

CTB rep will push I-73 change

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By SHAWN HOPKINS - Bulletin Staff Writer

The Commonwealth Transportation Board member for this area said he plans to push for the Henry County Board of Supervisors' request that the CTB consider another route for Interstate 73 through Henry County.

"What the Henry County Board of Supervisors feels is in the best interest of the region, in the absence of any clear evidence to the contrary, I'm going to support it," said Dana Martin of Roanoke.

At Tuesday's supervisors meeting, the board voted to ask the CTB to consider an I-73 route that would use a proposed connector the supervisors suggested. That road would connect the Patriot Centre to the U.S. 58/220 bypass in the Laurel Park area. It also would move the route west toward Martinsville, making it closer to the Patriot Centre, Martinsville Industrial Park and Martinsville Speedway.

The CTB establishes the administrative policies for the state's transportation system. It allocates highway funding to specific projects, locates routes and provides funding for airports, seaports and public transportation.

Martin said Thursday he has yet to receive any documents on the supervisors' proposed plan. But from what he has been told by supervisors Chairman H.G. Vaughn of the Ridgeway District, he said he feels he would have no problem advocating for the plan before the CTB.

Martin said he feels his job is to advocate for what local representatives feel is best for their areas.

However, he said his opinion could change if professional state engineers advise him that the plan is unworkable.

He said first, the alternate route proposal will be screened for any red flags or obvious problems by state engineers and other professionals. If none are found, he will take it before the CTB and the board will consider moving forward with studying and planning a new route.

"It will be a matter of if it's a logical thing to do," he said. If it causes problems they likely would reject it, but "if it's something that reduces expense and doesn't have any other pitfalls in it, there should not be much opposition."

Martin said he is only one vote on the board, but CTB's 17 members, who are appointed by the governor, generally rely on each district member to know what is going on in his or her district and act in its best interest.

"It will (my support) carry some weight. It won't necessarily mean that they will defer to me," he said.

He said the board could consider the proposal at a work session as early as February. If it does, the board may vote on it in March.

Officials with some groups, such as the Martinsville-Henry County Chamber of Commerce and Joblink, which has promoted I-73 in this area, have said they are concerned that changing the route might cause a delay that could jeopardize the project.

However, Martin said, based on his research and conversations with engineers close to the project, his assessment is that the CTB board's re-examination of the route through Henry County might not significantly delay the project.

He said that from his research, there is just as much of a chance that using existing parts of the bypass will speed up construction of the project as there is of an administrative delay.

At any rate, he said, the project already is on hold because of a lawsuit filed by a Franklin County environmental group.

"That lawsuit is probably going to cause much greater delay than this resolution will cause," he said.