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Local toll road eyed in Orrock transportation bill

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RICHMOND--

Legislation to create a transportation authority in Fredericksburg has passed one committee but must still survive more hurdles before it could become law.

Del. Bobby Orrock, R-Caroline, submitted the bill to create the George Washington Toll Road Authority. The bill was passed by the House Transportation committee, but then sent to another committee that will meet next week.

The authority is the first step in developing a proposed toll road off a yet-to-be-built exit on I-95 south near the Welcome Center, and cross through that area to Gordon Road, bypassing State Route 3 congestion.

The road is an idea developed by the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, which is conducting a study of the feasibility of building such a toll road.

That study will still need to get data on final cost estimates and toll feasibility, as well as locations for the potential exit and road. Also, the Federal Highway Administration must approve all changes to the interstate.

But Orrock's bill is necessary for FAMPO to develop a toll authority; because of the Dillon Rule, localities must apply to the state for permission to undertake such activities.

Orrock said the bill is simply permissive, and doesn't expect it to face a great deal of opposition in the House, except from some lawmakers who will balk at any potential taxing authority.

"It encourages regional cooperation," Orrock said. "It gives local governments a tool they don't already have."

But there's no matching Senate version of Orrock's bill, and Sen. Edd Houck, D-Spotsylvania, said he didn't know Orrock had introduced the bill.

He said he couldn't comment on it because he didn't know what Orrock's bill entailed, although he said the toll road proposal has been controversial over the years.

Orrock's bill does seem to give the toll authority permission to use bonds and, of course, tolls, to help fund the road project--or other projects. The authority in Orrock's bill is not limited solely to the proposed toll road.

It also calls for a seven-member board of directors--three from Spotsylvania's elected officials, three from Fredericksburg's elected officials, and the seventh being the commissioner of the Department of Transportation or a designee.

After a year, additional members from contiguous localities could be added to the board.

According to the framework, the authority's powers would include building and operating toll roads and non-tolled roads in areas represented on the board, and setting toll rates.

The suggested authority could receive funding, incur debt, allocate revenues, and enter into public-private agreements. It could acquire land through purchase, donation or condemnation.

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