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EDITOR'S PICK

Congestion conundrum

Scott Shenk 10 hrs ago

With Fredericksburg-area transportation and elected officials looking for more money and better ways to handle the region's traffic congestion conundrum, the comment that "we can't build our way out of this" has been repeated more than a few times.

But that's been the overriding approach here and across the nation as long as roads have been around.

It makes sense to add more lanes to handle more cars, and it does work. But it's also a vicious cycle, summed up by another popular phrase: If you build it, they will come.

The following bit about Interstate 95 is some historical proof.

The Richmond to Washington section of I-95 was completed at the tail end of 1964, according to the Virginia Department of Transportation's history of the interstate. It replaced, for many commuters, U.S. 1 as the route to and from work.

The opening of the interstate led to a construction boom, with gas stations, restaurants and stores popping up throughout the area, near the exits.

There also was a housing boom to accommodate the migrating Washingtonian workers moving south.

The Fredericksburg region's population grew from about 57,000 in 1960 to nearly 70,000 in 1970. By 1980, the region's population had spiked to 108,000.

Now more than 350,000 people live in the region, according to a September report by the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization.

The report cites 2015 Weldon Cooper Center population forecasts estimating that by 2040 the region's population is projected to more than double (123 percent) with an influx of 403,000 people.

The current traffic congestion quandary is proving difficult in its own right. The underlying question is what can we do to prepare for this predicted growth?

Planners and elected officials of the past didn't do a good enough job looking ahead. Will our current ones do better?

Land is a finite entity, and eventually we'll run out of it if we keep building houses, stores, offices and roads.

VDOT MEETING TO DISCUSS Route 3 work

Work is set to start this summer on the State Route 3 interchange in Fredericksburg, and VDOT will host a meeting to tell drivers what to expect. The meeting will be held on Thursday from 5-7 p.m. at the Fredericksburg Hospitality House & Conference Center in Central Park.

This will be a major overhaul of a troublesome interchange, one that resembles a bumper-car track more than a highway interchange as this spot for years has been the local crash leader.

The northbound I-95 cloverleaf on-ramp from eastbound Route 3 will be replaced by three left-turn lanes.

Several changes will be made on the westbound side of Route 3 for exiting southbound I-95 traffic. The ramp will be widened and extended. Also, Central Park traffic will be separated from through-traffic, which will use three right-turn lanes managed by red light signals. This change is aimed at eliminating the chaotic merging problem.

The estimated \$21 million project is expected to be completed in January 2019.

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