

Spotsylvania moving forward on 'super ramp' project

BY JEFF BRANSCOME / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Tuesday, March 11, 2014 8:03 pm

Spotsylvania County is setting the stage for substantial improvements to the congested Interstate 95 exit at Massaponax, though construction won't start anytime soon.

The Board of Supervisors on Tuesday voted 6-0 to allocate up to \$200,000 for a federally mandated report on a proposed \$45 to \$58 million "super ramp" that would travel from the Massaponax exit at southbound I-95 to the U.S. 17 Bypass. Proposed upgrades at southbound exit 126 also include a ramp to Southpoint Parkway and left-turn lanes onto northbound U.S. 1.

Supervisor Gary Skinner, who has expressed support for the super ramp, was absent from Tuesday's meeting.

County Administrator Doug Barnes said he will formally request that the project be put onto the Virginia Department of Transportation's six-year plan. The super ramp is currently unfunded.

The federally mandated report that the county voted to pursue will take about one year for VDOT to complete. The document will describe to the Federal Highway Administration how the super ramp will affect traffic flow.

If the proposal receives federal approval, the county will have to acquire right of way and hire a contractor to design the project—a process that could take five years. The super ramp would take three years to build, according to VDOT, which first proposed the project in January.

The Massaponax I-95 interchange has been a problem for years. During the afternoon rush hour, vehicles queue up in the right lane of southbound I-95, waiting to get off the highway onto U.S. 1. Still, the Board of Supervisors in the past year has approved almost 2,000 housing units—more than half of which are apartments—near Cosner's Corner in Massaponax, and other developments have been proposed nearby.



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Southbound traffic exits Interstate 95 at Massaponax. A proposed 'super ramp' would carry traffic from 95 to the U.S. 17 Bypass.

The supervisors on Tuesday also gave the go-ahead for preliminary engineering of a new, four-lane bridge over I-95 at the U.S. 17 Bypass. A stretch of the bypass from the bridge to Hospital Drive would also be widened to four lanes.

The cost of engineering alone for the work at the U.S. 17 Bypass is projected to be up to \$2.75 million. The total, including construction, could be \$19 million.

The county hopes VDOT will foot half of that bill through its revenue-sharing program.

Spotsylvania and VDOT are also moving forward on proposed roundabouts and other work at the Thornburg I-95 exit near the planned Dominion Raceway, which is scheduled to open in early 2015.

That includes widening the Mudd Tavern Road bridge over I-95, which is expected to cost about \$8 million. VDOT expects to advertise bids for that project, which is almost fully funded, in the spring of next year.

Barnes, the county administrator, has recommended that the county borrow a total of \$20 million over the next two fiscal years for work at the Thornburg and Massaponax I-95 exits.

In other business, supervisors voted 6-0 to direct county staff and the Historic Preservation Commission to solicit bids for a proposal to expand a mural depicting Spotsylvania's history. Supervisors have received complaints in recent years that the mural in the Holbert Building's meeting room lacks diversity.

A Historic Preservation Commission subcommittee has recommended adding panels that depict prominent local African-Americans and Native Americans.

Supervisors, some of whom expressed concern about paying for the mural with taxpayer dollars, will discuss funding scenarios after the county receives bids for the work. Supervisor Greg Cebula said he supports the idea but thinks it should be paid for through donations. Meanwhile, Supervisor Paul Trampe said he's in favor of allocating money from reserves. He says he's heard the cost will be from \$2,000 to \$5,000.

The mural includes images of 19th-century navigator Matthew Fontaine Maury, Gen. Robert E. Lee and Gov. Alexander Spotswood, Spotsylvania's namesake. The late Sidney King, who painted the piece, later added a small image of John J. Wright, who founded the first high school for the county's black students.

Supervisor Chris Yakabouski said the county should find out how much it will cost to expand the mural and go from there. "We do have a very rich history, a very diverse history, and we need to encapsulate that in a way that we don't lose it," he said.

Jeff Branscome: 540/374-5402

jbranscome@freelancestar.com

