

Virginia to extend I-95 Express Lanes in both directions, including in Stafford County

SCOTT SHENK/THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Tuesday, November 24, 2015 10:44 am

Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe returned from a trip to the Middle East and started off Tuesday morning with transportation news: His official stamp of approval for turning the Interstate 395 HOV lanes into express lanes, and the merge extension for the express lanes on Interstate 95 in Stafford County.

McAuliffe didn't go into great detail, but said on his regular appearance on WTOB radio that work on the merge project should start next year and will help improve the “bottleneck” he described as “just a total congestion mess.”

The tolled lanes have been open since December. And while they’ve improved the commute north of Fredericksburg, congestion issues have arisen in the area of the merge at Garrisonville.

Local officials have been pushing the state to fix the problem.

The Virginia Department of Transportation’s plan would extend the left-side ramp for northbound express lanes traffic while adding a left-side ramp for southbound express-lanes traffic to use as a merge back onto I-95’s main lanes. The changes will move the merge south nearly to the Courthouse Road exit.

Transurban, the express lanes toll operator, helped devise the plan and will help pay for the extension.

House Speaker Bill Howell, R-Stafford, said in a release that he is “confident this project will substantially improve access for Stafford area residents.”

Stafford Supervisor Paul Milde said the merge extension is “weak.” He is one of several area elected officials pushing to add regular lanes to I-95 south of the express lanes merge and to eventually extend the express lanes to Massaponax.

As for I-395, McAuliffe said the eight-mile express lane addition through Arlington is a “game-changer” that will fill in the gap to create an HOV and toll option from “Stafford to the District line.” The project also will include the addition of another lane to the I-395 HOV system.

That project, the governor said, should start in 2017 and be completed in about two years.

