

Spotsy to address traffic issues

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THE FREE LANCE-STAR

The new majority on the Spotsylvania County Board of Supervisors acknowledges that they need to do some thing to relieve traffic on State Route 3.

But they recently passed a resolution opposing a toll road at a new Interstate 95 interchange—a proposal others think is the only viable solution. It would've stretched from the Virginia Welcome Center and rest area in Fredericksburg to Gordon Road near the Harrison Crossing shopping center in Spotsylvania.

“It was a very quick decision made by people that didn't have all the information and hadn't really thought it out,” said Supervisor Gary Skinner, who has served on the board since 2008 and opposed the resolution to drop the project. “I think when everything's looked at again, we're going to go, OK, what do we do?”

Skinner said he thinks the new supervisors have neglected many Spotsylvanians to appease those who owned property in the toll road's path.

Supervisors Paul Trampe, Timothy McLaughlin, David Ross and Ann Heidig, who were elected on a conservative platform in November, disagree.

They say it wouldn't be cost effective to spend \$300 million on a toll road that would shave less than 10 minutes from a commute.

“At the end of the day, I just didn't think you were going to get enough people willing to pay the toll for that minor ding in time in order to significantly reduce traffic” on Route 3, Trampe said.

Trampe, Ross and McLaughlin—all commuters—were appointed this month to the George Washington Toll Road Authority.

They've suggested several potential ways to relieve traffic on Route 3, including better synchronization of the road's traffic lights and an “off-ramp,” or partial interchange, at I-95 and Harrison Road.

The Federal Highway Administration requires studies to justify new interchanges, which are rarely approved. The studies must address numerous policy requirements, including that the interchanges

are needed for regional and not just local traffic needs.

ROUTE 3 LIGHTS

Ross said he drives Route 3 every day and isn't convinced the timing of its stop lights is optimal.

"It could be as simple as that," he said. "Who knows?"

Over the next month, the Virginia Department of Transportation will install a new signal timing pattern on Route 3 west from the I-95 exit at Central Park to Chewing Lane and Rutherford Drive in Spotsylvania.

VDOT spokeswoman Kelly Hannon said in an email that the department will analyze traffic data before and after the pattern is implemented to see if it improves travel times. Officials will share the results with the public.

The new coordination will have five timing schedules: Morning peak, midday, afternoon peak, off-peak and weekend, Hannon said.

During the afternoon peak, lights will be timed to reflect that the largest number of vehicles are traveling west bound on Route 3. Motorists entering the road from a side street may find that their waits are slightly longer at peak times, Hannon said.

"For drivers traveling at the speed limit, the goal is to move through as many intersections as possible without a stop," she wrote in an email.

HARRISON ROAD

The Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization is studying the possibility for a new I-95 interchange in Spotsylvania between Exit 118 at

Thornburg and Exit 126 at Massaponax.

McLaughlin described an I-95 exit onto Harrison Road as the least expensive, quickest way to reduce Route 3 traffic. But that wouldn't fall under FAMPO's study.

Skinner said he doesn't think the Federal Highway Administration would allow

I-95 access to Harrison Road.

"There's a lot more to it than just putting an exit at 95," he said.

Skinner noted that there are two interchanges nearby at Route 3 and U.S. 1 at Massaponax. Plus, he said. Harrison Road would need to be widened.

VDOT doesn't have any plans to widen Harrison Road. It is working on a \$13.5 million intersection

improvement at U.S. 1 and Harrison Road.

The project does not yet have a construction schedule.

NO CLEAR SOLUTION

Spotsylvania Supervisor Benjamin Pitts, who is in his 13th year on the board, said in an email that the resolution against the toll road “offered no opportunity for compromise.”

Spotsylvania, he says, seems to be developing a record of starting projects only to back out of them. “I would think that the people with the purse strings would look very negatively upon such actions,” he said.

Still, he said he’s looking forward to hearing the new supervisors’ proposals to reduce traffic congestion on Route 3.

Heidig said supervisors are looking for “what makes the most sense for the most reasonable cost.”

“Clearly, if there was an easy solution it would’ve been done by now,” she said.

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