

# I-530 vision prompts bipartisan cooperation

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By Michael DeVault

A proposed interstate highway connecting northeastern Louisiana with southern Arkansas prompted two members of the U.S. House of Representatives to reach across the partisan divide to see the project become a reality.

**Fifth District Congressman Rodney Alexander, a Republican from Quitman, has joined forces with Arkansas's Fourth District Congressman Mike Ross, a Democrat, in an effort to connect Interstate 530 in Arkansas with Interstate 20 in the Monroe/West Monroe area.**

**Alexander called the project "economically viable" and said he looked forward to the day when the proposed connector is built.**

**"It's a much doable project," Alexander said. "That's the reason we are concentrating on that effort."**

**Under the current proposal, I-530 would connect to I-20 somewhere in the Monroe area, providing a direct link to southern Arkansas, including connections with Interstate 30 and Interstate 40 in Little Rock.**

**Ross said the proposed highway made sense because of the low number of north-south interstate**

**highways. Ross pointed out most interstates run east-to-west.**

**"This road would lead to an economic revival for the region," Ross said.**

**Alexander said economic factors would play a key role in securing federal funding for any proposed interstate highway through area.**

**"When you factor into the equation the need, the economic environment that exists there today, we have reason to think we can get some extra attention on that area," Alexander said.**

**Alexander noted that southeastern Arkansas and northeastern Louisiana contain some of the poorest communities in the nation, a fact that Alexander said provides incentives to work to bring new funding and new projects into the region.**

**According to Alexander, evidence suggests economic an exchange between southern Arkansas and north Louisiana is about even, as many people go back and forth to purchase goods or services.**

**"Anything we can do on that**

**transportation corridor there would benefit both states," Alexander said.**

The possibility of a new interstate connecting Monroe to Little Rock arose when transportation officials established the Interstate 69 corridor across southern Arkansas.

At the time, former Arkansas Congressman Jay Dickey secured some \$100 million for the construction of a four-lane interstate highway between Little Rock and Pine Bluff.

That road, when completed, will be designated I-530. It will stretch south to Wilmer, Ark., where it will intersect with I-69.

In 2005, Ross secured some \$750,000 to explore the construction of a new stretch of I-530 to connect I-20 to I-69 at Wilmer.

Ross said he made the move because connecting the I-20 and I-530 made sense. Ross noted the Congress has funded I-69 at higher-than-usual rates, adding that only one interstate in the country has been funded at a higher level than I-69.

Also, I-69 was designated a "high-priority corridor" by the Congress. That's a designation that 90 interstates

competed for, Ross said.

According to Ross, only six interstate highways received a "high priority" designation and only one of those -- I-69 -- was not a completed interstate. It certainly demonstrates that I-69 will be completed some day," Ross said.

Ross said one issue working in favor of the I-530 project is it is much smaller in scale and cost less than most of the interchanges Congress is considering funding in the future. Ross pointed out that I-530 could be completed well before I-69 opens sometime in the next decade.

Though funding has been made available for the I-69 project, Ross cautioned any new interstate construction projects could be years away.

"These interstates take time and don't happen over night," Ross said. "Just the Arkansas portion will cost \$1.6 billion."

Ross pointed to the long-term plans for I-69 as evidence of the slow pace highway development can take.

"I-69 was announced five years before I was born, in Indianapolis, and I'm 46," Ross said.