

# Spotsy bypass returns, without the toll

**BY SCOTT SHENK / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Thursday, December 12, 2013 9:16 am**

The concept for a tolled bypass around the busiest part of State Route 3 came out in the summer of 2010 as part of an estimated \$300 million project.

The parkway was only one facet of the massive project, now known as the Rappahannock River Crossing, but it became the most controversial.

Eventually, after much wrangling by area transportation officials, the parkway was removed from the plans.

Now, though, it's back in play. But not as a toll road.

Cord Sterling, Stafford County supervisor and Commonwealth Transportation Board member, said he is moving forward with a "non-tolled facility" being part of the project.

The parkway recently was added back after a Virginia Department of Transportation study included it as part of the top suggestion to fix the area's Interstate 95 corridor congestion problem.

The idea of using a toll to fund construction of the parkway was not included in the study, and it wasn't even mentioned during the Dec. 4 CTB meeting, where VDOT gave its presentation.

As planned, the parkway would start at a new I-95 interchange at the Virginia Welcome Center, run west between the Rappahannock River and Route 3, and connect to Route 3 around Gordon Road in Spotsylvania County.

The planning process for the river crossing project has been difficult.

Initially, the project, including the parkway aspect, had garnered approvals from the feds and VDOT. It was also supported by the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization.

But things changed in January 2011, when a new majority of Spotsylvania supervisors challenged the parkway because of concerns over the impact on property owners, cost, effectiveness and the toll aspect. It was eventually shelved, along with the George Washington Toll Road Authority, which was created in 2009, as part of the parkway plans.

Spotsylvania officials, led by Supervisor David Ross, have offered alternatives to the parkway, but none was picked by VDOT.

Ross represents the district where the parkway would run. Residents along River Road, in the area of the proposed bypass route, have spoken against it.

The CTB confirmed that the parkway is back in play by voting at the Dec. 4 meeting to fork over \$250,000 for studies and engineering work.

It will take a lot more than that to pay for the project.

The entire river crossing project has an estimated price tag of \$476 million. The parkway's estimated cost is \$284 million.

Sterling said the Rappahannock River Crossing is the area's top unfunded road project, so he plans to secure money in the state's next Six-Year Improvement Plan.

"The recent transportation bill provides more funding in the future so we can solve more problems now," he wrote in an email.

The state's most recent six-year plan spiked to \$15.7 billion, a 38 percent increase over the previous one.

There are no final plans in place for the river crossing project. It needs to be approved by FAMPO and get funding through the CTB. But a majority of FAMPO's policy committee has endorsed the project in the past and appears set to do so again.

FAMPO likely will vote on the project at its January meeting.

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