

PREMIUM NORTH MISSISSIPPI

DeSoto County gets \$90M for I-55 expansion

By Rob Moore, 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 Lepaske/Special to The Daily Memphian)

Last week, the Mississippi Legislature allocated \$90 million for widening Interstate 55 between Goodman and Church roads, a longtime priority for DeSoto County officials.

The Legislature ended the 2024 session Friday, May 3, with the passage of a \$7 billion state budget. Of that total, \$820 million went to various building initiatives throughout Mississippi, including the I-55 project.

“My delegation sees the value and economic impact of widening I-55,” said Republican state Rep. Rodney Hall who represents parts of Southaven and Olive Branch. “Whether it’s in our districts or not, we see it as important for continuing the growth and alleviating some of the growing pains for a rapidly growing county.”

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Before the legislative session began, the DeSoto County Board of Supervisors identified the widening of I-55 as their top priority.

Ultimately, county officials would like to see I-55 widened from Goodman Road all the way south to Commerce Street in Hernando. However, the first phase of this project only includes the expressway from Goodman Road to Church Road.

“This certainly moves the project forward,” Supervisor Lee Caldwell said. “We’re thrilled for this funding, but this is only phase one. We’re a long way to go to making it to Hernando, but it’s certainly a start.”

Caldwell said the county now has a total of about \$119 million for the first phase of the widening project. Overall, the first phase is expected to cost around \$150 million.

“We’re excited and grateful to be able to move forward,” Caldwell said. “We’re still short some funding, but we’re hopeful we will be able to work through it and get some more from other places.”

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I-55 carries an average of 75,000 cars every day. As DeSoto County has continued to grow in recent years, demand for widening the expressway has steadily increased.

During the 2023 legislative session, \$25 million was allocated for the project, despite the supervisors’ request of \$125 million, which was supported at the time by Gov. Tate Reeves.

“There was some buzz that was drummed up last year because our local electors really placed an emphasis on it when talking with our leaders at the statewide and federal levels,” Hall said. “So it’s always been at the forefront. Now, thanks to our freshman

and senior legislators working together, I think we had the push necessary to get it over the hump.”

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