

FAMPO blesses parkway proposals

BY SCOTT SHENK / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Tuesday, February 11, 2014 12:29 am

A boisterous overflow crowd didn't hear what it wanted at Monday night's Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting.

Several dozen residents took part in what has been a long-running battle over projects aimed at easing congestion problems along the Fredericksburg area's Interstate 95 corridor.

Most of them spoke against a resolution to move forward with road projects estimated to cost hundreds of millions of dollars, including a pair of parkways opposed by Spotsylvania County and Stafford County residents who would be impacted by them.

But after all was said and done, FAMPO's policy committee voted to approve the resolution.

The projects include the Rappahannock River Crossing, which would add collector-distributor roads and bridges along I-95 between the U.S. 17 and State Route 3 exits.

The residents, who spilled out of the FAMPO policy committee's regular meeting room, didn't show up to talk about that part of the proposal, though.

They took aim at the proposed Rappahannock Parkway in Spotsylvania and the Berea Parkway in Stafford.

Twelve people spoke and one handed in a written comment.

Only Fredericksburg Regional Chamber of Commerce representatives and former Stafford supervisor George Schwartz spoke in favor of the projects.

The opponents argued that the parkways would harm their way of living, said the plans wouldn't help with traffic, and that there are environmental concerns.

"It doesn't belong on a map," one Stafford resident said of the proposed Berea Parkway, which would run from Centreport Parkway to U.S. 17.

Another said the parkway was a "pot of gold" tied to developers.

Opponents of the proposed Rappahannock Parkway said it wouldn't fix problems it is proposed to fix.

Some speakers asked the committee to delay action and give more consideration to the projects.

The committee proceeded to discuss the projects, manifesting its regular split between Spotsylvania

representatives and those with Stafford and Fredericksburg.

Spotsylvania Supervisors David Ross and Tim McLaughlin criticized the idea that the Rappahannock Parkway could be forced on Spotsylvania even though there is clear opposition against it.

Ross said more than 700 constituents have signed a petition against the parkway.

He and McLaughlin said Cord Sterling, as the region's Commonwealth Transportation Board member, was not representing their county.

Sterling, who is a Stafford supervisor, disagreed with them. He said they had a chance to provide alternative plans, which were considered with more than a dozen others by the Virginia Department of Transportation.

In December, a VDOT report chose the Rappahannock River Crossing, the Berea Parkway and the Rappahannock Parkway projects as the best way to alleviate congestion along the area's I-95 corridor. It did not select suggestions made by Spotsylvania officials.

VDOT also suggested a version of the western Outer Connector as a possible solution.

Sterling and Fredericksburg Councilman Matt Kelly, the FAMPO committee's chairman, told the crowd that the projects have been talked about and studied for decades.

They emphasized that the plans aren't perfect, but said something needs to be done or what is a bad traffic situation will continue to grow worse.

Kelly said there isn't enough money to even "maintain the current flow of traffic in the region."

He said area leaders have debated for decades, "and we've done nothing and we're paying for it now."

Kelly said the issue isn't just a local one, either.

"We aren't just a regional problem," Kelly said of congestion problems on I-95. "We are a state problem."

The committee then voted 6-3, with two abstentions, to pass the resolution.

The vote doesn't mean work will begin on any of the projects. Instead, it means the process of finding more money for them and conducting more studies will move along.

There will be further meetings and public hearings held before any definitive plans are made and acted on.

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PROPOSED I-95 CORRIDOR CONGESTION FIX

RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER CROSSING

This project includes collector–distributor roads and interchange upgrades, which have a combined price tag of \$192 million. The Rappahannock Parkway also is part of this project.

Collector–distributor roads: Parallel lanes on Interstate 95 from the U.S. 17 exit in Stafford to the State Route 3 exit in Fredericksburg. Would include new bridges over the Rappahannock River to accommodate the new feeder lanes.

Interchange upgrades: The U.S. 17 and Route 3 interchanges would be upgraded to better handle traffic.

Rappahannock Parkway: This new four-lane road would run from a new exit at the Welcome Center, through Celebrate Virginia and eventually tap back into Route 3 at Gordon Road.

Its estimated cost is \$284 million.

OUTER CONNECTOR

This road would run from U.S. 17 in Stafford, cross the Rappahannock River and connect to Route 3 near the Gordon Road area. Its estimated cost is \$562 million.

BEREA PARKWAY

Considered the first section of the old Outer Connector, this proposed four-lane road in Stafford would run from Centreport Parkway

to U.S. 17. Its estimated cost is \$235 million.