

## **I-73 route study not authorized**

'Miscommunication' cited

June 22, 2008

Martinsville Bulletin

A resolution approved by the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) on Thursday asked for more information on a possible study of an alternate route for Interstate 73 but did not approve that study, according to the Virginia Department of Transportation.

The resolution essentially states that "if you (the CTB) decide to do this, what will the cost be, how long will it take, are there obvious challenges," said Heidi Coy, VDOT public affairs manager for the Salem District.

Even though the resolution refers to a study, "it's not a study," she said.

Coy said the resolution does not authorize re-engineering or other work, as stated Thursday by David Fierro, VDOT's Richmond-based assistant director for public affairs.

"It was our miscommunication," Coy said.

The CTB resolution acknowledged one approved by the Henry County Board of Supervisors, Coy said. The local resolution asked if I-73 could be rerouted to incorporate a connector road to the Patriot Centre industrial park, which also would provide better access to the Martinsville Speedway and Martinsville Industrial Park.

The CTB resolution also asks VDOT and the Federal Highway Administration to "come back with more facts" on conducting such a study, Coy said.

"Then they would make a decision as to do we want to relook at it (the route) or not," she said, adding that another CTB vote would be needed to authorize a study of an alternate route.

Richard Caywood, Salem District administrator for VDOT, added, "The major decision the board made was to authorize us to evaluate this request and come back to them with a recommendation on what to do. Before, from a policy standpoint, the decision on that line was considered to be closed."

Even though the board's action opened the door to a possible change in the route, Caywood said that does not mean it will happen. "They may decide they don't want to change ... it doesn't make sense."

The Federal Highway Administration also would have to agree on what portion, if any, of the route could be re-evaluated, Caywood said, and that information would go to the CTB when it considers whether to review the route.

The CTB also would be advised on whether reviewing the route could delay the project, Caywood said.

“It’s hard to say it would make an impact now because funds are limited,” he said. He added that there is money to make the evaluation the CTB wants, but “not enough to build much of anything.”

The CTB resolution also asks that VDOT and the highway administration determine an appropriate time when the supervisors’ request may be considered without impacting a lawsuit filed against the project by the Virginians for Appropriate Roads.

“At this point we will work with our counsel to determine the appropriate time,” Coy said, explaining that the resolution did not define “appropriate time.”

“It’s really gray. We haven’t ironed that out,” she added.

If a study of an alternate route is authorized, “we would probably look at multiple options if it got that far,” Caywood said.

Also, any change would be subject to environmental and public scrutiny, and another federal record of decision would be needed if the route was changed, he added.