

Spotsy leaders criticize Kelly

BY SCOTT SHENK / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Wednesday, October 9, 2013 6:30 pm

The Spotsylvania bypass battle continues.

The most recent salvo was fired by two Spotsylvania County supervisors, who are crying foul over a letter that led one county to reverse its support for a study of the bypass.

David Ross, Spotsylvania supervisor and Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization policy board member, called the letter a “back door” move and “dirty politics.”

The letter, sent by FAMPO Chairman Matt Kelly, asked the boards of supervisors in Orange and Culpeper counties whether they would put money behind their recent resolutions approving further study of a bypass proposed by Spotsylvania.

The bypass is an alternative to the Rappahannock Parkway, which was originally part of the estimated \$300 million Rappahannock River Crossing project. Spotsylvania supervisors oppose the parkway, saying it would negatively impact residents in the River Road area and that it wouldn't fix State Route 3 congestion problems.

The FAMPO board has been locked in a contentious battle over the issue for nearly two years. And now the state has gotten involved, asking the Virginia Department of Transportation to determine the best solution for the I-95 corridor gridlock problem.

Cord Sterling, Stafford County supervisor and Commonwealth Transportation Board member, sent an email earlier this month to area officials suggesting that they “stand down” on the issue while VDOT gathers suggestions from the involved localities.

It didn't work. A day after the email, the Spotsylvania supervisors voiced their complaints about Kelly's letter.

It didn't take long for Culpeper to respond to that letter. On Oct. 1, the supervisors unanimously voted against the study, citing the potential cost of the project and concerns from residents possibly affected by the road.

Orange supervisors, who supported studies but not financial support, reiterated that position at their Tuesday Oct. 8 meeting.

Kelly's letter includes background about how the impasse came to be and points out that FAMPO traffic models found that the Spotsylvania bypass “does poorly at alleviating congestion, although it would cost a considerable amount of money, in the range of \$400 million or more.”

Kelly ends the letter by asking if the supervisors would be willing to help fund the “study, design and construction of this new roadway, and if your county is willing to adopt a Resolution pledging this financial support.”

In emails and interviews Ross and fellow Spotsylvania Supervisor Paul Trampe criticized Kelly’s letter as an attempt to kill their proposal.

Kelly, they said, overstepped his authority in sending the letter without seeking FAMPO approval.

In an email, Trampe says the letter is “an attempt to persuade those jurisdictions to oppose the Spotsylvania plan.”

He and Ross added that the letter misrepresented the Spotsylvania board’s stance by saying it voted against the Rappahannock River Crossing. The board voted against the parkway portion of that overall project.

They also contend that the FAMPO modeling figures are skewed against their bypass.

Kelly said the letter was straightforward and “stated FAMPO policy.”

FAMPO initially approved the Rappahannock River Crossing project, which included the parkway. The Federal Highway Administration also approved the plan, and the Commonwealth Transportation Board set aside millions for further studies and design.

Kelly said the problem more likely is that Ross and Trampe “probably didn’t like the answer” from Culpeper.

Paul Milde, Stafford supervisor and FAMPO policy board member, did not talk to Kelly about the letter, but has no problem with it.

“Matt knew where the board stood on this,” he said.

Milde said he still wants to see Spotsylvania officials come up with a solution they’re comfortable with, but it has to be a “viable solution. So far, I haven’t seen a viable solution.”

He added, “The majority of FAMPO doesn’t see the logic of running a parkway one-way into the country.”

FAMPO administrator Lloyd Robinson said he spoke with Kelly about the letter and has no problem with it, saying it states FAMPO’s policy and that it includes findings from traffic modeling.

He lamented that the issue has driven a wedge into the FAMPO board, adding that he thinks Spotsylvania’s members have challenged the transportation board’s process.

“I am not on anybody’s side,” he said, “but I am on the side of facts.”

He believes the facts support the original Rappahannock River Crossing project.

The issue is all but assured to come up again at the next FAMPO policy board meeting on Oct. 21. The board has invited state legislators to attend that meeting, slated to be held at the downtown Courtyard by Marriott.

PROPOSALS AT A GLANCE

Here are summaries of the highway projects aimed at relieving traffic on Interstate 95 and highways near interstate exits in the Fredericksburg area.

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 running parallel to Interstate 95 between the interchanges. The C–D roads to separate local and through traffic would include new northbound and southbound bridges next to the current I–95 bridge over the Rappahannock.

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

Rappahannock River Parkway: Originally part of the Rappahannock River Crossing project, this four-to six-lane parkway would run from the Welcome Center at I–95, go through Celebrate Virginia in Fredericksburg and tie into Route 3 in Spotsylvania at Gordon Road. It was initially proposed as a toll road. It would impact residents along River Road, which has been one of the key sticking points against the parkway.

Spotsylvania Bypass: Proposed this year by a majority of Spotsylvania supervisors, the project is an alternative to the Rappahannock Parkway, which they have opposed. It would run through Stafford, Culpeper and Orange counties while completely bypassing Spotsylvania. The bypass would start at the Centreport Parkway interchange in Stafford. It would incorporate the proposed Berea Parkway, which would extend from the Stafford Regional 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 Route 20 in the Wilderness area of Orange. The route would cross both the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers.

Staff reporter Dan McFarland contributed to this story.

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