

ARTICLES OF INTEREST

3/3/2011

VDOT approves seeking U.S. 460 proposals

3 firms will be
invited to submit
plans for toll road

BY PETER BACQUÉ
Richmond Times-Dispatch

The state transportation commissioner has approved seeking detailed proposals from three industry teams to build a new U.S. 460 between Petersburg and Suffolk.

"The U.S. Route 460 Corridor improvements project is a top priority for the commonwealth," said Virginia Transportation Commissioner Greg Whirley. "Advancing the three private-sector proposals to the next phase will enable us to work closely with the offerors to reduce costs and improve the feasibility of the project."

The Virginia Department of Transportation will invite the three industry teams to submit their in-depth plans for the multibillion-dollar toll road March 25. The state agency wants to

make sure the proposals can be clearly compared to determine their relative value.

The proposals are due back to VDOT by Aug. 18. The Transportation Department would like to have a final project agreement in place late this year or early in 2012.

Cintra Infraestructuras S.A.U., 460 Partners Inc. and Multimodal Solutions LLC submitted conceptual proposals for the highway project.

The cash-strapped state highway agency is looking to private partners to come up with innovative ways to build and pay for the work.

VDOT estimates that constructing the 55-mile road as a limited access, four-lane, divided highway would cost \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion in 2012 dollars. Tolls for passenger vehicles could run 10 cents to 20 cents a mile, or \$5.50 to \$11 to travel the full length, the department said.

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Published: March 15, 2011

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New tax in works for Pittsylvania County?

By John Crane



CHATHAM — The chairman of the Pittsylvania County Board of Supervisors finance committee said Tuesday he hopes the board will hold a work session soon, possibly next week, to discuss the county administrator's proposal for filling a \$3 million shortfall in its upcoming 2011-12 budget.

The board will also discuss a possible new tax — such as a fire-and-rescue or a solid waste tax — to help prevent future imbalances, said Finance Committee Chairman Coy Harville. The earliest a solid waste tax would go into effect would be July 1, 2012, because it would need approval from the Virginia General Assembly, Harville said during the committee's meeting Tuesday.

If a new tax were to pass, it would have to be fair, with everyone and not just homeowners carrying the burden, Harville said. Residents may be more receptive of a new tax — such as a fire-and-rescue tax — that applies to everybody, he said.

"The public's safety is what we're charged with," said Harville, who represents the Westover district.

The Pittsylvania County Board of Supervisors must find a way to fill a gap of at least \$3 million in its upcoming proposed \$204 million 2011-12 budget. County Administrator Dan Sleeper has come up with a plan to do that for another year before a new tax could possibly take effect.

“We need to address this debt,” said Callands-Gretna Supervisor Fred Ingram, who serves on the Finance Committee.

To eliminate the \$3 million shortfall, Sleeper is proposing about \$1.4 million in cuts to county departments, with unappropriated surplus funds providing an additional \$600,000. Sleeper also proposes using \$1 million in high school bond contingency funds to cover the rest.

Contingency funds are a small portion of the cost of a project — such as the \$70 million high school renovations — set aside to cover change orders or other problems not included in a contract. The county would use the \$1 million to pay toward the high-school bond debt, Sleeper said.

Harville said Sleeper’s proposal is “pretty solid.”

Representatives from Davenport & Company LLC, the board’s financial consultant, presented several choices to the Finance Committee to fill what it estimated to be a \$3.5 million gap.

Davenport’s proposed options included, in addition to the \$1.4 million in cuts and using \$530,000 in unappropriated surplus money, three alternatives. They included either a 5-cent increase in the county’s real estate tax rate, using an additional \$1.6 million in unappropriated surplus funds or refinancing about \$8.7 million in middle-school bonds to cover the remaining \$1.6 million in 2011-12.