

Supervisor has idea for bypass

BY SCOTT SHENK / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Friday, June 28, 2013 2:40 pm

Spotsylvania Supervisor David Ross has stood his ground during a year-plus tussle with area officials over his stance against the county's portion of the \$300 million Rappahannock River Crossing project.

The project is aimed at easing congestion along the area's Interstate 95 corridor around U.S. 17 in Stafford and State Route 3 at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania.

It includes interchange expansions and additional bridges over the Rappahannock. It also had a controversial toll road paralleling Route 3 in Spotsylvania.

Time and again, area officials have asked Ross to come up with another plan.

In May, Ross did that at a Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting.

That night, he unveiled to the regional transportation group a map with a bypass that would start at Centreport Parkway interchange in Stafford County. It would incorporate the Berea Parkway, which would extend from the airport to U.S. 17. Ross' bypass would then run west through Stafford into Culpeper and Orange counties, where it would connect to Route 3 near Wilderness.

The route would cross both the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers.

Most FAMPO members have been critical of Ross' plan, saying it extends too far west and doesn't do anything for I-95 traffic, or for congested sections of Route 3.

They have said there needs to be a southern link of the road that ties back into I-95. And, the FAMPO members have noted, the bypass proposed by Ross completely avoids Spotsylvania.

Matt Kelly, Fredericksburg city councilman and FAMPO member, said the group and the other localities are willing to work with Ross. But he added that Ross' proposal isn't a regional solution, which is what the Rappahannock River Crossing project is supposed to be.

"What he's proposed is a driveway to Lake of the Woods, but it's not doing anything for us," Kelly said



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Under a previous proposal for a Rappahannock River Crossing, traffic on southbound I-95 would have entered a new parkway at the Welcome Center in Fredericksburg.

in a recent interview.

The original Rappahannock River Crossing project included a parkway that would run from a new interchange at the Virginia Welcome Center on I-95 and connect to Route 3 near Gordon Road. The parkway had been proposed as a toll road prior to the legislature's passage this year of a transportation funding bill.

And the parkway would impact residents along River Road, and areas on the north side of Route 3—part of Ross' Courtland district.

Ross has said no one he has talked to in Spotsylvania likes the parkway. And he has argued that it would not help enough with Route 3 congestion.

Many FAMPO meetings during the past year have been consumed with heated arguments over Ross' stance.

The parkway portion of the project has been shelved, along with the George Washington Toll Road Authority, which was created to oversee the parkway.

In the meantime, the other parts of the project—interchange improvements at U.S. 17 in Stafford and State Route 3 in Fredericksburg, along with feeder roads running along I-95 between those exits—recently received \$55 million in funding for further planning and reviews.

Even with lingering doubts about Ross' plan, Cord Sterling, a Stafford supervisor and member of the Commonwealth Transportation Board, has outlined the steps Ross needs to take to move the alternative project forward.

At the top of the list, Sterling said that Ross must present the plan to Culpeper and Orange officials.

“Moving forward without their formal backing of the concept (and participation in the process) would be a waste of time and resources,” Sterling wrote in a recent email.

And Ross appears to be ready to present his plan.

“It seems like a step in the right direction,” he said during a recent interview.

Ross said he had help laying out the alternate proposal from Orange County supervisor Jim White and state Sen. Bryce Reeves, R-Spotsylvania.

Reeves could not be reached for comment.

White said it is too early in the process to say whether the new plan is better. But he noted that existing commercial and residential development, the Motts Run Reservoir and the Chancellorsville and Wilderness battlefields will make building the original bypass difficult.

“At this point, I can't tell you whether it is something I would support or not support, because it is too

early,” White said of the proposed Stafford-to-Orange route. “But I could see why someone would look at this and say, ‘That probably makes some sense.’”

Ross doesn’t think his proposed bypass goes too far west, and he believes there would be a better route to connect back to I-95 from the State Route 20 area than from Gordon Road.

He said there is “nothing in detail” yet for a second phase of his proposed bypass. But he indicated that the bypass could tie back into I-95 in the Thornburg area.

If the other local governments approve Ross’ plan, then there would need to be feasibility studies, Sterling wrote in an email. He added that the studies would have to be paid for by Stafford and Spotsylvania.

With backing from localities and FAMPO, the plan would be in a position to compete for funding with other regional transportation projects. Then, maybe it would be put in the state’s six-year transportation plan.

Meanwhile, the other portions of the Rappahannock River Crossing project are moving along.

Ross has suggested that that project should be put on the back burner while he pursues his plan.

In an email to FAMPO members, Sterling wrote that Ross and others who support his plan should explain to those who use I-95 that, “You are looking out for their interests with more studies rather than more upgrades.”

“I am sure they will appreciate more studies and they can read them while sitting in traffic,” he added.

The string of emails also indicates that Ross faces some opposition to his approach some fellow members of the Spotsylvania board.

Supervisor Benjamin Pitts sent an email to fellow Supervisor Gary Skinner complaining that the board hasn’t even discussed Ross’ proposal.

“I once again find it very interesting that we are talking about the process for moving a transportation project forward by contacting the ‘other jurisdictions’ that may be involved in the proposal when in fact Spotsylvania County hasn’t even given its official support for the proposal or to begin the process to move the proposal forward,” Pitts wrote. “It appears that we are putting the cart before the horse.”

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