

Spotsy sends VDOT plans

**BY SCOTT SHENK / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Wednesday, September 25, 2013
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Spotsylvania County supervisors have responded quickly to a request by the state's transportation leader seeking a resolution to a long-running regional transportation battle.

During a Commonwealth Transportation Board meeting last week in Fredericksburg, Virginia's Secretary of Transportation heard about problems revolving around the Rappahannock River Crossing, a \$300 million project aimed at improving congestion along the local Interstate 95 corridor.

Secretary Sean Connaughton asked the Virginia Department of Transportation to gather relevant information and recommend the best solution to the CTB.

The Spotsylvania Board of Supervisors added to the debate on Tuesday, approving a resolution with recommendations compiled by Supervisor David Ross. He has expressed concerns over the state deciding what to build to ease congestion in the Fredericksburg area.

Spotsylvania's recommendations include construction of:

A bypass that would run from central Stafford County to eastern Orange County. It would start at Centreport Parkway and run to U.S. 17. From there it would run through Culpeper and tie in to State Route 3 near Route 20 in Orange. The bypass would cross the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers.

Collector-distributor roads along I-95 between the Route 3 and Massaponax exits. These local-traffic lanes alongside the interstate would extend from the additional lanes proposed as part of the Rappahannock Crossing project, which would start north of the U.S. 17 Falmouth exit and stretch south of the State Route 3 exit.

An I-95 off-ramp onto westbound Harrison Road in Spotsylvania, with a flyover ramp onto northbound I-95 to avoid impacting private property.

And an I-95 off-ramp at State Route 208, Courthouse Road.

A much-maligned toll road section of the Rappahannock River Crossing that would parallel congested Route 3 has been a hot-button issue for years. The project has the support of elected officials in Fredericksburg and Stafford, but has proven controversial in Spotsylvania.

In January 2012, a new majority on the Spotsylvania Board of Supervisors nixed the parkway, which would start at the Virginia Welcome Center on I-95, run between Route 3 and the Rappahannock River and tie into Route 3 at Gordon Road.

There have been endless debates among area officials since then.

Ross presented Spotsylvania's bypass alternative to FAMPO, the regional transportation planning group, earlier this year.

The Spotsylvania supervisors support it. County officials, including Ross, have presented the plan to Stafford, Orange and Culpeper officials.

Orange and Culpeper supervisors said they supported further study, but have not committed any money to the plan.

Stafford supervisors have not voted on the proposal.

Stafford and Fredericksburg representatives on FAMPO have been critical of the plan, saying it goes too far west and that it completely avoids Spotsylvania.

Matt Kelly, Fredericksburg councilman and FAMPO policy board chairman, said the Spotsylvania recommendations show "a general lack of understanding of what is required in putting any type of project together." He said federal highway officials don't just approve ramps off the interstate simply because a locality wants them. It takes expensive and time-consuming justification studies that show that such changes won't make congestion worse on the interstate.

Kelly said on Wednesday that he doesn't agree with all state and federal transportation regulations. "But," he said, "you've got to know the rules of the game."

Cord Sterling, a Stafford supervisor and CTB member, also has been critical of the plan, but has said that Spotsylvania can pursue an alternative to the Rappahannock River Crossing parkway.

Sterling has touted the importance of the other portions of the Rappahannock River Crossing—U.S. 17 and Route 3 interchange improvements, additional bridges and parallel roads along I-95 for local traffic.

At the CTB meeting last week, Connaughton echoed that sentiment, stressing the importance of finding a solutions to the bottleneck congestion where the interstate crosses the Rappahannock River.

"This has gone from being an issue of local concern to one of statewide concern," Connaughton said. The area's I-95 chokepoints are "causing major problems."

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