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Isle of Wight County leaders: Tolls on the James River Bridge would not be necessary

March 08, 2011 | By Allison T. Williams, atwilliams@dailypress.com | 247-4535

Isle of Wight County leaders are throwing their support behind Patriots Crossing as the best solution for Hampton Roads' burgeoning transportation woes.

The \$2.9 billion Patriots Crossing — an extension of Interstate 564 under the Elizabeth River to Craney Island that would join the Monitor-Merrimac Memorial Bridge-Tunnel and include a spur to Highway 164 — is the top proposal to go before the Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization later this month.

That's a shift in thinking from last fall, when the organization's computer model ranked expansion of the Hampton Roads Bridge -Tunnel as the region's top interstate project. Last year, a consortium of private developers submitted an unsolicited proposal to expand the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel from four to eight lanes that would be partially funded by one-way tolls ranging from \$4 to \$8 on the HRBT, the Monitor-Merrimac Bridge Tunnel and the James River Bridge.

The proposed James River Bridge tolls have drawn sharp criticism from Isle of Wight County officials and residents in recent months, with civic activist Grace Keene calling the idea "outrageous." Hundreds of county residents commute across the James River Bridge daily to work on the Peninsula.

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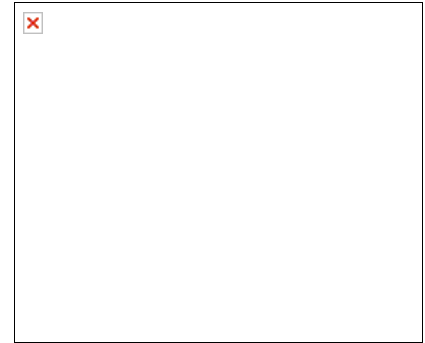
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Dwight Farmer, executive director of Hampton Roads District Planning Commission, told the Isle of Wight Board of Supervisors March 3 that his agency's research shows Patriots Crossing could be funded without tolls on the James River Bridge, and minimal tolls of about \$2 on the HRBT and Monitor-Merrimac.

"It has the key elements to alleviate congestion at the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel without unduly burdening Isle of Wight citizens with tolls on the James River Bridge," Clark said. "Tolls there would be damaging to commuters in Isle of Wight."

Tolls are included in all three preliminary private proposals for a new Route 460, a 55-mile freeway between Suffolk and Petersburg, Farmer said. As proposed, one-way tolls for the roadway could run from \$13 for a car to \$75 for a tractor-trailer.

"We have got to be careful to make sure the roads aren't being over-tolled," Clark said. "Heavy tolls can restrict commerce and economic activity ... and if we aren't sensitive to this, we can toll ourselves right out of freight traffic coming through the Port of Virginia."

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