SENATE BILL NO. 2174

AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 65-1-8, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO AUTHORIZE THE MISSISSIPPI TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION TO PURCHASE EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES LIABILITY INSURANCE AND AN EXCESS POLICY TO COVER CATASTROPHIC LOSSES INCURRED UNDER THE COMMISSION'S SELF-INSURED WORKERS' COMPENSATION PROGRAM; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. Section 65-1-8, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

65-1-8. (1) The Mississippi Transportation Commission shall have the following general powers, duties and responsibilities:

(a) To coordinate and develop a comprehensive, balanced transportation policy for the State of Mississippi;

(b) To promote the coordinated and efficient use of all available and future modes of transportation;

(c) To make recommendations to the Legislature regarding alterations or modifications in any existing transportation policies;

(d) To study means of encouraging travel and transportation of goods by the combination of motor vehicle and other modes of transportation;

(e) To take such actions as are necessary and proper to discharge its duties pursuant to the provisions of Laws, 1992, Chapter 496, and any other provision of law;

(f) To receive and provide for the expenditure of any funds made available to it by the Legislature, the federal government, or any other source.

(2) In addition to the general powers, duties and responsibilities listed in subsection (1) of this section, the
Mississippi Transportation Commission shall have the following specific powers:

(a) To make rules and regulations whereby the Transportation Department shall change or relocate any and all highways herein or hereafter fixed as constituting a part of the State Highway System, as may be deemed necessary or economical in the construction or maintenance thereof; to acquire by gift, purchase, condemnation or otherwise, land or other property whatsoever that may be necessary for a State Highway System as herein provided, with full consideration to be given to the stimulation of local public and private investment when acquiring such property in the vicinity of Mississippi towns, cities and population centers;

(b) To enforce by mandamus, or other proper legal remedies, all legal rights or rights of action of the Mississippi Transportation Commission with other public bodies, corporations or persons;

(c) To make and publish rules, regulations and ordinances for the control of and the policing of the traffic on the state highways, and to prevent their abuse by any or all persons, natural or artificial, by trucks, tractors, trailers or any other heavy or destructive vehicles or machines, or by any other means whatsoever, by establishing weights of loads or of vehicles, types of tires, width of tire surfaces, length and width of vehicles, with reasonable variations to meet approximate weather conditions, and all other proper police and protective regulations, and to provide ample means for the enforcement of same. The violation of any of the rules, regulations or ordinances so prescribed by the commission shall constitute a misdemeanor. No rule, regulation or ordinance shall be made that conflicts with any statute now in force or which may hereafter be enacted, or with any ordinance of municipalities. A monthly publication giving general information to the boards of...
supervisors, employees and the public may be issued under such
rules and regulations as the commission may determine;

(d) To give suitable numbers to highways and to change
the number of any highway that shall become a part of the State
Highway System. However, nothing herein shall authorize the
number of any highway to be changed so as to conflict with any
designation thereof as a U.S. numbered highway. Where, by a
specific act of the Legislature, the commission has been directed
to give a certain number to a highway, the commission shall not
have the authority to change such number;

(e) To make proper and reasonable rules, regulations
and ordinances for the placing, erection, removal or relocation of
telephone, telegraph or other poles, signboards, fences, gas,
water, sewerage, oil or other pipelines, and other obstructions
that may, in the opinion of the commission, contribute to the
hazards upon any of the state highways, or in any way interfere
with the ordinary travel upon such highways, or the construction,
reconstruction or maintenance thereof, and to make reasonable
rules and regulations for the proper control thereof. Any
violation of such rules or regulations or noncompliance with such
ordinances shall constitute a misdemeanor.

Whenever the order of the commission shall require the
removal of, or other changes in the location of telephone,
telegraph, or other poles, signboards, gas, water, sewerage, oil
or other pipelines; or other similar obstructions on the
right-of-way or such other places where removal is required by
law, the owners thereof shall at their own expense move or change
the same to conform to the order of the commission. Any violation
of such rules or regulations or noncompliance with such orders
shall constitute a misdemeanor;

