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VDOT to brief legislators on I-64 Peninsula expansion

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On Thursday, the Virginia Department of Transportation will update local legislators and other elected officials on the Peninsula's I-64 widening project, expected to start in the summer of 2017, the agency said Monday. advertisement

Jim Utterback, the regional VDOT District Administrator, told Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization board members in September he hoped to have an environmental impact study completed by December of this year. VDOT has already conducted surveying work and other preliminary studies this past summer and fall to help assess what's needed to complete the project.

Virginia Secretary of Transportation Sean Connaughton will be on hand for the briefing, which will also be attended by Del. Mike Watson, R-Williamsburg, who trumpeted the charge for I-64 expansion in the General Assembly during the past session.

"Expanding I-64 has been a project I have been working on the last two years with Speaker Howell and Senator Wagner. I'm excited to see the progress and look forward to joining them at this event," Watson said in a statement to the Daily Press. "I've also worked directly with Secretary Connaughton to ensure I-64 expansion was a priority in the Governor's transportation plan. Improving our roads is a critical step in attracting new business to our region."

Local elected officials on the HRTPO board have long made it clear they view expanding the congested roadway as a top regional priority.

But funding to expand the section of interstate between Newport News and Williamsburg was not available until after Gov. Bob McDonnell's signature transportation legislation was passed by the General Assembly this past spring.

Right now, VDOT estimates that adding a single additional lane and a 12-foot shoulder to each direction of the interstate will cost about \$100 million. The agency said in a media advisory released Monday that construction could begin as early as summer of 2017. VDOT said the project should be completed in two years after construction begins.

The meeting will be held in the James City County Board of Supervisors Board Room at 101 Mounts Bay Road, in Williamsburg. But the briefing won't be open to the public, despite the media being invited, according to Brooke Grow, a spokeswoman for VDOT.

"It's just supposed to be a legislative briefing," Grow said. "We're not promoting it as a public meeting."

The construction on the road will begin at the Jefferson Avenue exit in Newport News at mile marker 255 and extend past Busch Gardens at mile marker 242.

The roadway has been a long-time bottleneck on the Peninsula, with nearly daily backups during rush hour on I-64 westbound when the interstate narrows to two lanes past Jefferson Avenue. HRTPO forecasts project that commercial truck travel on the road will nearly double in the next two decades, which could make the road even more congested without additional lanes added.

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