

# Resolution divides I-95 project in two

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BY SCOTT SHENK

In an effort to keep the divisive Interstate 95 interchange project alive, the George Washington Toll Road Authority voted Monday to split the proposal into phases.

But not before some terse discussion in which the authority's three Spotsylvania County representatives again made clear their opposition to the parkway portion of the project.

The resolution allows the project to be divided into two phases.

Phase one, now called the I-95 Rappahannock River Crossing, will add new Interstate 95 feeder roads and bridges, and include improvements to the U.S. 17 interchange.

The second phase would include a new interchange at the Virginia Welcome Center and rest area, and a parkway that would stretch into Spotsylvania.

A decade likely will pass before any part of the proposed project is done.

The key to the resolution is that it allows the authority to keep \$14.8 million set aside for design and analysis of the entire project, including the proposed parkway.

That's where the problems began during Monday's meeting.

Spotsylvania Board of Supervisors and new authority members Tim McLaughlin and David Ross wondered why money and time would be spent on something—the parkway—that isn't going to be built. They also wanted to know how much of the funds would go to design and study on the parkway.

McLaughlin said the parkway option is outdated and won't fix the problems with State Route 3. Neither did he see how the first phase improvements would help traffic problems in Spotsylvania.

Cord Sterling, a member of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors and Commonwealth Transportation Board, and other authority members said the resolution would, at the very least, keep the first phase of the project on target to get done, without requiring that the parkway be built.

They also said it would provide further details on the parkway.

If the resolution didn't pass, Sterling said, "it will delay this significantly."

Paul Milde and Gary Snellings, Stafford's representatives on the toll road authority, supported the resolution because they said it will help with congestion on U.S. 17 and I-95.

Sterling also noted that if the resolution didn't pass, the project would be shifted to VDOT, which "is right now overtaxed" with work.

Quintin Elliott, VDOT's Fredericksburg District administrator, said such a move would indeed force VDOT to take on the proposal as well as cause significant delays.

McLaughlin and Ross emphasized the need to look for other options to fix the area's congestion problems.

Other authority members, as well as Sterling, said Spotsylvania officials should continue looking for those options to help fix Route 3's issues.

Sterling said if they find one, and it conforms to federal and state regulations, he would support it.

But he and the authority's other members said supporting the current resolution would ensure that one part of the problem can be fixed.

None of the Spotsylvania supervisors, including Paul Trampe, could be swayed.

"You have the votes," McLaughlin said. "Just pass it."

The authority did, passing the resolution by a 5-3 vote.

Ross and McLaughlin also voted against resolutions to allow the authority to negotiate contracts for lawyers and staff to work on the project. The resolutions passed.

After the meeting, McLaughlin said using the designated funds for the parkway portion of the project "is not good use of taxpayer money."

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