

# **Bypass extension remains on track**

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## **State road projects package approved**

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FRANKFORT -- The planned extension of the U.S. 60 bypass will move ahead as scheduled after lawmakers signed off on a road projects bill in the final hours of this year's legislative session.

The move overrides changes in the state's revised six-year road plan that was released this year and would have meant no new construction in the next two years due to a lack of funding.

"I feel good about it, and we're going to stay on top of it," said state Sen. David Boswell, a Sorgho Democrat.

The passage of House Bill 79 follows work by the legislature's conference committee on the budget to try to keep a whole host of road projects on track despite declining state and federal funding and a state road plan that has more projects than money.

The bill reverts to the federal and state road projects outlined in the 2006 road plan rather than adopting the road plan presented by the state Transportation Cabinet in January.

The federally funded projects, including the bypass extension, are balanced in House Bill 79, which means the money will be available to fund those projects.

Plans for the extension call for it to run from the bypass' intersection with Kentucky 54 to U.S. 60 near the Hawesway Truck Plaza. It is expected to be a critical thoroughfare for the new hospital planned by Owensboro Medical Health System on Daniels Lane.

Under the road plan released this year, the next phase on the bypass extension -- roughly \$24.6 million in construction -- would have been delayed until 2010, with the entire extension not scheduled to be completed until 2014.

However, the hospital is scheduled to be completed by 2012 and will rely heavily on the new bypass extension.

Under the plan outlined in House Bill 79, funding for the next construction phase will be available in the 2009-2010 fiscal year and allow the project to stay on track for completion by 2012.

Boswell and Rep. Tommy Thompson, a Philpot Democrat, have both said they have talked with Transportation Secretary Joe Prather about the project to ensure that the bypass extension remains on schedule as it advances.

"I think that was a significant accomplishment," Thompson said of House Bill 79. "(Prather) both understands and appreciates the importance of that bypass extension to our community and has agreed to do everything he can to keep it on schedule."

House Bill 79 was one of two road projects bills taking center stage Tuesday night.

The second bill outlined \$200 million in road projects primarily on interstate highways that would have been possible thanks to a \$231 million federal road bond the state planned to issue for further work on the Ohio River bridges at Louisville.

During its budget work, legislative leaders authorized the state to issue those bonds, which would have freed up money for the completion of those \$200 million in construction projects outlined in House Bill 136.

Although it saw swift passage in the Senate, the House refused to go along with the plan, in part because of the manner in which it was determined what projects would be funded.

Among that list of projects outlined in House Bill 136 were:

-- \$50 million to widen Interstate 65 from the Cumberland Parkway to Park City in Barren County.

-- \$21.8 million to extend the Natcher Parkway to U.S. 231 at Dye Fork Road in Warren County.

-- \$50 million to widen Interstate 64 from Lexington to Catlettsburg.

"We focused on federally maintained major projects," said Sen. Brett Guthrie, a Bowling Green Republican and chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee.

The projects were decided in a closed-door meeting between House and Senate leaders on Tuesday night.

But House leadership failed to generate enough votes in the House for the bill on a vote of 36 to 54 after prompting impassioned speeches by a number of legislators.

Along with objections over how the projects were decided, legislators also criticized both chambers for stopping the clocks before midnight and continuing to work.

According to the state constitution, the legislature must conclude its business by midnight on April 15. Late Tuesday night, the clocks were stopped just shy of midnight while more legislation, including House Bill 136, was debated and voted on.

That practice was more common years ago.

"It's been 15 years since I've seen that clock stop," said Rep. Danny Ford, a Mount Vernon Republican. "I think we are reverting to a bad way of doing business."