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North Carolina discusses I-95 as a toll road

Tolling and public-private partnerships are on the table in North Carolina as state officials look into improving Interstate 95.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation recently hired two consulting firms, PBS&J and Baker Engineering – at a cost of \$6.4 million – to evaluate the state’s 182 miles of I-95 and to develop recommendations for financing. The report, titled “I-95 Corridor Planning and Finance Study,” is scheduled to be completed in the fall of 2011.

“Renewing I-95 through upgrades and widening is an expensive process, and NCDOT is researching both traditional and non-traditional methods of funding as part of this financial model, including the State Highway Fund, tolling, a local option sales tax, public-private partnerships, and others,” NCDOT officials stated in preliminary documents.

An NCDOT spokeswoman said the state will begin public outreach in the coming days with the launch of a new Web site carrying the theme “Driving 95: What’s Your View?”

Public input sessions and hearings have yet to be announced.

I-95 was built and is currently maintained with federal and state tax dollars, a large portion of which comes from truckers. Before the roadway could be tolled, North Carolina would need to obtain tolling authority from the Federal Highway Administration.

I-95 from Maine to Florida is part of the FHWA’s Corridors of the Future program instituted in 2005. That program gives priority to a short list of nationally significant projects eligible for innovative financing methods including tolling.

Also related to funding, North Carolina recently received \$2 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to rehabilitate seven miles of I-95 in Johnston County, according to the FHWA.

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