(f) To regulate and abandon grade crossings on any road
fixed as a part of the State Highway System, and whenever the
commission, in order to avoid a grade crossing with the railroad,
locates or constructs said road on one side of the railroad, the
commission shall have the power to abandon and close such grade
crossing, and whenever an underpass or overhead bridge is
substituted for a grade crossing, the commission shall have power
to abandon such grade crossing and any other crossing adjacent
thereto. Included in the powers herein granted shall be the power
to require the railroad at grade crossings, where any road of the
State Highway System crosses the same, to place signal posts with
lights or other warning devices at such crossings at the expense
of the railroad, and to regulate and abandon underpass or overhead
bridges and, where abandoned because of the construction of a new
underpass or overhead bridge, to close such old underpass or
overhead bridge, or, in its discretion, to return the same to the
jurisdiction of the county board of supervisors;

(g) To make proper and reasonable rules and regulations
to control the cutting or opening of the road surfaces for
subsurface installations;

(h) To make proper and reasonable rules and regulations
for the removal from the public rights-of-way of any form of
obstruction, to cooperate in improving their appearance, and to
prescribe minimum clearance heights for seed conveyors, pipes,
passageways or other structure of private or other ownership above
the highways;

(i) To establish, and have the Transportation
Department maintain and operate, and to cooperate with the state
educational institutions in establishing, enlarging, maintaining
and operating a laboratory or laboratories for testing materials
and for other proper highway purposes;

(j) To provide, under the direction and with the
approval of the Department of Finance and Administration, suitable
offices, shops and barns in the City of Jackson;

(k) To establish and have enforced set-back
regulations;
(l) To cooperate with proper state authorities in producing limerock for highway purposes and to purchase same at cost;

(m) To provide for the purchase of necessary equipment and vehicles and to provide for the repair and housing of same, to acquire by gift, purchase, condemnation or otherwise, land or lands and buildings in fee simple, and to authorize the Transportation Department to construct, lease or otherwise provide necessary and proper permanent district offices for the construction and maintenance divisions of the department, and for the repair and housing of the equipment and vehicles of the department; however, in each Supreme Court district only two (2) permanent district offices shall be set up, but a permanent status shall not be given to any such offices until so provided by act of the Legislature and in the meantime, all shops of the department shall be retained at their present location. As many local or subdistrict offices, shops or barns may be provided as is essential and proper to economical maintenance of the State Highway System;

(n) To cooperate with the Department of Archives and History in having placed and maintained suitable historical markers, including those which have been approved and purchased by the State Historical Commission, along state highways, and to have constructed and maintained roadside driveways for convenience and safety in viewing them when necessary; however, no highway or bridge shall ever be memorialized to a man while living;

(o) To cooperate, in its discretion, with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks in planning and constructing roadside parks upon the right-of-way of state highways, whether constructed, under construction or planned; said parks to utilize where practical barrow pits used in construction of state highways for use as fishing ponds. Said
parks shall be named for abundant flora and fauna existing in the
area or for the first flora or fauna found on the site;

(p) Unless otherwise prohibited by law, to make such
contracts and execute such instruments containing such reasonable
and necessary appropriate terms, provisions and conditions as in
its absolute discretion it may deem necessary, proper or
advisable, for the purpose of obtaining or securing financial
assistance, grants or loans from the United States of America or
any department or agency thereof, including contracts with several
counties of the state pertaining to the expenditure of such funds;

(q) To cooperate with the Federal Highway
Administration in the matter of location, construction and
maintenance of the Great River Road, to expend such funds paid to
the commission by the Federal Highway Administration or other
federal agency, and to authorize the Transportation Department to
erect suitable signs marking this highway, the cost of such signs
to be paid from state highway funds other than earmarked
construction funds;

(r) To cooperate, in its discretion, with the
Mississippi Forestry Commission and the School of Forestry,
Mississippi State University, in a forestry management program,
including planting, thinning, cutting and selling, upon the
right-of-way of any highway, constructed, acquired or maintained
by the Transportation Department, and to sell and dispose of any
and all growing timber standing, lying or being on any
right-of-way acquired by the commission for highway purposes in
the future; such sale or sales to be made in accordance with the
sale of personal property which has become unnecessary for public
use as provided for in Section 65-1-123, Mississippi Code of 1972;

(s) To expend funds in cooperation with the Division of
Plant Industry, Mississippi Department of Agriculture and
Commerce, the United States government or any department or agency
thereof, or with any department or agency of this state, to
control, suppress or eradicate serious insect pests, rodents, plant parasites and plant diseases on the state highway rights-of-way;

