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Framework for toll authority moves ahead

November 18, 2008 12:35 am

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If the Fredericksburg area wants to build a toll road bypassing State Route 3 traffic, it will have to take an administrative role in the project and create a local toll road authority.

An early framework for such an authority was endorsed in a vote last night by the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization board, which includes elected officials from Stafford, Spotsylvania and Fredericksburg.

Fredericksburg City Council endorsed the framework last week, and Virginia House Speaker Bill Howell is studying the document, said Lloyd Robinson, director of transportation planning at the George Washington Regional Commission.

FAMPO is studying whether the region can build a new interchange near the Virginia Welcome Center on Interstate 95. The interchange could connect to a toll road that would carry vehicles from the I-95 exit to Gordon Road. The toll road has been called the "Rappahannock Parkway" in FAMPO meetings.

If the region decides to build a tolled parkway, having an authority in place eliminates a barrier, said Fredericksburg City Councilman Matt Kelly and FAMPO board member.

"It's better to have this established," Kelly said.

According to the framework, the authority would be named the George Washington Toll Road Authority. Spotsylvania and Fredericksburg would appoint three members each to the authority's board from their elected officials. The Virginia Department of Transportation Commissioner or a designee would also be a voting member. After the authority has existed for one year, board members from local governments in Stafford, Caroline and King George could be added, with the board deciding the number of new members.

According to the framework, the authority's powers would include building and operating toll roads and non-tolled roads in areas represented on the board, and setting toll rates.

The suggested authority could receive funding, incur debt, allocate revenues, and enter into public-private agreements. It could acquire land through purchase, donation or condemnation.

The framework will be voted on next month by FAMPO board members in resolution form. If it passes, it will be forwarded to Fredericksburg area elected officials as part of FAMPO's legislative recommendations. A toll road authority must be approved by the Virginia General Assembly.

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