

# Soon Come Highway' comes a step closer

CAMILO THAME Business Co-ordinator

[thamec@jamaicaobserver.com](mailto:thamec@jamaicaobserver.com)

THE Southern Coastal Highway, the longpromised but never delivered match to the Northern Jamaican Coastal Highway, has come a little closer to reality.

The National Contracts Commission endorsed a US\$3-million (\$257-million) contract for American engineering firm Stanley Consultants to conduct a feasibility study and preliminary design for the proposed road to link Port Antonio to Negril via Harbour View and Mandeville.

Cabinet is yet to review or sign off on it, according to head of communications for the National Works Agency (NWA), Stephen Shaw. This phase of the project, which has been “in the making for many years”, is expected “to be completed 12 months from its effective start date”.

The Government received funding for the front-end study and design from the Inter-American Development Bank ) — also a major funder of the Northern Jamaican Coastal Highway — under the Transportation Infrastructure Rehabilitation Programme in July 2009, when the NWA opened invitations to bidders wishing to provide engineering services.

Shaw said yesterday that he was unable to date the plan back to its origins but he was quoted in a May 2007 Observer article as saying that the road masterplan to build the south coast road was still “in motion”.

It is likely that this project, sometimes derided as the “Soon Come Highway”, was conceptualised at the same time as the north coast highway, which was originally supposed to be implemented between October 1991 and March 2000. That highway, which connects Negril on the westernmost end of Jamaica to Fair Prospect, Portland, in the east, costs` more than twice as much to build as originally estimated, or \$21.4 billion up to March 31, 2011 compared to the original target of \$10.6 billion, and is still technically incomplete.



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