

Dunn, Key Legislators Endorse Bonds To Pave Way For Earlier Expressways

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From The Commercial Appeal Nashville Bureau

NASHVILLE, Feb. 16. — A construction speedup on the northern perimeter expressway in Memphis seemed almost certain Wednesday after Gov. Winfield Dunn proposed a 100-million-dollar bond issue to accelerate interstate highway work.

Democratic and Republican leaders quickly fell behind the plan, which would shave a year or more off the anticipated completion date of Interstate 240, which will run along the Wolf River in the city's northern sector.

Proceeds of the proposed bond issue also would be used to speed up construction work on other incomplete interstate roads in Tennessee, making it possible to travel across the state on the superhighways and establishing a connector between the Mississippi River bridge under construction west of Dyersburg and the existing highway system.

House Speaker James McKinney (D-Madison) and Senate Speaker John Wilder (D-Somerville) both expressed support. "I would not think we would have any serious opposition," Mr. Wilder said.

Highway Department plans now call for bid-letting on the Memphis project to be broken into two phases with construction to be completed in late 1976. With the speedup, construction would still be in two phases, but part of I-240 could be ready for use in late 1974 and the entire route could be finished in 1975.

The first phase is for the eastern section of I-240 from I-40 near Summer to Jackson. Nearly all the right-of-way work is completed, said Ray Terrell,

director of the Highway Department's planning and programming division. Remaining work includes grading and paving. That segment — if the legislature approves the governor's bond plan — should be ready for traffic by fall of 1974.

The second phase of the northern perimeter route, from Jackson to the Wolf River and across to Chelsea, Mr. Terrell said, will take until sometime in 1975. The reason, he said, is that the segment will have to be redesigned from four to six lanes because engineers now feel the traffic load coming into the downtown area from Raleigh and Frayser will be heavier than first believed.

Cost of completing the entire 10.3-mile route, he said, will be about 33.7 million dollars.

By issuing bonds, at about three per cent interest, the state can speed construction despite a cutback in federal highway funds, and retire the bonds with future federal funds and be obligated only for interest costs, Gov. Dunn said.

The governor said that with issuance of the bonds, which would mature in seven years, various other portions of the interstate system could be advanced, including making usable part of I-155 with its new Mississippi River bridge near Dyersburg.

Tennessee's share of paving the bridge and building the eastern approach which would extend several miles into the state would be paid out of the bond money.

The bonds also would provide money for the interchange of I-65 and U.S. 440 in the Melrose area of Nashville; about

13 miles of I-40 east of Knoxville; I-75 between Lenoir City and Cleveland, and completion of several segments of I-31 south of the Tennessee-Virginia line.

"Paving all lanes of our interstate highways under construction in East Tennessee would be assured," the governor said.

State Highway Commissioner Robert Smith — who with Mr. McKinney, Mr. Wilder and others sat in on the governor's press conference — said the speed-up program would have no effect on noninterstate road work.

Mr. Smith estimated that issuance of the bonds — perhaps 20 million dollars initially, then the balance as needed — would result in pushing completion of the interstate system in Tennessee to near the 90 per cent mark.

Governor Dunn told reporters that Tennessee's interstate program has been lagging lately because 75 per cent of the state's system is complete, compared to only 71 per cent nationally. The state's share of interstate road funds has been reduced to allow more money to go to states which are behind. Tennessee received about 94 million dollars in interstate funds in 1970, but was allotted only \$46,844,000 in 1971 and the same amount for 1972.

The governor called this "penalizing progress and penalizing good judgment."

A check with the United States Department of Transportation showed that 78 per cent of the national program is complete if toll roads in the system are counted, but the 71 per cent figure is correct when toll roads are omitted.

Federal sources also said figures which will be sent to Congress next week should result in an increase in federal interstate funds for Tennessee in 1973, when the state is scheduled to receive an estimated 56 million dollars.

Dunn noted that much of the interest cost on the bonds could be offset by savings in construction costs, which rise each year.

Latest available figures show that Tennessee has completed 777.1 of its allotted 1,045 miles of interstate highways.

(Map and Additional Story on Page 37)

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