

VDOT scaling back northbound Rappahannock River Crossing project

• By **SCOTT SHENK THE FREE LANCE-STAR** • Aug 24, 2019

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Higher costs have forced transportation officials to shrink the size of the northbound Rappahannock River Crossing project, the third leg in a trio of major Interstate 95 projects aimed at easing congestion problems.

Nearly three dozen residents came to James Monroe High School on Thursday evening to view the final plans and talk to Virginia Department of Transportation officials about the \$132 million project, which will add three lanes from just north of the Fall Hill Avenue overpass to U.S. 17.

The new lanes were originally planned to start south of the State Route 3 interchange, but the length was shortened because construction costs eclipsed the budget, according to VDOT officials.

Fredericksburg District Administrator Marci Parker spoke of the changes earlier this week during the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization policy committee meeting. She cited the scope of the project and increased costs for such things as steel as reasons for scaling back the project, something she said other districts are experiencing with their projects as well.

After Thursday's meeting, VDOT's Michelle Shropshire also noted some of the facets that impacted the project. One issue is the impact from new work as part of Fred Ex, a range of I-95 corridor projects that includes the extension of the express lanes.

The crossing lanes will connect to the express lanes at U.S. 17 in Stafford County, and the projects had to be adjusted.

She also noted other, earlier design changes, which included moving the new Rappahannock River bridge for the northbound project from outside the main lanes to the median.

Fredericksburg City Councilman Matt Kelly, who is also chairman of the FAMPO policy committee, attended Thursday's meeting and said it's nice to be getting the additional lanes. But he was incredulous that the project had to be downsized because of cost.

"It's scaled down," he said. "If 95 is a priority, why don't they pay for it?"

The northbound project design has a pair of options, which will rely on funding.

One includes adding a fourth northbound lane on I-95 from U.S. 17 to Centreport Parkway. The other would involve replacing the exit ramp bridge over U.S. 17 with a new span that would carry collector-distributor lane traffic. That bridge is the only one of the four overpasses at that spot not being rebuilt as part of the crossing projects.

The crossing projects will add three lanes each way, and when they open, local drivers will be able to use the collector-distributor lanes to avoid through traffic on the interstate.

The southbound crossing will run from U.S. 17 to just south of Route 3, at a cost of \$132 million. Work has started, with opening set for summer 2022.

Work is scheduled to start on the northbound project in late 2020, with completion expected in summer 2024.

The express lanes extension is under construction, with that work expected to be completed in 2022.