

Fredericksburg localities don't want to miss out on express lanes cash

BY SCOTT SHENK/THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Sunday, March 27, 2016 12:00 am

The extension of the express lanes to Interstate 395 will not only close a gap in the electronically tolled system, it will send millions in revenue to jurisdictions along the corridor.

But some local transportation officials are crying foul over the planning process and how the revenue will be used.

The express lanes extension agreement between the state and Transurban calls for an annual payment by Transurban for transit services and multimodal strategies identified in a study led by Virginia's Department of Rail and Public Transportation.

The Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission and the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission were chosen to represent regional jurisdictions as part of the study. Stafford, Spotsylvania and Fredericksburg are members of the PRTC but not NVTC.

The cities of Alexandria and Arlington and the counties of Fairfax, Prince William and Stafford are also included as members of the study.

At Monday's monthly meeting, Policy Committee members of the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization voiced concerns over the program.

Some members were not happy that Stafford is the only local jurisdiction included in the study.

Members also said FAMPO should be part of the planning process.

Committee chairman Tim McLaughlin said the region sends a large contingent of toll-paying customers up north and should reap the benefits of the program.

"We're paying the money, but we're not getting any of the revenues from those lanes," said McLaughlin, a Spotsylvania supervisor. "That's wrong."

Matt Kelly, FAMPO committee member and Fredericksburg councilman, was the most vocal critic of the program.

"This really isn't a good approach," he said. "FAMPO needs to be at the table and discuss it as an equal partner."

Tim Roseboom, DRPT's Northern Virginia transit planning manager, and local Commonwealth Transportation Board member Hap Connors tried to dispel committee member concerns.

Roseboom said it still hasn't been determined how much revenue the program will bring in or how it will be divvied up.

He also said the jurisdictions involved in the study were chosen because they lie within the corridor—from Eads Street in Northern Virginia to the express lanes' southern terminus in North Stafford.

Connors tried to calm the critical committee members, telling them: “Each jurisdiction ... will have a seat at the table.”

The committee voted to send a letter to Virginia Secretary of Transportation Aubrey Layne asking that FAMPO be included in the planning process.