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PROJECT MAY BE IMPETUS FOR NEW INTERCHANGE

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By KELLY HANNON

The arrival of a Kalahari water-park resort in Celebrate Virginia could act as a catalyst for a new Interstate 95 interchange near the Fredericksburg Welcome Center.

A toll road could connect to the interchange, acting as a State Route 3 bypass.

Fredericksburg Councilman Matt Kelly is confident that interstate access will be achieved near the Welcome Center.

"It's not whether it will happen, it's how best to do it," said Kelly, who chairs a regional transportation group, the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Kalahari will build a 125,000-square-foot indoor water park on 49 acres of Celebrate Virginia. The resort will have more than 700 guest rooms.

Kalahari's traffic potential will be part of an eight-month study of the interchange and toll road, which Kelly called the "Spotsylvania Greenway."

Kalahari "will be a traffic generator in and of itself, no question about it," said Lloyd Robinson, director of transportation planning at the George Washington Regional Commission in Fredericksburg. He is the project manager for the interchange and toll road study, although he is working closely with the Virginia Department of Transportation, he said.

The study's formal name is an Interchange Justification Report. The Federal Highway Administration requires one to be done before I-95 can be modified.

The federal agency wants to know how building an interchange with northbound and southbound access to Celebrate Virginia would impact traffic flow over the next 20 years.

Professional engineers will be hired to complete the study by fall 2008.

After the study is finished, VDOT will send it the Federal Highway Administration for review at the local, regional and national level.

There is no timeline on how long that could take, Robinson said.

"They will have a very rigorous review. They could take a little while or a year," Robinson said.

Kalahari is expected to open in December 2009.

Consultants to carry out the study were being interviewed yesterday, and Robinson said he expects to recommend a company to FAMPO's board on Monday. FAMPO is a committee of the George Washington Regional Commission.

The study will not cost more than \$400,000. The cost will be shared by VDOT, FAMPO and the Celebrate Virginia

Community Development Authority.

There is no cost estimate for the interchange and toll road, Robinson said.

Toll revenues could pay for the Spotsylvania Greenway, and the study will look at toll prices and what people would be willing to pay, Robinson said.

At the end of the study, "we can look at traditional sources of funds as well as a PPTA," he said, referring to public-private transportation projects.

No new road improvements were announced at a press conference yesterday for the Kalahari complex.

Two projects, already in the works, will widen the main access roads, Bragg Road and Fall Hill Avenue.

Bragg Road will be widened to four lanes from State Route 3 to Carl D. Silver Parkway. VDOT will advertise that project for construction in August 2008.

Fall Hill Avenue will be widened to four lanes from Carl D. Silver Parkway to the Rappahannock Canal, near the Virginia Outdoor Center. Mary Washington Boulevard will connect with Fall Hill Avenue near the canal. Sidewalks and bicycle paths would be added.

The cost could range from \$21 million to \$32 million, with state and federal funds paying 98 percent of the costs.

The Fredericksburg City Council will consider giving the Fall Hill project priority status at its Nov. 27 meeting.

Fredericksburg Councilwoman Debby Girvan said Virginia should support a new interchange near the Welcome Center.

"The state benefits from this as well as the region and the city, and it would behoove them to create that access," Girvan said.

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