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EDITOR'S PICK

## Fredericksburg-area projects approved for state's six-year transportation plan

By SCOTT SHENK THE FREE LANCE-STAR 11 hrs ago

The Commonwealth Transportation Board on Tuesday approved the state's next Six-Year Improvement Program, establishing billions in funding for work during the 2018–2023 period, including projects in the Fredericksburg region.

The SYIP includes funding for Smart Scale projects, a 2-year-old scoring program aimed at helping pay for the most important road and rail projects in Virginia. The budget also includes funding for maintenance and operations work, which is a major transportation expenditure.

The \$18.6-billion SYIP funding will pay for work on more than 3,600 projects across the state, according to the Virginia Department of Transportation.

VDOT's portion of the SYIP for its 2018 fiscal year budget is \$5.41 billion, up 1 percent over last year. VDOT said in a release that the increase comes from more contributions from local and regional jurisdictions, which offsets a drop in state revenue. Without the local contributions, VDOT said its annual budget would be 4 percent less than fiscal 2017.

VDOT said maintenance and operations accounts for \$2.13 billion of the 2018 budget while new construction will claim \$1.87 billion of it.

The state's six-year funding program includes money for transportation work in the 14-county Fredericksburg District, including current and upcoming projects.

Two of the bigger new local projects in the SYIP are the \$59.7-million Virginia Railway Express station expansions in Stafford and \$14.4 million in improvements to the Interstate 95 interchange in Massaponax, both of which secured Smart Scale funding to cover a portion of the costs.

A total of nine Fredericksburg District projects got \$26 million through the second round of Smart Scale. That total is in stark contrast to the \$204 million the district got through the first round of Smart Scale. Much of the first round funding will go toward the \$125-million southbound Rappahannock River crossing project.

Other major local projects getting money in the six-year funding program include the planned replacement of both U.S. 17 bridges over I-95 in Stafford and a major rehabilitation project for the Chatham Bridge.

More than \$20 million was secured for the U.S. 17 overpass projects.

The CTB allocated \$17.7 million for the Chatham Bridge project, which is in the design phase. No timeline has been announced for the project yet, but a public hearing is expected to be held in January.

Area transportation leaders have recently ramped up efforts to find new ways to pay for the region's transportation infrastructure, including the northbound side of the Rappahannock River crossing project, which did not score well in the Smart Scale program.

But it's not all bad

Hap Connors, the area's CTB representative, pointed out on Tuesday that the district is getting roughly twice as much transportation funding as it got two years ago.

"We often lose sight of that," he said in an email about the area's transportation funding. "But still more to do and more is needed."

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