

Federal grants could help 'unlock' Fredericksburg area road congestion

BY SCOTT SHENK/THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Sunday, April 10, 2016 12:00 am

Big planned improvements along the Interstate 95 corridor from Northern Virginia to Spotsylvania County could come faster if the state gets money it is seeking from two federal grants.

The Virginia Department of Transportation and the Department of Rail and Public Transit recently announced that the state is tossing its hat into the ring for some \$1.5 billion from two grants that, if won, could go toward the expansion of the express lanes, the construction of the northbound Rappahannock River Crossing project and rail improvements.

The state is grouping the projects the grants would fund as the “Atlantic Gateway,” a plan to “unlock” the gridlock along the Interstate 95 corridor, according to a recent presentation.

There’s no guarantee the state will win funds from the Fastlane and Tiger grants, but transportation officials are optimistic about the approach, at the very least.

“It’s a good thing,” said Hap Connors, the Fredericksburg area’s representative on the Commonwealth Transportation Board. “It shows [transportation planners] are trying to be proactive . . . in an outdated system.”

Del. Mark Dudenhefer, a former Stafford County supervisor who has spent years pushing for transportation improvements in the region, agreed with the potential benefits. He also touted work already completed and projects in the pipeline.

“It’s amazing what’s going on, much better than 10 years ago,” he said. “Don’t know if we’ll get the [grant] money, but if we do, that would be a big shot in the arm.”

If the state gets funding from the grants, two major area projects would benefit.

The money would be used to expand the express lanes north to the Pentagon and south to U.S. 17 in Stafford.

There already are plans to extend the express lanes north on Interstate 395 and about two miles south of what is now a troubled merge with regular lanes at Garrisonville.

If the express lanes are extended to U.S. 17, that would possibly allow them to tap into the planned Rappahannock River Crossing, which would add collector–distributor lanes for local traffic along I-95 between U.S. 17 and State Route 3.

The southbound portion of the crossing project is expected to win funding in the state’s new

prioritization program. The northbound crossing project did not score well, so it isn't expected to get funding in the first round of the new prioritization program.

But if the state gets the grant money, it could help pay for the northbound crossing project and accelerate its construction.

The grant money could also be a boon for rail travelers, including Virginia Railway Express commuters.

According to VDOT and DRPT, the grants could be used for the addition of an eight-mile stretch of third track in Fairfax County and proposed improvements to the Long Bridge, which is a bottleneck for train traffic crossing the Potomac River into Washington.