

# Editorial: Unified region wins big on road funding

**BY THE EDITORIAL PAGE STAFF OF THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Monday, May 16, 2016 12:00 am**

The most encouraging local news on the transportation front emerged quietly last week from a room at Germanna Community College's Fredericksburg Area Campus.

There, Virginia Secretary of Transportation Aubrey Layne confirmed that our region did very well under the state's newfangled method for prioritizing highway construction projects. Officials say the goal of ranking highway projects is to ensure that each is measured in the same way—how it improves movement of people and goods, eases congestion, promotes public safety and economic growth.

Over the next six years, 19 projects in the Virginia Department of Transportation's 14-county Fredericksburg District will receive \$205 million under scoring proposed for Virginia's so-called House Bill 2 program.

That puts our region in the commonwealth's No. 3 spot—which is logical, given the population and pace of development—behind more populous Northern Virginia with \$523 million and Hampton Roads with about \$300 million.

Of the transportation proposals from our region considered in the HB2 process, 86 percent won some funding, said Hap Connors of Spotsylvania, the area's representative on the Commonwealth Transportation Board. That's an encouraging success rate given the fierce competition statewide for road money.

Now it's up to the CTB, which is set to vote next month, as to whether to approve the first round of prioritization. The board can deviate from HB2's scoring but must explain those decisions, a refreshing attempt at government transparency.

The projects in the Fredericksburg region include commuter parking lots in Massaponax and Stafford, Caroline County's widening of Ladysmith Road and the largest single project—the \$125 million Rappahannock River Crossing plan to add another bridge and collector–distributor lanes beside southbound Interstate 95 between U.S. 17 in Falmouth and State Route 3 in the city. The idea behind the new lanes is to separate through travellers from local drivers trying to go an exit or two on the interstate.

Area officials also requested money for I–95's northbound lanes and bridges, but those projects didn't make the cut with the current amount of expected revenue. The northbound phase of the river crossing remains a top regional priority.

Still, the prospect for major progress is heartening for communities where transportation headaches are residents' most vexing quality-of-life issue.

Elected officials, business leaders and residents in our commuter-heavy region have come together to press for transportation improvements with a unified voice. In years past, infighting among local officials serving on the Fredericksburg Metropolitan Planning Organization has stymied efforts to get and keep major regional projects in VDOT's Six-Year Improvement Plan.

Thankfully, those days appear to be behind us. Public forums and meetings with representatives in Richmond and Washington sponsored by the Fredericksburg Regional Chamber of Commerce have helped focus attention on critical transportation needs.

We extend thanks to all involved in getting our region to this benchmark in the HB2 process.