

Richmond Times-Dispatch

\$2.00 • WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2022 • WHERE YOUR STORY LIVES • FINAL

\$25M grant isn't enough to close I-64 funding gap

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Richmond Times-Dispatch

Virginia wants to close a 29-mile gap by widening Interstate 64 between Richmond and Williamsburg, but the state first has to plug a funding gap for the \$750 million project.

Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, both Virginia Democrats, recently announced the state



WATCH: Drone views of I-64 near Bottoms Bridge and West Point exits. Point your camera at the QR code, then tap the link.

received a \$25 million federal grant for the I-64 project, which officials plan to move forward to construction in three

I-64, Page A4

I-64

From Page A1

phases beginning next fall.

But the senators acknowledged they haven't reached the end of the road in securing the funding, despite a \$470 million state budget commitment and a pledge of \$100 million from a regional transportation authority for the Richmond area, including New Kent County, where most of the work will be done.

The "rural surface transportation" grant was provided through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act — which they helped pass and President Joe Biden signed last year — but the state has asked for a \$150 million discretionary grant under the \$1 trillion funding package.

The Virginia Department of Transportation said it submitted a single application for three grant programs under the infrastructure law, so it hopes for additional federal aid "to support funding for the full project."

Warner and Kaine promised to seek more

federal support for the project.

"We see this grant as a sign of progress toward fulfilling the [Biden] administration's commitment to closing the I-64 gap by adding a third lane all the way from Hampton Roads to Richmond, but more work needs to be done," they said in a Dec. 16 announcement.

"We are glad to see the bipartisan infrastructure law continue to deliver funding that will help improve and ease the stress on Virginia's highway system."

Warner, in a statement on Twitter, called the gap in the widened highway "unacceptable for such a critical thoroughfare" and promised to "keep pushing until the project is fully funded."

The state announced last week it released a "request for qualifications" from contractors to widen the first segment of the highway with an additional lane in each direction on an almost 11-mile stretch between Bottom's Bridge to a mile beyond the exit for New Kent

Courthouse.

The next step will be a request for proposals — expected in spring — and the award of a contract next fall to design and build the first section of the project to widen the interstate from four to six lanes. The work is scheduled to be completed in the winter of 2026-27.

The work includes the widening and rehabilitation of "multiple bridges;" installation of new overhead signs and cameras to monitor traffic incidents; construction of sound barrier walls; repair of culverts and pipes; and stormwater drainage and management.

The entire project would extend from mile marker 205 at Bottom's Bridge through New Kent and James City counties to mile marker 234 at Lightfoot in York County. The state has received approval to build the project under the National Environmental Policy Act, allowing design and construction work to begin.

Widening the highway is the top transportation priority for New Kent,

which much of the 29-mile stretch of four-lane highway crosses.

"This notoriously congested stretch of interstate disrupts one of Virginia's vital thoroughfares," said Secretary of Transportation Shep Miller, a Virginia Beach businessman who previously served on the Commonwealth Transportation Board.

"Adding a third lane in each direction will unlock the corridor, unify Richmond and Hampton Roads, grow the economy and provide opportunities for all," Miller said in a statement announcing the request for qualifications.

"The importance of connecting the Richmond and Hampton Roads regions cannot be overstated," he added.

Unless the federal government provides more money, it's unclear where Virginia will find the money to close a potential funding gap of up to \$125 million.

The two-year state budget adopted in June includes a total \$470 million commitment to the project. The Central Virginia

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Transportation Authority committed in June to dedicating up to \$100 million for the project, and the Commonwealth Transportation Board promised an additional \$30 million.

Hampton Mayor Donnie Tuck, chairman of the Hampton Roads Transportation Accountability Commission and the region's transportation planning organization, called the project "a unanimous regional legislative prior-

ity" for his area.

"Completing the I-64 gap is critical to supporting our military, the Port of Virginia, and the Commonwealth's tourism economy," Tuck said in a statement.

Hampton Roads has already invested \$311 million in regional and local tax funds to widen I-64 in three phases over 21 miles on the Peninsula to the west side of Williamsburg, but the region hasn't committed funds yet to completing the 29-mile gap in New Kent and James City.

"The Hampton Roads Region remains committed to working with our state and federal partners to explore all funding opportunities to complete the I-64 gap, which is imperative to our regional, state, and federal economies," Tuck said.

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