

# VDOT Discusses Proposed I-9

## *Presents New Details Including Discount Options*

By Michael Campbell  
SUSSEX - The Virginia Department of Transportation has been making headlines across Central Virginia as officials discuss plans for the new proposed Route 460 Bypass and installing tolls on Interstate 95 and, possibly, on Interstate 64.

Last Monday, VDOT, along with approximately 300 residents and media outlets from around the area, made their way to Sussex Central High School to present details for the tolls that, if approved, would be placed on Interstate 95 from Exit 17 in Greensville County up to Exit 31 in Stony Creek.

VDOT Director of Strategic Initiatives Michael Estes led the presentation that answered many questions people have posed to them over the past several months. During the "Keep I-95 Toll Free" rally that was held a half hour before the meeting, residents and county leaders asked why Sussex County and the Southside Virginia area was chosen as the "prime location" for

of vehicles that travel through the selected portion of Interstate 95 are out-of-state, or "long haul users," as they travel through and beyond Richmond.

Additionally, Estes explained that over the next 25 years, Interstate 95 is "expected to need a \$12.2 billion investment, of which only \$2.1 billion can be expected from existing state and federal sources."

He went on to say that the solution offered by many, increasing the gas tax, was not a viable solution because those tax revenues are being "eroded due to inflation and increased vehicle fuel efficiency."

"Virginia must look to other sources of funds to address the maintenance and construction needs of aging roads, bridges, and interstate across the state," Estes said. "Tolling is a potential funding source available to the Commonwealth with the potential to raise revenue for these much needed projects."

In terms of revenue, projected figures total \$155 million over the first six years of operation and is expected to cross over \$1 billion over 25 years from the \$4 mainline toll and \$2 ramp tolls

used for various projects across the Richmond area and southward along Interstate 95. Estes and VDOT staff encouraged residents to put their thoughts on what projects mean the most to them by filling out survey sheets and submitting them to the organization.

A new aspect of the tolling proposal was presented to residents; three discount plans that they are evaluating when using the highway for short trips. They are using community feedback and internal research to determine which of the three plans would be implemented if the tolls were installed.

In order to qualify for any of the plans, you must be a resident of Greensville, Sussex or Prince George and the plans would be available to eligible E-Z Pass account holders. The first plan is a simple "flat discount plan," where one way through the main gantry would cost 65 cents and the ramp toll would cost 35 cents.

The second plan presented, named a "minimum use plan," would require those eligible residents to pay the full toll rate of \$4 for their first five trips during a given month. After the five trips, the rate would

# Tolls with Sussex Residents

ip fee that covers driv-  
s for six months and  
ves them access to a  
scounted toll rate of 55  
nts.

"Look, we want the com-  
munity on Interstate 95  
we want this discount  
lan to work," said Estes.  
During the 30-minute  
uestion and answer ses-  
sion, Emporia Mayor Sam  
adams and several resi-  
dents commented, "The  
only discount plan they  
want is 'free.'"

Emporia City Coun-  
cilman Woody Harris  
questioned VDOT about  
why the U.S. Department  
of Transportation and  
Federal Highway Admin-  
istration has only given  
"conditional provisional  
approval" for the pilot  
program VDOT is using  
to place tolls on Interstate  
95, the Interstate Recon-  
struction and Rehabilita-  
tion Pilot Program, or  
ISRRPP.

Estes explained that  
Congress holds the cards  
in allowing Virginia to  
take part in the new pilot  
program. VDOT wanted  
an "immediate response"  
but did not receive one  
and were told by USDOT  
that the Commonwealth  
must complete its Nation-  
al Environmental Policy  
Act studies before receiv-  
ing final approval.

"We were told to move  
forward with our studies.  
These public meetings are  
also part of the next step.  
It is not an up or down on  
the project," said Estes.

Estes did empathize to  
residents that the tolling  
project was not a "done  
deal," adding that they  
were reluctant to make  
a hard timetable of the  
project. He did say that  
the "earliest" tolling  
would begin would be  
2015, based on how proj-  
ects and developments  
proceed in the future.

Outside the auditorium  
in the cafeteria, VDOT  
had large boards with  
detailed models and  
diagrams that highlighted  
many of the points made  
by Estes in his presenta-  
tion. Residents spoke with  
and questioned officials  
about many aspects of the  
tolling project.

Sussex Resident Laurie  
Cornell did not like what  
she heard and saw at the  
VDOT presentation.

"I think it is extremely  
unfair to those of us who  
live down here in this  
extremely economically-  
developed area. I wish  
that they would cancel it  
and put a gas tax in place.  
When I travel to North  
Carolina and Pennsyl-  
vania, their gas is sig-  
nificantly higher and their  
roads are much better  
than they are here."

One Jarratt woman who  
wished to remain anony-  
mous explained that  
proposed Interstate 95  
tolls would place signifi-  
cant hardship on her and  
her family and she does  
not see the discount plans  
offered helping.

"We are really a poor

town here and they re-  
ally need to rethink this  
and take it somewhere  
else. I have to commute  
from Jarratt to Chester  
everyday for work, 59  
miles each way, and I use  
I-95 north and south each  
day."

Waverly Board Supervi-  
sor A.G. Futrell was not  
pleased with what he  
heard as well and thinks  
the toll should be moved  
elsewhere.

"No way, in any way,  
shape, or form. It is going  
to kill the community, its  
already dying. The county  
is in ruins now. We are  
not benefiting from this  
toll road at all. Not just  
one side of the county is  
going to suffer; it will be  
both sides of the county.  
We don't need that toll  
here. It needs to be in  
Northern Virginia in-  
stead."

VDOT hosted two other  
meetings in Chesterfield  
County and Fredericks-  
burg last Wednesday  
and Monday respectively  
where residents shared  
similar concerns.

According to the tenta-  
tive timetable provided by  
VDOT at the presentation,  
officials will begin refining  
the I-95 tolling proposal  
based on public feedback  
while finishing their en-  
vironmental reports with  
toll construction expected  
in 2014 and toll collection  
starting in 2015.