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## VDOT to offer plan to fix I-95 congestion

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BY SCOTT SHENK / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

The feud over how to fix the region's Interstate 95 corridor congestion could be settled this week.

The Virginia Department of Transportation is set to present on Wednesday its findings on what it deems the best solution to fix those congestion problems.

The presentation will take place in Richmond at the Commonwealth Transportation Board's monthly meeting.

Cord Sterling, Stafford County supervisor and CTB member, wants to get moving on projects as soon as possible.

"It's my intention to start moving forward with advancing that recommendation" from VDOT, Sterling said in a recent interview.

David Ross, one of Spotsylvania's representatives on the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's policy committee, isn't optimistic about the outcome.

"I've got my concerns," said Ross, who has been at the center of the battle that has plagued FAMPO, and the now defunct George Washington Toll Road Authority, for nearly two years.

The struggle over how to fix the Fredericksburg area's congestion problems is not new, but since early 2011 the issue has become a particularly tense one for local transportation officials. During that time, Ross and other Spotsylvania officials have criticized the planning process and the intentions of FAMPO staff and officials with Fredericksburg and Stafford. Spotsylvania's officials in turn have been taken to task for their approach.

The problems stem from Spotsylvania officials' rejection of a parkway included in the planned Rappahannock River Crossing project, which had previously been approved by state and federal

officials.

The \$300 million multiphase crossing project is aimed at improving traffic flow along the I-95 corridor in the Fredericksburg area. It includes improvements to the interchanges at U.S. 17 in Falmouth and State Route 3 in Fredericksburg, along with additional bridges over the Rappahannock River and parallel lanes along the interstate for traffic using local exits.

The parkway that the majority of Spotsylvania supervisors oppose would have run from an exit at the I-95 Welcome Center, 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 parkway has since been shelved, but study and engineering work continues on the I-95 portions of the crossing project.

With the feud appearing to jeopardize the project's future, Virginia Secretary of Transportation Sean Connaughton asked VDOT to step in. Each locality—Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania and Stafford—sent suggestions to the state highway department, which used them in studying a possible solution.

The City Council's approach is to support the Rappahannock River Crossing project, including the parkway into Spotsylvania.

Stafford's Board of Supervisors also supports the Rappahannock River Crossing—with the Rappahannock Parkway in Spotsylvania. The board 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. The Stafford proposal estimates that this connector would cost \$431 million.

The eastern Outer Connector alternative, which dates back decades, 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.

A majority of Spotsylvania's supervisors has offered up a host of projects.

The supervisors—with the exception of Emmitt Marshall—support 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.

The board asked VDOT to consider extending the proposed collector–distributor roads along I–95 from Route 3 south to the Massaponax exit, with the addition of interstate interchanges at Harrison and Courthouse roads.

The CTB will ultimately determine which projects get the necessary state and federal funding.

FAMPO’s policy committee also must pass federally funded road projects in the region.

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