

Rappahannock River Crossing makes transportation projects cut

BY SCOTT SHENK/THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Wednesday, January 20, 2016 12:00 am

Nineteen local projects, including the southbound portion of the Rappahannock River Crossing, made the first cut of transportation projects to be funded under a new statewide prioritization program.

The crossing, which would add collector–distributor lanes along Interstate 95 from U.S. 17 in southern Stafford County to State Route 3 in Fredericksburg, was the biggest of the local projects on the list unveiled Tuesday. It alone accounts for \$115.5 million of the \$204 million in suggested HB2 funding for the Fredericksburg District, which covers 14 counties.

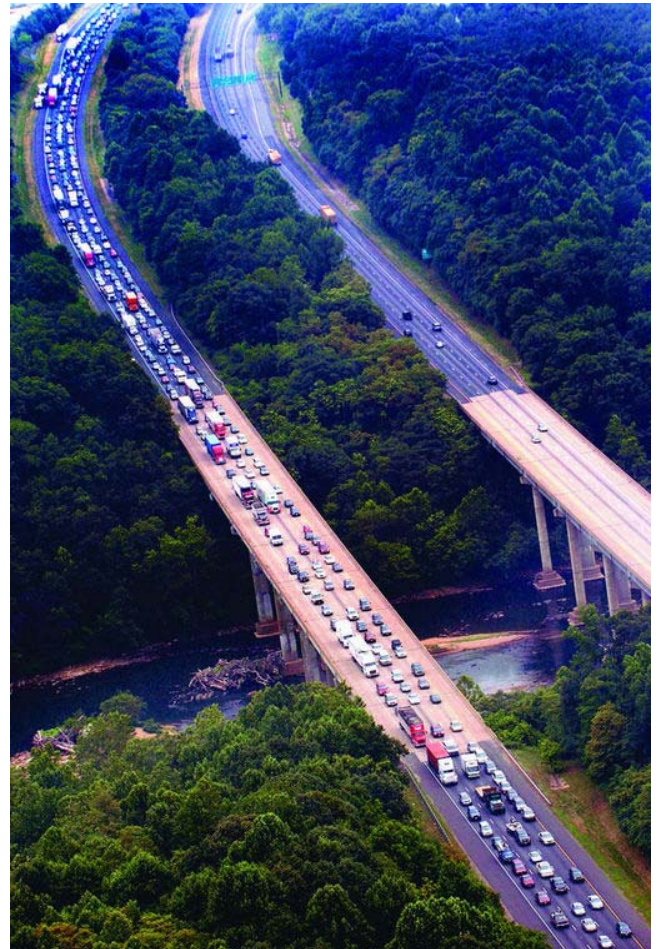
The northbound portion of the crossing project was submitted, but not recommended for funding.

Other local projects that were recommended include a new commuter lot and new U.S. 17 bridge over I–95 in Spotsylvania County and upgrades to Mud Tavern Road, widening of Ladysmith Road in Caroline County, and an expanded commuter lot and other improvements in the Stafford Courthouse area.

The Commonwealth Transportation Board, which heard a presentation on the prioritization program scores on Tuesday, will finalize the first round of prioritization funding in June.

Between now and then, much about the list of projects could change. More than 287 projects statewide are vying for a total of \$1.7 billion in funding in the prioritization program. While the program scores projects according to set criteria, the CTB can choose whichever projects it wants to fund.

Officials say the program will help fund the best projects, improve transparency and take some of the



STATE BACKS CROSSING

The Rappahannock River Crossing project is aimed at easing Interstate 95 traffic.

political gamesmanship out of the process.

The program's funding increased by about \$500,000 because of better-than-expected revenue projections for the 2017–2022 six-year plan.

The CTB will also approve the six-year plan at its June meeting. The current total for the six-year plan, which includes maintenance and debt service, is almost \$35 billion.

There were 22 Fredericksburg-area projects submitted for scoring in the prioritization program. All but three made Tuesday's list.

"I'm happy with the first cut," said Hap Connors, the area's CTB representative.

Matt Kelly, a Fredericksburg councilman who sits on the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee, said the ranking system is confusing and no one seems to be able to explain it.

CTB members asked a lot of questions during Tuesday's presentation, and there seemed to be general confusion and some skepticism about the scoring process and how projects were selected.

Virginia Secretary of Transportation Aubrey Layne reiterated that the program is "data driven" and "analytics"-based and will change for the better how projects are approved.

Connors agreed that there has been some confusion about the rankings so far, but added that the details can be hashed out over the next five months.

"The bottom line is, we got 19 of 22 projects" on the list, Connors said.