



INFORMATION RELEASE

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Arkansas State Highway Commission Starts Process of Creating Interstate 555

STATEWIDE (12-2) – The Arkansas State Highway Commission approved a Minute Order during today’s regular business meeting that designates 44 miles of U.S. Highway 63 in northeast Arkansas, from Interstate 55 in Crittenden County to U.S. Highway 49 in Jonesboro, as Interstate 555, according to Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) officials.

The highway has been signed as “Future I-555” for almost 15 years. The designation is contingent upon Congress approving the federal Highway authorization bill, titled Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), which was approved by the Senate and House conference committee yesterday. Arkansas First District Congressman Rick Crawford served on the conference committee. Upon Congress’ approval, the bill will go to the President’s desk for his signature, which is expected to occur before the end of the year.

Major improvements to U.S. Highway 63 began in the early 1970s in the form of a Jonesboro bypass project. During the last 40 years more than \$250 million dollars were spent to bring the highway up to interstate standards. The last requirement was to build a two-lane frontage road across the St. Francis River floodway, estimated to cost more than \$33 million, specifically for farm equipment use.

Cotton module trucks and other agricultural traffic that did not meet federal interstate requirements would be forced to take a 90 mile detour if I-555 was designated without the frontage road. Language included in the proposed FAST Act by Congressman Crawford and Arkansas’ senior U.S. Senator John Boozman includes an exemption which will allow these vehicles to continue using the three-mile stretch of highway that crosses the floodway without building the \$33 million frontage road. AHTD will review existing safety protocols for this section of I-555 as part of its mandate to protect motorists.

Arkansas Highway Commissioner Alec Farmer of Jonesboro praised Congressman Crawford for leading the effort to complete the I-555 designation, as well as Senator Boozman's work in the Senate and Governor Asa Hutchinson for including necessary state legislation in a special session of the General Assembly earlier this year.

"This is a great example of our federal and state officials working together to provide a common-sense solution for our citizens," stated Commissioner Farmer. "The actions of Congressman Crawford, Senator Boozman, Governor Hutchinson, and our General Assembly allowed a major highway improvement to occur that has a huge impact economically for the region at no cost to the taxpayers, actually saving more than \$30 million. I also want to express my appreciation to my fellow members of the Highway Commission, AHTD Director Scott Bennett, and the entire AHTD staff for their work on this very important project."

"We are extremely happy that we can see I-555 becoming a new reality, especially without taking additional time and additional funding," added Director Bennett. "This has been an important, concerted effort by federal, state and local officials – as well as stakeholders – to come up with the best overall solution for economic development that includes the agricultural industry which is so important to our state."