

More requests, less money available for transportation program

BY SCOTT SHENK THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Monday, October 17, 2016 11:00 pm

There's going to be a lot more competition in the second round of the state's transportation prioritization program, now known as Smart Scale.

Project requests and costs are significantly higher than 2015's inaugural round of the program, in which projects are scored for funding. But there is a lot less money available this time around.

Last year, there was more than \$1.7 billion available for projects statewide. This year there is \$750 million on the table.

Some 436 projects across the state have been entered into this round of the Smart Scale scoring process, totaling \$9.25 billion in requests, an increase of nearly \$2 billion compared with the total of last year's 287 projects.

The Fredericksburg District has sent 29 project applications to be scored in this round, totaling \$808 million.

On Monday, the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee approved 11 project requests from the Fredericksburg City Council and the board of supervisors in the counties of Stafford and Spotsylvania.

Other local projects that will be vying for Smart Scale funding are the \$130-million Rappahannock River Crossing's northbound segment; the \$32-million Interstate 95 express lanes extension; and \$22 million in Virginia Railway Express expansion projects.

Paul Milde, one of the Stafford representatives on the FAMPO committee, said during Monday's meeting that it "looks like we are asking for way more than we'll ever get. It looks like a dreary picture."

That is a sharp contrast to the first round of the Smart Scale program, in which the Fredericksburg District had 19 of its 22 project requests approved, totaling about \$204.6 million.

One of those approved projects was the southbound segment of the Rappahannock River Crossing. That project, which will add collector-distributor lanes parallel to the interstate between U.S. 17 in Stafford and State Route 3 in Fredericksburg, is considered crucial to helping alleviate I-95 congestion through the area.



Site of the proposed Rappahannock River Crossing on Interstate 95 in Fredericksburg

Site of the proposed Rappahannock River Crossing on Interstate 95 in Fredericksburg.

Just as that project was expected to score well in the prioritization program, the same is expected of the northern segment.

Scores in the Smart Scale program's second round are expected to be released early next year, perhaps in January. The Commonwealth Transportation Board will vote on project selections in June.