

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

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U.S. 58, I-73 make priority list

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Two area highway projects are on a list of 50 projects the list's authors say are needed to support Virginia's industries and provide for additional growth.

TRIP, a national transportation research group based in Washington, ranked completion of U.S. 58 from Stuart to Hillsville as No. 11. Construction of Interstate 73 in Henry, Franklin and Roanoke counties was No. 14 on the list.

Making U.S. 58 four lanes in the 30.26-mile stretch from Stuart to Hillsville is estimated to cost \$326 million, the report states.

"The project will reduce truck congestion and increase safety," it states. "Upgrading Route 58 will make the historically economically depressed southside of Virginia more accessible, potentially spurring development."

U.S. 58 has been widened and four-laned from Virginia's coast to Stuart in a project that began in 1989. A transportation bill being considered in the General Assembly includes more than \$108 million for two projects, totaling more than 10 miles, on the highway in Carroll County.

Construction of 63 miles of a new road for I-73 from the North Carolina state line to U.S. 220 in Roanoke County would cost almost \$4 billion, the list states.

"This project is a new interstate highway that, once complete, will provide access from Myrtle Beach, S.C., to northern Michigan and alleviate traffic on Route 220," the list states.

"I-73 has the potential to be a major economic generator for not only Virginia, but the entire eastern United States," it adds. "The construction of I-73 in Virginia will provide access to an economically depressed area of the state, making development viable."

A route for I-73 through Henry County received a record of decision from the Federal Highway Administration, but the Henry County Board of Supervisors proposed an alternate route that is closer to the east side of Martinsville. That proposal is undergoing an environmental assessment that is expected to take 15 to 18 months, officials said in October.

In all, TRIP's list includes 36 projects to build, expand or modernize highways, six projects to improve public transit and eight projects to improve the state's rail system.

Construction estimates show that Virginia would need at least \$44.7 billion to finance the top 25 projects, most of which are in Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads.

TRIP ranked each transportation project based on a rating system that considered the short-term economic benefits, including job creation; the level of improvement in the condition of the transportation facility, including safety improvements; the degree of improvement in access and mobility; and the long-term improvement provided in regional or state economic performance and competitiveness, according to a news release announcing the list.

"These improvements would enhance economic development opportunities throughout the state by increasing mobility and freight movement, easing congestion, and making Virginia an attractive place to live, visit and do business," the release states.

The report, called "The Top 50 Surface Transportation Projects to Support Economic Growth in Virginia," came a day after the state Senate endorsed Gov. Bob McDonnell's \$4 billion transportation financing plan for Virginia.

The top project on the list is widening Interstate 95 between Washington and Richmond, and No. 2 is expanding the Hampton Roads Bridge tunnel. No. 50 is completion of a rapid transit system, called the Broad Street Corridor, in Richmond and Henrico County.

"Virginia can't get where it wants to go — in both a literal and an economic sense — without an efficient transportation system," said Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP. "It is critical that Virginia's transportation system is adequately funded at the local, state and federal level. Thousands of jobs and the state's economic well being are riding on it."