

# Editorial: Getting home could get easier on I-95

BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF OF THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Thursday, March 10, 2016 12:00 am

In two weeks, the Virginia Department of Transportation will host a public hearing in Stafford County on a great idea: Adding a fourth lane — nearly four miles' worth — to southbound Interstate 95.

Please exercise your right to step up and stick in your oar about this vitally important proposal, which would benefit just about every person living in the Fredericksburg region. The project would be especially beneficial for area commuters headed home each weekday evening.

VDOT wants to hear what people think as the department prepares to ask contractors to bid on its newest notion to help ease (or at least move south) the current bottleneck where the express lanes merge near State Route 610 in North Stafford.

The general-purpose lane would be built from the express lanes' planned extension to beyond the planned Courthouse Road interchange, ending 3,000 feet past the new State Route 630 overpass. Southbound motorists would be able to do what they fiercely desire: keep on going in one continuous lane. Congestion has plagued the current merge near Route 610 since the junction opened in December 2014.

But the fourth-lane project is contingent on funding, notes Kelly Hannon, spokeswoman for VDOT's Fredericksburg District.

The department's first priorities are improving the Courthouse Road interchange and widening Route 630 for two miles from west of Austin Ridge Drive to the intersection of Ramoth Church Road and Winding Creek Road.

Since the interchange and widening projects will be right next to each other, VDOT thought it should ask construction firms to bid on doing them together—and to submit prices for the hoped-for fourth lane, as it would also be in that immediate area.

Bundling road projects with contiguous work zones makes common sense.

Companies' bids on the interchange are due in April, and VDOT expects to award a contract in the



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Congestion on Interstate 95 is a daily occurrence for local commuters.

fall, Hannon said. Then it will determine the fate of the fourth-lane idea.

But first off, there's the public hearing from 5 to 7 p.m. March 24 at Colonial Forge High School, 550 Courthouse Road. At that meeting, VDOT will share its preliminary plans, invite comments on the fourth-lane bid option, and respond to people's feedback.

Engineers have designed the fourth lane to be built on part of the interstate's median and plan to install sound walls along portions of the southbound and northbound sides of the highway. VDOT has notified people who live in the vicinity of where the sound walls would go by letter.

Where will the money come from? It's not that the budget for the interchange and widening has grown larger, but VDOT is seeing a more competitive bidding atmosphere statewide, influenced by better prices for materials, lower petroleum costs and other economic factors, Hannon said.

Let's hope some savings happen.

The estimated price tag for lengthening the express lanes, set to finish in the summer of 2018, is \$50 million. Widening Route 630, due to be done in spring 2020, will cost an estimated \$35.9 million.

The Stafford Courthouse interchange, which was recently redesigned with a newfangled "divergent diamond" plan, would cost \$149 million. It also would be completed in spring 2020.

Take the time to learn more about this set of high-stakes proposals, and weigh in. Transportation is the lifeblood of our region.

For maps and details, visit VDOT's web page for the three projects: [bit.ly/I95fourthlaneVDOT](http://bit.ly/I95fourthlaneVDOT)