

Culpeper withdraws support for bypass

BY DONNIE JOHNSTON AND SCOTT SHENK / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Tuesday, October 1, 2013 3:56 pm

The Culpeper County Board of Supervisors reversed itself Tuesday and pulled its support for a study for a proposed Fredericksburg bypass that would end in Orange County.

The decision was made, in large part, because the county received a letter last week from the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization asking the board to adopt a resolution committing to “funding for the study, design and construction of the new road.”

FAMPO has supported a different bypass, the Rappahannock Parkway, that would run from Interstate 95 and connect to State Route 3 in Spotsylvania County. That parkway was originally part of a bigger project known as the Rappahannock River Crossing, which was approved by state and federal transportation officials. There is still \$55 million in state and federal funds being spent to study other parts of the project—improvements to interchanges at U.S. 17 and Route 3 and collector-distributor roads along I-95 between those exits.

Last month, at the request of Spotsylvania County Supervisor David Ross, the Culpeper supervisors voted unanimously to endorse a study of an alternative to the Rappahannock Parkway backed by the Spotsylvania board. At that time, they made it clear that they would provide no funding for the study or the highway, about half of which would go through the eastern part of Culpeper County. Then came the letter asking for a financial commitment.

Money, however, was not the only reason the Culpeper supervisors went from a unanimous vote for a study to a unanimous vote against one. “Some people down [in the Richardsville area] are upset about it,” said Supervisor Bill Chase. “I see absolutely no benefit to Culpeper County and a big detriment.”

“A letter seeking financial support puts this in a whole different light,” said Supervisor Bradley Rosenberger.

“This makes me nervous,” added Chase. “We would have no control over it.”

The bypass also came up during the Stafford County Board of Supervisors meeting on Tuesday afternoon. The supervisors decided to put the bypass matter on the Oct. 15 agenda, where they will vote on whether to support further studies, and possible funding, of the option being pushed by Ross and a majority of his fellow supervisors.

At that meeting, the Stafford board also will determine what alternatives to send to the Virginia Department of Transportation.

VDOT was recently asked to study options to ease congestion problems along the Interstate 95 corridor in Fredericksburg.

The bypass option supported by Spotsylvania's board would start at Centreport Parkway in Stafford and be part of the proposed Berea Parkway. It would run to U.S. 17 near the University of Mary Washington satellite campus, cross the Rappahannock River and then parallel the Rapidan River on the western side to Route 3 near Lake of the Woods.

That 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.

Less than five miles of the proposed 10-mile-long bypass would be in Culpeper County and about two miles would be in Orange, where the bypass would tap back in to State Route 3 near State Route 20. No part of the bypass would be in Spotsylvania and there is no specific plan to link the road to I-95 south of Fredericksburg.

The option already in line for funds is the Rappahannock River Crossing, which includes improvements to the I-95 interchanges at U.S. 17 and Route 3. Collector-distributor roads and bridges also would run along the interstate between the exits.

That proposed project also includes the Rappahannock Parkway, a toll road that would start at the welcome center on I-95, run between Route 3 and the Rappahannock River and connect to Route 3 at Gordon Road.

The Spotsylvania supervisors objected to the parkway, and have since offered the bypass as an alternative.

Another option is the old outer connector proposal, which is similar to the Spotsylvania bypass route in Stafford, but would change drastically from there. It would actually run through Spotsylvania, tapping back in to Route 3 just west of Gordon Road.

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