

Culpeper endorses alternate I-95 bypass study

BY DONNIE JOHNSTON / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Tuesday, September 3, 2013 2:44 pm

Spotsylvania County Supervisor David Ross took his case for an alternative Interstate 95 bypass to the Culpeper County Board of Supervisors Tuesday and got mixed reaction.

While the Culpeper supervisors eventually voted to give their blessing to a study of the route, some had serious reservations about building a new highway through mainly woods and farmland.

The proposed bypass would connect to the Berea Parkway, which runs from Interstate 95 near the Stafford Airport to near the University of Mary Washington satellite campus on U.S. 17 in southern Stafford. The bypass would continue west across the Rappahannock River and then run parallel to the Rapidan River to State Route 3 near Lake of the Woods in Orange County.

The proposed route would carefully skirt city of Fredericksburg easements along the Rappahannock as well as Civil War battlefield sites in Orange. It would be east of the Culpeper County community of Richardsville.

Fewer than 5 miles of the proposed 10-mile-long bypass would be in Culpeper County and about 2 miles would be in Orange. No part of the highway would be in Spotsylvania.

Ross told the Culpeper supervisors that this plan is just one of several being discussed to alleviate traffic concerns along U.S. 17 and Route 3 near Fredericksburg.

“The route is not set in stone,” he said.

Both Ross and Jim Joyce of the Spotsylvania County Citizens’ Budget Review Committee stressed the importance of building a secondary highway that bridges the Rappahannock River.

“If there is an accident on the I-95 Rappahannock River bridge, there is no other way around,” Ross said.

Ross’s presentation hit a stumbling block when he alluded to the fact that such a highway could open the eastern end of Culpeper County to development.

“More development?” asked Chairwoman Sue Hansohn. “I don’t see that as a positive.

“I’m not interested,” she added. “I don’t see any benefit to Culpeper.”

Finding money for such an ambitious project was another issue.

“The big point is, Where is the funding coming from?” Supervisor Bradley Rosenberger asked Ross.

“This is a big undertaking. VDOT can’t even [find money to] mow its right-of-way these days.”

Supervisor Steve Nixon worried that a bypass might take funds away from other needed road projects in the county.

Supervisor Larry Aylor, however, was more positive.

“[This project would] provide added safety and commerce for this part of the state,” he said.

The board voted 6-1 to support a study of the alternate route, with Hansohn opposing it.

On Monday, Ross will meet with a special Orange County committee to discuss how the project will affect that area.

The Culpeper supervisors also voted to give its blessing to the Rappahannock–Rapidan Community Services Board to borrow about \$3.8 million to construct a new facility (the site has not been designated), and another \$3 million to renovate two existing buildings at the Boxwood House site on U.S. 29 and construct a third building there.

The Boxwood site would be used as an outpatient facility and consolidate offices in Orange, Warrenton and on Sunset Lane in Culpeper.

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