

Impact of project on I-385 ignored

The South Carolina Department of Transportation will soon begin work on the largest stimulus project in our state — adding two lanes to a five and a half mile section of Interstate 385 between Mauldin and Simpsonville. The total price tag is \$65 million.

Incredibly, the DOT requested, and the Federal Highway Administration granted, a "categorical exclusion" (CE) that completely exempted the project from any environmental review. The Highway Administration's regulations, however, limit CEs to relatively minor projects such as landscaping, noise barriers and bicycle lanes. Road-widening projects are not on the list. The administration violated its own regulations and the National Environmental Policy Act in granting the exemption.

An environmental review would have allowed the public to fully understand the impacts of this project. Among those impacts is land use which is explicitly required by the Highway Administration's regulations to be considered. New and widened roads are magnets for residential and commercial growth — build it and yes, they will come. How much additional growth along and near I-385 will be caused by the widened highway? How will this growth increase traffic congestion? How will this congestion affect air quality? What are the alternatives to the proj-

ect? Could one or more of the new lanes be dedicated for HOV (high-occupancy vehicle) use and/or high-speed buses (and perhaps future light rail)?

But the DOT and the Highway Administration ignored the rules and fast-tracked the project with little or no consideration of these and other important issues.

A transportation policy based primarily on widening roads is neither sensible nor affordable. It is like trying to solve obesity by wearing larger clothes. It might feel good for a while, but you soon realize that all you have done is spent a lot of money and the situation has not improved at all. Greenville County and the entire Upstate urgently need a comprehensive, multifaceted policy that includes not only roads but also land-use planning, public transit, carpooling and incentives for walkable, mixed-use communities.

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