin River Crossing project after it finalized an agreement with the North Carolina Department of Transportation for \$10 million in Recovery Act funds, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced Tuesday.

"This money represents an important piece in the puzzle of how to pay for this much-needed project," N.C. Transportation Secretary Gene Conti said. "Making these improvements to the I-85 corridor is critical to maintaining regional, statewide and national mobility, as well as commerce activity and economic development along the route."

The project is being completed in two phases. A \$136 million design-build contract for phase one was awarded at the end of April to **Flatiron**-Lane, a joint venture of **Flatiron** Constructors Inc. and The Lane Construction Corp. To cover the cost of the contract, the \$10 million TIGER grant will be combined with state funds and money from Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicles, or GARVEE bonds, which allow NCDOT to borrow against future federal funding to finance needed transportation improvements.

"The I-85 Corridor and Yadkin River Crossing are more examples of the Obama administration's commitment to modernizing our transportation infrastructure and creating economic opportunity," LaHood said. "Thanks to TIGER Recovery Act grants like these, transportation projects are creating jobs in communities across the country."

The grant is from the U.S. Department of Transportation Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery program, part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, designed to promote innovative, multi-modal and multi-jurisdictional transportation projects that provide significant economic and environmental benefits to an entire metropolitan area, region or the nation.

Construction of the first phase is expected to begin in October with completion set for January 2013, about eight months earlier than NCDOT originally anticipated. Work will include:

- . Replacing the I-85 bridges over the Yadkin River;
- . Replacing the parallel bridges over the North Carolina Railroad tracks located north of the river;
- . Replacing the parallel bridges over the Duke Power Industrial Rail Spur located south of river;
- . Replacing the U.S. Highway 29/70 North bridge over the river;
- . Reconstructing the I-85 interchange at N.C. Highway 150;
- . Removing the I-85 interchange at Clark Road;

- . Widening about three miles of I-85 from four lanes to eight lanes; and
- . Building noise walls.

The second phase of the project includes widening an additional 3.5 miles of I-85 to just north of I-85 Business Loop and reconstructing the I-85/Belmont Road interchange and will cost an estimated \$120-\$130 million. NCDOT expects to award a contract for phase two by early next year. It will be funded through the N.C. Mobility Fund included in the 2010-11 state budget. The newly created fund sets aside money for critical projects of statewide significance.

The section of I-85 is the most direct interstate route between Atlanta, Ga., and Richmond, Va., and carries a heavy volume of truck traffic. It is one of the last remaining substandard segments of I-85. Once the entire project is completed, the improvements will lead to a future increase of 45 percent in freight and passenger rail speeds in the area.

This project will relieve congestion by reducing a significant interstate bottleneck and improving travel for area residents and businesses located in the two economically distressed counties of Rowan and Davidson.

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Highlights: Flatiron, Flatiron Constructors