

# **TRANSPORTATION: Projects vie for state dollars**

**BY SCOTT SHENK / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Wednesday, December 18, 2013  
4:56 pm**

In recent times, most transportation planning for the Fredericksburg area has focused on areas north of Massaponax.

The Rappahannock River Crossing, the Outer Connector, Interstate 95 express lanes, the Falmouth intersection—all are big, expensive projects, either under construction or in the planning phases with at least some funding. All are north, and west, of the busy State Route 3 corridor.

But there's another major highway plan that has largely flown under the radar: Spotsylvania County's Jackson Gateway project.

While the project is important to the Spotsylvania Board of Supervisors, it might be put off for years because of recent decisions by state and regional transportation officials.

The gateway project aims to relieve traffic problems in the Massaponax area, where I-95 and U.S. 1 around Spotsylvania exit 126 often become congested during the daily commuter rush.

Fixing the mess and handling future traffic growth would cost an estimated \$400 million to \$500 million.

State transportation officials began the studies in 2008. So far that has cost more than \$550,000.

Studies for the project are nearing completion, with a preferred alternative that could soon be sent off for local, state and federal approval.

That doesn't mean the project is anywhere near to actually happening, though.

Gaining approval of such plans is one part of a long, slow process.

And now the project has an issue that could keep it on the back burner for quite some time. Jackson Gateway appears to be lagging behind at least two other major area road projects:

The Rappahannock River Crossing is at the top of the list. And a revitalized version of the old Outer Connector, a western bypass around Fredericksburg through Stafford and Spotsylvania, seems to have leapfrogged the gateway project in the eyes of state and local transportation officials.

The Virginia Department of Transportation earlier this month chose both projects as the best solutions to alleviate congestion along the I-95 corridor. VDOT presented its findings at the Commonwealth Transportation Board's Dec. 4 meeting in Richmond.

CTB members expressed interest in funding both of those projects, which combined could cost more

than \$800 million.

Cord Sterling, a CTB member and Stafford County supervisor, said the meeting earlier this month may have changed things for Jackson Gateway.

“Given the discussion, although no formal ranking was done regarding Jackson Gateway vs. a second [river] crossing, I would say that the Rappahannock River Crossing and the Outer Connector are of a higher priority—but there needs to be more discussion on that before I can say it is truly the case,” Sterling wrote in an email.

The Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, he added, “will need to do some work identifying the community position on an Outer Connector alignment, and then determine where it stands vs. Jackson Gateway before I can say what the state position is.”

Spotsylvania Supervisor Gary Skinner acknowledged that the Jackson Gateway project sustained a “setback” as a result of the recent VDOT report.

“It doesn’t lessen the Jackson Gateway,” Skinner said of the county’s interest in the project. He added that there could be revisions to the plans and that the supervisors are going to have to set “transportation priorities.”

Spotsylvania officials see the Massaponax area of the county as prime development space and the Jackson Gateway as a way to help traffic as future growth happens.

Spotsylvania’s comprehensive plan says the southern area of Spotsylvania along U.S. 1 and I-95 “is envisioned to be an economic driver.” Already there is the recently approved Dominion Raceway in Thornburg. And officials expect the racetrack to spawn growth around it.

David Whyte of Kimley–Horn and Associates, the consultant handling the Jackson Gateway study, said the Massaponax area “certainly needs work now.”

But he noted that it would likely be more than a decade before anything would be done.

If the project eventually gets off the ground, it could be done in phases, which is the suggestion in the most recent plans.

The Jackson Gateway study could be complete and ready for consideration by FAMPO in January.

[fampo.gwregion.org/transportation-studies/i-95-jackson-gateway-access-study/](http://fampo.gwregion.org/transportation-studies/i-95-jackson-gateway-access-study/)

Scott Shenk: 540/374-5436

[sshenk@freelancestar.com](mailto:sshenk@freelancestar.com)

## **Jackson Gateway Plan**

Studies on the Jackson Gateway, a project aimed at improving the corridor through the

Massaponax area, began in 2008.

There have been plenty of designs in that five-year span, including plans to widen U.S. 1. At one point, there was even consideration of running extra U.S. 1 lanes over the Interstate 95 bridge, but that idea didn't last long.

At this point, the plans primarily call for adding collector–distributor roads along I–95 for local traffic and improvements to exit 126. As part of the plan, the Courthouse Road bridge over I–95 would have to be rebuilt.

There also are several options for new interchanges connecting the C–D roads to different locations around the Massaponax area:

One alternative has an I–95 C–D road exit ramp connecting to the Southpoint Parkway.

Another option would add an exit ramp at the Spotsylvania County Parkway. This would include rebuilding the parkway bridge over I–95.

A third option would have a northbound ramp connecting to U.S. 17, which would include rebuilding the bridge over the interstate.

—**Scott Shenk**