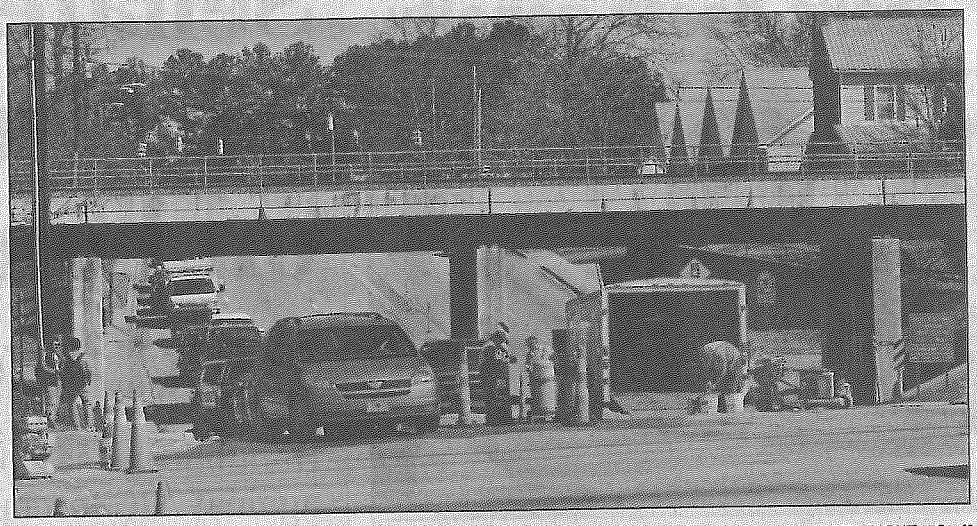
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State approves bridge funds
Project to ease Clemson traffic

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Clemson received funds to work on the railroad bridge on State 133 near the intersection of State 133 and U.S. 123.

CLEMSON — State Department of Transportation commissioners approved $6.14 million in federal economic stimulus money for the State 133 intersection and railroad bridge project in Clemson.

The federal money puts this long-awaited project back on track, provides $7.65 million for an east-west connector in Anderson, and funds three road projects in Laurens and Saluda counties in the Third Congressional District.

The state Department of Transportation will prepare the projects to go to bid this spring or early summer, said department spokesman Pete Poore.

In addition, some state money originally designated for the Clemson rail project will be used for the Sheep Farm Road project near Seneca in Oconee County, instead, to assist with completion of that project.

The commission agreed to divide $106 million equally among the state's six congressional districts and also do some resurfacing work in every county so that work will be done all across the state, and every county will share in the benefits, Poore said.

The stimulus money doubles the amount of federally funded state highway and bridge work that will start this year in South Carolina, Poore said.

Economic stimulus projects for the Third Congressional District were approved by commissioners this week.

The city of Clemson has tried for decades to improve the State 133 intersection where a narrow opening under a railroad bridge is the city's only rail crossing.

It constricts traffic, is prone to flooding, and emergency vehicles must go to Central to cross the tracks if the intersection is closed by wrecks or flooding.

"There were days I didn't think I'd live to see this project happen," said Clemson Mayor Larry Abernathy. "We started talking about this project quite literally at the first meeting I attended 34 years ago.

"This will improve the intersection, improve traffic flow, make things more convenient for people, and above all make it easier for emergency vehicles" to reach the other side of the college town where the high school is located, Abernathy said.

Construction will take about 18 months to complete and will be inconvenient for motorists, but the end result "will be worth it" because it will greatly improve the intersection "and it will save lives," Abernathy said.

In addition to funding for the Clemson rail bridge and the east-west connector in Anderson County, state Department of Transportation commissioners also approved funding for the Stagecoach Road phase II and Clinton Frontage Road projects in Laurens County and the State 39 and State 702 intersection in Saluda County.