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Virginia Extends Existing P3 to Toll I-395 HOV Lanes.

DALLAS – Virginia will extend an existing transportation public-private partnership to add eight miles to its system of high-occupancy tolled traffic lanes near Washington, D.C.

Transurban has agreed to finance the \$200 million to \$250 million project to add a new high-occupancy lane to the existing two-lane HOV system on Interstate 395 and to convert all three to reversible HOT lanes, Virginia Transportation Secretary Aubrey Layne said on Nov. 20.

The Transurban-led 95 Express Lanes LLC, which includes Fluor Corp., maintains and operates the 28 miles of managed toll lanes on Interstate 95 that opened in late 2014 with a concession that extends to 2087. The \$950 million project was financed and built under Virginia's Public-Private Transportation Act.

Motorists could use the existing free lanes on the I-395 segment or opt to pay a toll on the three reversible HOT lanes that increases as free-lane road congestion worsens, Layne said in a letter to local officials in Alexandria, Va., and Arlington and Fairfax counties. Vehicles with at least three passengers can continue to use the HOT lanes without charge.

"This proposal is not the same as proposals in the past," Layne said in his letter.

The state originally proposed extending the HOT system to the Potomac River, which separates the District of Columbia and Virginia, but dropped that plan when Arlington County filed an environmental lawsuit to block the project.

The tolled lanes on I-395 would connect with the I-95 high-occupancy lanes and extend to near the Pentagon under the new plan.

The revised proposal will provide funding for transit improvements and commuter parking lot expansions, but requires only minimal interchange construction, Layne said.

"The McAuliffe administration believes that this corridor needs new and expanded transportation options for drivers, sluggers, and transit users," he said.

Sluggers are commuters who congregate along the road to catch a ride with motorists seeking additional passengers so they can qualify for the high-occupancy lanes.

Jennifer Aument, general manager of Transurban's operations in North America, said the project will benefit residents and travelers for decades.

"By funding improvements through a public-private partnership, we are able to preserve scarce public transportation dollars to be used on other regional priorities and provide a revenue stream for transit that will continue to fund new options for travelers in the I-95 corridor for many years to come," she said.

The tolled HOV lanes will provide area motorists with new choices, said Joe Vidulich, vice president

of government relations at the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce.

“This innovative public-private partnership will result in a dedicated corridor for carpoolers and buses, while also providing new transportation choices for all motorists to reach their destination faster,” he said.

The state will conduct an environmental assessment of the lane project and study other ways to improve travel along the I-95/395 corridor before construction begins, Layne said.

“The Commonwealth and its private partners are committed to a robust public engagement effort,” he said.

Work could begin in 2017 and be completed in two years, Layne said.

Meanwhile, the Maryland Transit Administration last week received initial proposals from the four teams shortlisted as contenders for its Purple Line P3 light rail system. The 16-mile system in the northern suburbs of Washington is expected to cost more than \$2 billion, but the project cost won’t be known until the teams submit their financial plans on Dec. 8.

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan in June cut the state’s contribution to the Purple Line to \$168 million from the original \$700 million pledge and cancelled the Red Line light rail project in Baltimore.

The MTA plans to select a preferred partner for the Purple Line in February, subject to a review by the Maryland Board of Public Works in March. Work is expected to begin next year with completion in 2021.

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BY JIM WATTS

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