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Transportation Board Approves Location of New Interstate I-73 In Southwest Virginia

Also approves \$115 million for highway work, including I-64 widening in Hampton Roads

RICHMOND – In a landmark decision for the nation's interstate system and southwest Virginia, The Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) voted today on a location to build the future Interstate 73 from Roanoke to North Carolina. This section of I-73 would be part of a new north-south link between Michigan and South Carolina.

The board selected a location that overlaps I-581 in Roanoke to Elm Avenue, then veers to the southeast and enters Franklin County near Coopers Cove, travels east of Rocky Mount into Henry County and stays east of Martinsville, before turning slightly and entering North Carolina southwest of Ridgeway.

The decision to build I-73 follows nearly four years of intensive environmental study and an unprecedented public participation program undertaken by VDOT. The new interstate is needed to improve safety, mobility and capacity. It also has the potential to enhance economic development and attract new industry and tourism to southwest Virginia.

The selected corridor is about 66.5 miles long, and its construction cost is estimated to be \$1.23 billion in today's dollars. Approximately 506 homes, 42 businesses and one non-profit organization may be affected by the road's path.

Following the Board's action, a Final Environmental Impact Statement will be completed and sent to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for consideration, a process that could take up to a year. If the FHWA grants approval, final design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction can begin pending the availability of funds.

In other business, the Board approved 30 contracts for highway improvement projects valued at more than \$115 million.

Among the major awards is a \$64.7 million project to widen I-64 from Hampton Roads Center Parkway to Ramp B of I-664 through the City of Hampton. It will include three lanes in each direction, High-Occupancy Vehicle lanes, and a new Mercury Boulevard interchange with flyovers and a collector/distributor road system. Awarded to E.V. Williams, Inc. of Virginia Beach, the project is scheduled for completion in November, 2004.

The Board also approved a \$20.5 million project to replace the Route 11 bridge across the New River and the Norfolk Southern Railroad. between

Radford and Fairlawn in Pulaski County. Awarded to Fairfield Echols Corporation of Fishersville, the work should be completed in the fall of 2004.