

Congestion question: Answers vary

BY SCOTT SHENK / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Saturday, October 19, 2013 4:38 pm

The feud among Fredericksburg-area officials over possible fixes to local congestion on Interstate 95 has played out for nearly two years.

During that time, Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization meetings have regularly turned into angry exchanges, with elected leaders of Stafford County and Fredericksburg squaring off with Spotsylvania County representatives.

Shortly after a new majority of Spotsylvania supervisors was swept into office in January 2012, they told FAMPO members they didn't want a planned parkway paralleling State Route 3 running through the county. The parkway would run from the Virginia Welcome Center on Interstate 95, through Celebrate Virginia South and between the Rappahannock River and Route 3. It would tie back into Route 3 at Gordon Road. At the time, plans called for the parkway to be a toll road.

The Spotsylvania supervisors' opposition to the Rappahannock Parkway put the entire Rappahannock River Crossing in jeopardy.

The multiphase crossing project, aimed at improving traffic flow along the I-95 corridor in the Fredericksburg area, involves improvements to the interchanges at U.S. 17 in Falmouth and State Route 3 in Fredericksburg. The crossing project also includes additional bridges over the Rappahannock River and parallel lanes along the interstate for traffic using local exits.

As the dispute lingered, Virginia Secretary of Transportation Sean Connaughton asked the Virginia Department of Transportation to gather suggestions from Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania and Stafford officials for state study and consideration.

Each locality has voted on its suggestions to VDOT, which is expected to present its findings at the December Commonwealth Transportation Board meeting.

It's crucial to come up with a regional plan before the CTB allocates money for studies, engineering and construction for projects across Virginia in its six-year improvement plan. For the first time in years, the state has a new flow of revenue for roads and rails following passage of a bipartisan transportation bill earlier this year by the General Assembly.

Here is the rundown of each locality's proposals to fix the I-95 corridor congestion:

FREDERICKSBURG

The City Council's approach is to support the regional plan that had been in place prior to 2012. It voted to support the Rappahannock River Crossing project including the parkway into Spotsylvania.

SPOTSYLVANIA COUNTY

The Spotsylvania Board of Supervisors has offered up a host of projects.

A majority of supervisors—with the exception of Emmitt Marshall—supports construction of a bypass that would start at I-95 in central Stafford and run through Culpeper and end in Orange County near State Route 20.

As now proposed, it would not enter Spotsylvania. However, most supervisors say they would be open to having the bypass rerouted into Spotsylvania.

In addition, the board supports consideration of connecting the Spotsylvania bypass back to I-95 south of Fredericksburg through the county.

The supervisors also support elements of the Rappahannock River Crossing project, but not the parkway. In addition, the board also asked VDOT to consider extending the proposed collector-distributor roads along I-95 from State Route 3 south to the Massaponax exit, with the addition of interstate interchanges at Harrison and Courthouse roads.

STAFFORD COUNTY

Stafford supervisors, like Fredericksburg, support the Rappahannock River Crossing—with the Rappahannock Parkway in Spotsylvania.

Stafford supervisors also brought back an old beltway-type proposal known as the Outer Connector.

The western leg of the Outer Connector would be a 13-mile-long, four-lane, divided road. It would start at the Centreport Parkway I-95 interchange in Stafford. The first four miles of the connector would essentially be the proposed Berea Parkway, which would tie to U.S. 17.

The western Outer Connector would continue south from U.S. 17, cross the Rappahannock River into Spotsylvania and tie into Route 3 in the area of Gordon Road. The Stafford proposal estimates that this connector would cost \$431 million.

The eastern Outer Connector alternative, which dates back decades, would run from Centreport Parkway through southeastern Stafford, cross the Rappahannock and connect with U.S. 17 in Spotsylvania. It would be about 10 miles long and cost an estimated \$350 million to \$400 million. It also would impact more properties—80 to 100—than the other alternatives.

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