

Outer Connector plan still dead

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BY SCOTT SHENK

The old Outer Connector project will not be raised from the dead. At least not officially.

The Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization on Monday voted against spending \$5,000 to have a consultant present portions of the defunct connector project at next month's George Washington Toll Road Authority meeting.

The Outer Connector wasn't the only old project to come up during the FAMPO meeting.

The board also discussed the possibility of having a consultant prepare an updated study of a 10-year-old analysis of a Harrison Road interchange off Interstate 95. That would cost \$25,000.

All of the FAMPO members were against having either study done.

Instead, it was suggested that the Spotsylvania County Board of Supervisors look into the old studies to see if there are alternatives its members could support.

David Ross, Spotsylvania supervisor and FAMPO board member, agreed to take that approach.

Quintin Elliott, Virginia Department of Transportation's Fredericksburg District administrator, said the department has "boxes of information" on the connector project.

The idea of rehashing facets of the Outer Connector emerged recently as transportation and local elected officials struggle to find ways to fix area congestion after a proposed I-95 interchange and toll road project hit the skids.

The massive project aimed at fixing congestion problems along I-95, U.S. 17 and State Route 3 had been making its way through the planning process, but hit a snag after a new majority of the Spotsylvania supervisors voted against a parkway that would run through the county.

That move put the estimated \$300 million project in jeopardy because state and federal authorities would not fund it without local support.

The project calls for a new interchange at the welcome center and rest area and an improved interchange at U.S. 17 in Stafford.

Plans also include feeder roads along I-95 from U.S. 17 to the new rest area exit. Those roads would include a pair of two-lane bridges next to the existing bridges over the Rappahannock River.

The parkway portion of the project would connect to the new Fredericksburg exit, run through

Celebrate Virginia in the city, continue west between Route 3 and the Rappahannock River and tap back into Route 3 near Gordon Road.

Plans called for a possible toll on the parkway.

The project had been supported by local elected officials and the Federal Highway Administration.

The project is still on the books, but what, if anything, will happen with it is unclear.

Nearly a decade ago, the Outer Connector also had local support.

But in 2003, elected officials in Spotsylvania and Fredericksburg voted against it, essentially killing the project.

The connector would have started at the Stafford Regional Airport interchange near State Route 627, then looped west and south across U.S. 17 and the Rappahannock River into Spotsylvania, where it would have connected with State Route 3 near Andora Drive.

In another move Monday, FAMPO voted to amend the Fiscal Year 2012–2015 Transportation Improvement Program to include \$780 million for the massive project that will bring HOV/HOT lanes to Stafford.

VDOT and Fluor–Transurban struck a tentative deal this winter for the public–private project. The bulk of the project will be privately funded.

The project will add nine miles of high occupancy and tolled lanes along the median from Garrisonville to Route 234 in Dumfries, which is where the HOV lanes start.

Improvements to the existing HOV lanes will extend north to the Prince William Parkway. From there, one lane will be added to the existing two HOV lanes and run to the Edsall Road area in Fairfax.

Construction could begin this year, and the project is expected to take three years to complete, according to VDOT.

There are plans to eventually extend the HOV/HOT lanes to the Massaponax area of Spotsylvania.

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