

Paving the way: DeSoto's long-term traffic goals start with 4-year road plan

By Brandon LaGrone II, Daily Memphian

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A line of traffic waits under the interstate overpass on Commerce Street in Hernando to turn north onto interstate 55. (Toni Lepascka/Special to The Daily Memphian file)

The DeSoto County Board of Supervisors is actively seeking to address mounting traffic congestion by emphasizing state highway improvements alongside long-term interstate expansions.

The four-year road plan, mandated annually by state law, serves as a guide for the county's transportation infrastructure priorities.

While the multimillion-dollar expansion of Interstate 55 from Goodman Road down to Commerce Street remains a prominent fixture on the county's planning documents, local officials increasingly point to the necessity of upgrading Miss. 305 and U.S. 51.

Board President Jessie Medlin, who serves District 1 and sits on the transportation committee, emphasized the need for these state routes.

"I've always said that 305 was the most dangerous road in the state of Mississippi," Medlin said, noting the high volume of traffic and numerous hazardous intersections.

Medlin noted that Miss. 305 has suffered from a lack of attention throughout the years, a situation exacerbated by the arrival of commercial and residential traffic following completion of Interstate 269.

The county previously bonded money in its own name to expedite the I-269 project, anticipating the strain on local roads.

The road plan officially lists lane expansions for Miss. 305 from Church Road to Byhalia Road, and for U.S. 51 from Venture Drive to Green T Road, utilizing state and federal funding through the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT).

Despite the inclusion of these major arteries on the four-year plan, securing the necessary capital remains a significant hurdle.

Medlin clarified that listing the projects keeps everyone focused on the goals, even if immediate funding is not available.

He explained that the legally required four-year road plan is actually part of a larger five-to-15-year transportation roadmap.

Because of this extended timeline, projects are frequently advanced or delayed depending on the securing of funding and right-of-way.

District 4 Supervisor Lee Caldwell, also a member of the transportation committee, echoed the financial challenges.

Caldwell stated that the timeline for securing right-of-way funding for U.S. 51 and Miss. 305 is heavily dependent on the speed at which “utilities can be moved.”

“Even though the study’s been done, we don’t have the funding to do that yet,” Caldwell said. “So we’re trying to acquire the funding.”

The county’s blueprint for I-55 details an expansive multi-phase widening effort spearheaded by MDOT.

The Goodman Road to Church Road phase, carries an estimated price tag of \$156 million to expand the corridor from four to eight lanes.

Phase 2 continues the eight-lane expansion from Church Road to I-269 at an estimated \$168 million.

Additional phases aim to widen the interstate near the Starlanding junction to Commerce Street in Hernando, costing an estimated \$45 million and \$50 million.

Regarding concerns about a potential bottleneck where the interstate narrows from 10 to six lanes near Commerce Street, Medlin observed that traffic generally flows

adequately unless disrupted by an accident, citing the 10-lane stretches out of Memphis as an example.

Caldwell confirmed that the county is working closely with MDOT engineers to ensure new infrastructure, such as the I-269 overpasses and the Starlanding interchange, is designed to accommodate future capacity.

Intersection management remains a point of contention and planning.

The county plan features some upcoming roundabouts, including a \$3 million State Aid project at Holly Springs Road and Jaybird Road, and a proposed \$4 million roundabout at Byhalia Road and Jaybird Road currently in the planning phase.

Medlin expressed disappointment regarding MDOT's decision to install a roundabout at the busy intersection of Miss. 305 and Bethel Road. He stated that Mitch Turner, a former district engineer for MDOT, told him that a traditional traffic light with turning lanes was approved for that specific location.

"It really disappointed me because I don't know how well it's going to work at that busy intersection," Medlin said of the roundabout, acknowledging that the county ultimately has no choice in the state agency's final design.

Conversely, Caldwell expressed confidence in MDOT's engineering regarding the Green T Road intersection.

She noted that engineers have formulated a plan for that specific location that will be wide and safe enough to accommodate both heavy commercial trucks and passenger vehicles simultaneously.

As county officials continue to lobby in Jackson for state funding, localized projects are also moving forward.

Medlin noted the county is currently waiting on approved plans from MDOT to self-fund the widening of a short section of Craft Road near the Lewisburg schools from three to five lanes, which is expected to provide substantial traffic relief.

For Medlin, the fight for better infrastructure, particularly on Miss. 305, is a long-standing commitment.

“I’ve been working on it 34 years,” Medlin said. “So I’m not gonna quit now.”



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