(t) To provide for the placement, erection and maintenance of motorist services business signs and supports within state highway rights-of-way in accordance with current state and federal laws and regulations governing the placement of traffic control devices on state highways, and to establish and collect reasonable fees from the businesses having information on such signs;

(u) To request and to accept the use of persons convicted of an offense, whether a felony or a misdemeanor, for work on any road construction, repair or other project of the Transportation Department. The commission is also authorized to request and to accept the use of persons who have not been convicted of an offense but who are required to fulfill certain court-imposed conditions pursuant to Section 41-29-150(d)(1) or Section 99-15-26, Mississippi Code of 1972, or the Pretrial Intervention Act, being Sections 99-15-101 through 99-15-127, Mississippi Code of 1972. The commission is authorized to enter into any agreements with the Department of Corrections, the State Parole Board, any criminal court of this state and any other proper official regarding the working, guarding, safekeeping, clothing and subsistence of such persons performing work for the Transportation Department. Such persons shall not be deemed agents, employees or involuntary servants of the Transportation Department while performing such work or while going to and from work or other specified areas;

(v) To provide for the administration of the railroad revitalization program pursuant to Section 57-43-1 et seq.;

(w) The Mississippi Transportation Commission is further authorized, in its discretion, to expend funds for the
purchase of service pins for employees of the Mississippi
Transportation Department;

(x) To cooperate with the State Tax Commission by
providing for weight enforcement field personnel to collect and
assess taxes, fees and penalties and to perform all duties as
required pursuant to Section 27-55-501 et seq., Sections 27-19-1
et seq., 27-55-1 et seq., 27-59-1 et seq. and 27-61-1 et seq.,
Mississippi Code of 1972, with regard to vehicles subject to the
jurisdiction of the Office of Weight Enforcement. All collections
and assessments shall be transferred daily to the State Tax
Commission;

(y) The Mississippi Transportation Commission may
delegate the authority to enter into a supplemental agreement to a
contract previously approved by the commission if the supplemental
agreement involves an additional expenditure not to exceed One
Hundred Thousand Dollars ($100,000.00);

(z) (i) The Mississippi Transportation Commission, in
its discretion, may enter into agreements with any county,
municipality, county transportation commission, business,
corporation, partnership, association, individual or other legal
entity for the purpose of accelerating the completion date of
scheduled highway construction projects.

(ii) Such an agreement may permit the cost of a
highway construction project to be advanced to the commission by a
county, municipality, county transportation commission, business,
corporation, partnership, association, individual or other legal
entity, and repaid to such entity by the commission when highway
construction funds become available; provided, however, that
repayment of funds advanced to the Mississippi Transportation
Commission shall be made no sooner than the commission's
identified projected revenue schedule for funding of that
particular construction project, and no other scheduled highway
construction project established by statute or by the commission
may be delayed by an advanced funding project authorized under
this paragraph (z). Repayments to an entity that advances funds
to the Mississippi Transportation Commission under this paragraph
(z) may not include interest or other fees or charges, and the
total amount repaid shall not exceed the total amount of funds
advanced to the commission by the entity.

(iii) In considering whether to enter into such an
agreement, the commission shall consider the availability of
financial resources, the effect of such agreement on other ongoing
highway construction, the urgency of the public's need for swift
completion of the project and any other relevant factors.

(iv) Such an agreement shall be executed only upon
a finding by the commission, spread upon its minutes, that the
acceleration of the scheduled project is both feasible and
beneficial. The commission shall also spread upon its minutes its
findings with regard to the factors required to be considered
pursuant to item (iii) of this paragraph (z).

(aa) The Mississippi Transportation Commission, in its
discretion, may purchase employment practices liability insurance,
and may purchase an excess policy to cover catastrophic losses
incurred under the commission's self-insured workers' compensation
program authorized under Section 71-3-5. Such policies shall be
written by the agent or agents of a company or companies
authorized to do business in the State of Mississippi. The
deductibles shall be in an amount deemed reasonable and prudent by
the commission, and the premiums thereon shall be paid from the
State Highway Fund. Purchase of insurance under this paragraph
shall not serve as an actual or implied waiver of sovereign
immunity or of any protection afforded the commission under the
Mississippi Tort Claims Act.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from
and after July 1, 2002.