

# New interchange plan draws fire

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BY SCOTT SHENK

The conceptual design of a a new \$300 million interchange and parkway from Interstate 95 to State Route 3 in Spotsylvania County wasn't very popular at an information session Thursday night.

"This isn't going anywhere," said Stan Huie, who lives near where the parkway would go.

He and Spotsylvania Supervisor-elect David Ross think the project would be too expensive and have minimal impact.

"I drive this every day," said Ross, whose opposition to the interchange and parkway plan was a key part of his successful campaign against incumbent Jerry Logan in November's election. "I'm not really convinced this will answer the problem."

Ross said "not one" person he has talked to about the plan has liked it.

He and others got a chance Thursday to see the plans during a public information session held by the Virginia Department of Transportation. Several dozen people attended the two-hour event at Salem Church Library.

The public comment meeting was part of a study under way to determine what can be done to fix traffic problems along and around Interstate 95 between State Route 3 in Spotsylvania and U.S. 17 in Stafford.

Nicholas Nies, VDOT's project manager, said the agency will take into account what residents have to say, from comments last night as well as any sent to VDOT by Dec. 26. He said the conceptual design is flexible, and added that it is possible it may never come to fruition.

VDOT and the Federal Highway Administration are conducting the current study, which will take about a year.

The preferred solution at this point is the controversial interchange, which would put a new I-95 exit at the Welcome Center/rest area and connect to what would be called the Rappahannock Parkway.

The four- to six-lane parkway would be an express route from I-95 to Route 3 at Gordon Road, bypassing heavily congested parts of Route 3 around Central Park and Spotsylvania Towne Centre. There



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would be no traffic signals except at an intersection in Celebrate Virginia.

The parkway could require a toll, but would be free for high-occupancy vehicles.

The plan also includes connector roads that would run parallel to I-95 from U.S. 17 to the new parkway. Those roads would require the construction of two new bridges over the Rappahannock River next to the current I-95 bridges.

Last year, the George Washington Regional Commission and VDOT completed the I-95 Access Study, which identified problems along the Spotsylvania corridor and alternatives to fix them. The current concept was the preferred plan and was approved by federal authorities.

The study identified such alternatives as the rest-area interchange; improving the street system in the area; using transportation system management, such as traffic light coordination; and a “no-build” alternative, which includes no major changes.

Huie likes the idea of the connector roads, but said VDOT should extend them all the way down to Massaponax and add new exits at Harrison Road and Courthouse Road. The current plan isn't worth the trouble, he said, adding that he figures the project would cost \$500 million.

“It'll cost a half-billion dollars to save people a few minutes on Route 3,” he said. “The word I would use to describe this project is ‘lunacy.’”

Studies, including analysis of environmental impacts and cost, will continue throughout the next year. Another public hearing is planned for July.

The Commonwealth Transportation Board and the Federal Highway Administration would have to approve the project.