

STAFFORD PITCHES ROADS

BY SCOTT SHENK / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Wednesday, October 16, 2013 4:29 pm

The Stafford County Board of Supervisors has proposed a detailed set of alternatives to address the congestion issues in the area's Interstate 95 corridor.

The Stafford proposal includes the Rappahannock River Crossing, with the controversial Rappahannock Parkway in Spotsylvania, as well as eastern and western outer connectors as alternatives.

The board also included the alternative bypass proposed by the Spotsylvania Board of Supervisors in its list of potential projects, but voted Tuesday against supporting it.

Instead, the board voted, 5-0, with Cord Sterling and Susan Stimpson abstaining, to support the Rappahannock River Crossing and outer connectors as alternatives for the Virginia Department of Transportation to consider.

"This is just a recommendation" for VDOT, said Sterling, who abstained because he serves on the Commonwealth Transportation Board, which determines funding for projects across the state.

The Fredericksburg City Council and the Spotsylvania supervisors have already given their pitches to VDOT.

The proposals have been made in an effort to end a long-running feud that started in January 2011 when a new majority of Spotsylvania supervisors swept into power and abruptly told Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization members they didn't want the Rappahannock Parkway running through the county.

In September, Virginia Secretary of Transportation Sean Connaughton asked VDOT to gather suggestions from Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania and Stafford officials after learning details of the long-running dispute at FAMPO, where meetings have regularly devolved into angry exchanges over the issue.

The Rappahannock Parkway was proposed as a toll road and was part of the Rappahannock River Crossing, a multiphase project aimed at improving traffic flow along the I-95 corridor in the Fredericksburg area. The crossing project includes additional bridges over the Rappahannock and parallel lanes along the interstate for traffic using local exits.

Led by David Ross, Spotsylvania supervisors pushed to have the parkway removed from the project. They say it would be too expensive and wouldn't do enough to fix State Route 3 congestion. They

also don't like the impact it would have on property owners along River Road.

The Stafford board's proposal includes the parkway as part of the river crossing project, but added an alternative that would end the parkway at the Spotsylvania–Fredericksburg line at River Road. The cost of the overall project, if done in full, has an estimated price tag of \$300 million.

The western outer connector alternative included in the Stafford proposal would be a 13-mile-long, four-lane, divided road. It would start at the Centreport Parkway I–95 interchange in Stafford. The first four miles of the outer connector would essentially be the proposed Berea Parkway, which would run to U.S. 17.

The connector would continue south from U.S. 17, cross the Rappahannock River into Spotsylvania and tie into Route 3 in the area of Gordon Road. The Stafford proposal estimates that the outer connector would cost \$431 million.

The eastern outer connector alternative, which dates back decades, would run from Centreport Parkway east to U.S. 17 in Spotsylvania. It would be about 10 miles long and cost an estimated \$350 million to \$400 million. It also would impact more properties—80 to 100—than the other alternatives.

The board also considered an alternative road that would connect Celebrate Virginia South off of U.S. 17 in Stafford to the Celebrate Virginia South and Central Park in Fredericksburg. The supervisors did not support that road because it wouldn't address regional congestion issues.

The Stafford supervisors also proposed alternatives to Spotsylvania's bypass project. The Stafford route follows the Berea Parkway proposal but would veer into Spotsylvania instead of going into Culpeper and Orange counties.

It would shorten Spotsylvania's 12-mile bypass, which the Stafford proposal estimates would cost \$450 million to \$550 million.

This alternative would cross U.S. 17 at Majestic Drive and run parallel to a power line. It would cross the Rappahannock River and connect to River Road in Spotsylvania. It would be a four-lane road about seven miles long. The estimated cost is \$240 million.

Stafford offered two bypass alternatives that continue south of Route 3 in Spotsylvania.

One would run to Catharpin Road and continue to Piney Branch, Brock Road and then Massaponax Church Road. From there it would head east to I–95 in the Massaponax area. The roads involved would have to be realigned and improved, and an interchange would have to be built at I–95.

The other option would veer southwest and connect with Brock Road at Route 3. It would run along Brock Road and Massaponax Church Road before tapping into I–95.

Those two options come with hefty price tags of between \$700 million and \$950 million.

Neither of those versions nor the Spotsylvania Bypass will be included in the alternatives Stafford sends to VDOT, though.

Stafford Supervisor Paul Milde has long been against the bypass proposed by Spotsylvania.

It is, he said during Tuesday's meeting, "the most expensive" option and has the "least amount of positive effect."

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Here are the initial proposals to ease area Interstate 95 congestion:

Rappahannock River Crossing: This \$300 million project calls for improvements to the U.S. 17 and State Route 3 interchanges and the addition of collector–distributor roads and bridges running parallel to Interstate 95 between the interchanges. That would include new northbound and southbound bridges next to the current Interstate 95 bridge over the Rappahannock.

These portions of the project are still in the planning and review phase, with \$55 million in funding.

Rappahannock River Parkway: Originally part of the Rappahannock River Crossing, this four- to six-lane tolled parkway would run from the Welcome Center at Interstate 95, go through Celebrate Virginia in the city and tie into Route 3 in Spotsylvania at Gordon Road. It would impact residents along River Road, which has been one of the key sticking points against the parkway.

Spotsylvania Bypass: This proposal by Spotsylvania supervisors is an alternative to a parkway they have opposed. It would run through Stafford, Culpeper and Orange, completely bypassing Spotsylvania. The bypass would start at the Centreport Parkway interchange in Stafford and would extend from the airport to U.S. 17. It would then run west through Stafford into Culpeper and Orange counties. The bypass would connect to State Route 3 near State Route 20 in the Wilderness area of Orange. The route would cross both the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers.