

# The Beaufort Gazette

SATURDAY, December 27, 2008

beaufortgazette.com

Established in 1897 25 cents

## County seeking money for roads

By MICHAEL WELLES SHAPIRO  
mshapiro@islandpacket.com  
843-706-8142

Beaufort County officials have a long list of road projects they want to complete in 2009. But they're looking everywhere — and increasingly toward Washington — to find money to pay for the projects.

In 2006, when voters approved an additional 1-percent sales tax for road improvements, the county estimated it would need \$152 million. But construction costs have risen, and the list of projects now would cost \$238.4 million, according to county transportation consultant Dan Dennis.

He attributed the \$86 million increase to the price of asphalt, which is a petroleum product. Asphalt prices have dramatically increased in the past three years and remained high even as the price of oil has dropped.

For now, Dennis and county officials are hoping the

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Dan Dennis, county transportation consultant

incoming Obama administration and the U.S. Congress can help make up the price difference.

Lawmakers in Washington have indicated they intend to free up billions of dollars for roads, bridges, public transportation and other projects that can be started quickly — in four to six months — to get unemployed Americans back on the job.

He said the three largest penny sales tax projects fit the bill nicely.

The road projects are;

■ A project to widen Lady’s Island Drive in northern Beaufort County and build

a bridge parallel to the J.E. McTeer bridge. That work is expected to start in October. Dennis said the county could move up the timeline for the project if necessary to attract federal money.

■ Construction to straighten a portion of the Bluffton Parkway and extend it to connect to U.S. 278 with a fly-over bridge. That project is scheduled to begin in July.

■ Widening 5.9 miles of S.C. 170 from the traffic circle at S.C. 46 to the Riverbend entrance in Okatie. That project could begin in April but might be split into three parts to get construction started earlier.

“We’ve been telling anyone who asks us — the (U.S.) Highway Department and members of Congress — ‘Look, we’ve got projects ready to go,’” Dennis said. “A lot of counties can’t say that.”

Following are some other road projects scheduled for 2009:

■ The S.C. Department of Transportation is on pace to begin widening Burnt Church Road and will hold a final pre-construction meeting in January before getting to work.

■ The SCDOT will widen portions of S.C. 46 and Simonsville roads shortly after the Burnt Church Road work, with those projects going out to bid in March.

■ A project to resurface sections of U.S. 278 on Hilton Head Island is scheduled to start in early 2009. The goal is to finish the first phase of resurfacing — from the entrance to Indigo Run to the Mall at Shelter Cove — before the Verizon Heritage in April.