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## Richmond could help us break up traffic jams

February 18, 2009 12:36 am

ABILL to create a regional authority to manage toll roads in our area is coming before the state Senate Transportation Committee. HB2099, a brainchild of the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, has passed the House under the hand of Del. Bobby Orrock, R-Caroline. This measure spells relief for all of us.

The legislation would allow a newly created George Washington Region Toll Road Authority to acquire property, enter contracts, set tolls, receive grants, enter into public-private pacts, and more. The authority could also own and operate regional public transportation, provided localities agree. Note: It would have no power to levy new taxes.

We live in the fastest-growing region in Virginia. Over the last two years, FAMPO, made up of regional elected officials and mobility experts, has worked on a plan to better accommodate that growth. The result, HB2099, would allow Greater Fredericksburg--hear this--to achieve its long-range transportation goals.

FAMPO's 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan represents a vast improvement over past plans by including all types of transportation, land-use realities, a project schedule based on such criteria as safety and congestion mitigation, and a detailed needs assessment.

Yet the 2035 plan comes with two troubling facts. First, current regional-development plans will not handle future growth; second, funding from state and federal sources over the next 30 years will not meet minimal mobility needs.

Working both regionally and through local comprehensive-plan updates, we have begun to change land-use plans so as not to overwhelm infrastructure and other key services. But, even with these changes, funding surely will lag.

General Assembly leaders, it's no secret, are deadlocked philosophically about a transportation fix. The toll-road authority would be a proactive step to address this issue, of paramount importance to local residents.

The authority would allow our region to begin projects sooner rather than waiting years (or even decades) for funding from Washington or Richmond. Funding would come via user fees. Depending on the level and duration of the tolls, surplus funds could help finance other projects, such as bike trails, transit upgrades, and pedestrian-safety improvements.

### Breaking the Rt. 3 jam

A great boon of the toll-road authority would be construction of the long-proposed Interstate 95 access in the vicinity of the Fredericksburg Welcome Center, and a new toll facility extending from I-95 to State Route 3 around Gordon Road. This limited-access project aligns with "Alternative 5" of the old Outer Connector proposal--the one that protected the river and the battlefields.

In the late 1990s, this project was seen as the least invasive means of improving safety at the I-95 interchange at Route 3, as well as easing congestion on that road. The portion in Spotsylvania County now called the Rappahannock Parkway would have no access points between the county line and Gordon Road, and would allow commuters to avoid the busy



Creating the George Washington Region Toll Road Authority could be the first step in ameliorating traffic jams like this one on State Route 3.

Route 3 corridor.

This project would also improve that corridor, easing the way for patrons of Spotsylvania Towne Centre, Celebrate Virginia, Central Park, and other businesses. The result would be greater mobility without robbing schools, fire and police, and other crucial programs.

The new access and toll-road project is important because it will hugely benefit the entire region through traffic diversion, improved safety, and greater connectivity and access.

FAMPO is now completing the conceptual design and financing plan for this new project with Virginia Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration input. This spring, we will seek VDOT and federal concurrence to do the project's detailed design and environmental assessment.

The endeavor will cost \$200 million or more. The four sources that would pay that cost are (1) tolls, (2) federal grants, (3) contributions from community-development authorities (which stand to benefit), and (4) cost sharing for I-95 facility changes with VDOT and its HOT Lanes partners.

The George Washington Region Toll Road Authority is a very big step forward in the maturation of our region. Last week, HB2099 passed the House. Won't the Senate now help us help ourselves by voting to approve this crucial legislation?

Henry "Hap" Connors is chairman of the Spotsylvania Board of Supervisors, and Matthew Kelly represents Ward 3 on the Fredericksburg City Council. Both serve on the executive board of FAMPO.