

State's new bridge and pavement program expected to help Fredericksburg-area projects

BY SCOTT SHENK/THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Friday, May 20, 2016 12:00 am

A new, state-mandated bridge and pavement prioritization program is about to come to fruition.

Virginia transportation officials are putting the finishing touches on the “state of good repair” program, which will allocate more than \$1 billion over six years for repairing deficient bridges and deteriorated pavement. The Commonwealth Transportation Board will vote on the program and a list of suggested projects at its June meeting.

The program could help accelerate more than half a dozen bridge projects in the Fredericksburg District and include more money for the eventual rehabilitation or reconstruction of the Chatham Bridge over the Rappahannock River.

A draft report of the next Six-Year Improvement Program shows that the Fredericksburg District could get a little more than \$101 million for bridge work and \$25 million for pavement improvements through the program. The CTB will vote on the 2017–22 plan next month, too.

“This is a safety program,” Secretary of Transportation Aubrey Layne said at Wednesday’s CTB meeting, noting that these kinds of infrastructure improvements are needed.

“I strongly support this initiative, as it finally addresses long-standing needs in a methodical, transparent and measurable way,” Hap Connors, the Fredericksburg area CTB representative, wrote in an email.

There is a big need for infrastructure repairs, according to VDOT, which estimates that it’ll take \$3.7 billion to fix the 1,030 structurally deficient bridges in the state. The Fredericksburg District has 72 structurally deficient bridges and other structures, such as culverts. Fifty-two of those structures (which have to be longer than 20 feet) are eligible for the program, according to local VDOT



State's new bridge and pavement program expected to help Fredericksburg area projects

Crumbling concrete and exposed rebar are visible on the Chatham Bridge over the Rappahannock River on Thursday, May 19, 2016. The Commonwealth Transportation Board is prioritizing new road projects with an emphasis on bridges.

spokeswoman Kelly Hannon.

VDOT estimates that it will take another \$1.4 billion to deal with the 27,100 miles of deteriorated pavement in Virginia.

The legislature in 2015 passed a law calling for the CTB to develop a prioritization ranking system to address the crumbling pavement and deficient bridges.

The guidelines are straightforward for the programs, with condition, cost and traffic counts being keys for both.

The goal with the pavement program is to improve deteriorated pavement to “fair or better” status, according to VDOT. Hannon said 20 percent of the district’s primary road pavement is deficient.

For a bridge to qualify for the program, it must be listed as structurally deficient. Other factors include the structure’s risk of failure and its importance to traffic.

The Chatham Bridge qualifies for the program because it is structurally deficient. The Falmouth Bridge is listed as functionally obsolete only, so it doesn’t qualify.

If the CTB passes the draft plan in June, the state of good repair program could speed up seven Fredericksburg District bridge projects, add the funding for the Chatham Bridge plans, lead to the replacement of seven culverts and pay for work that would remove three other district bridges from the structurally deficient list.

The list of all projects is still under consideration.

Since all of the district’s interstate pavement meets VDOT’s standards, Hannon said the highway department will focus on what sections of primary roads could get funding through the program.

Connors said the program is a good start toward improving the state’s transportation infrastructure, but added that there’s a long way to go.

“While I am grateful for the extra funding for this program,” he wrote, “we do not have nearly enough money to take care of the enormous backlog, which will require us to find innovative and cost-effective solutions—and that is a good thing.”