

# THE BOND BUYER

Thursday, July 7, 2016 | as of 2:58 PM ET

Infrastructure

## Almost \$800M of Federal Grants to Fund 18 Bottleneck Buster Projects

By [Jim Watts](#)

July 6, 2016

DALLAS -- Virginia will embark on a \$1.4 billion program of road and rail upgrades to alleviate traffic bottlenecks along the congested Interstate 95 corridor with a \$165 million FASTLANE grant from the Transportation Department.

The grant to the Virginia Department of Transportation is largest awarded among the 18 projects across the U.S. selected to share in the \$800 million competitive grant program in fiscal 2016 that is aimed at smoothing the flow of freight and vehicles.

The projects were chosen from 212 applicants that submitted grant proposals totaling \$9.8 billion, according to Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Senate's Environmental and Public Works and Commerce, Science, and Transportation committees will review the grants over the next 60 days. Congress can void grants for projects found objectionable by passing a joint resolution of disapproval.

FASTLANE, which is an acronym for Fostering Advancements in Shipping and Transportation for the Long-term Achievement of National Efficiencies, was created in late 2015 with passage of the five-year, \$305 billion Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. FASTLANE grants will total of \$4.5 billion through fiscal 2020.

Funding for the annual grants will go up \$50 million each year, with \$1 billion of FASTLANE grants available in fiscal 2020.

Total FASTLANE funding over the five years for freight rail and port projects that improve freight movements on highways is capped at no more than \$500 million. The rest of the grant money goes to road projects. Freight rail does not contribute to the Highway Trust Fund, the source of the FASTLANE grants, while ports have their own dedicated harbor trust fund.

Work will begin on Virginia's Atlantic Gateway Program in 2017 funded in part by the FASTLANE grant even though the state received less than the \$200 million it was seeking, said Gov. Terry McAuliffe.

Virginia will use the grant to extend the existing tolled express lanes on I-95, expand bus service, and build a new highway bridge. The state will also build a section of highway to test the deployment of driverless cars and purchase an abandoned rail line that could be converted to

high-speed rail use, McAuliffe said.

"This is the biggest game-changer Virginia's had in a very long time," McAuliffe said. "You'll see actually shovels in the ground next year."

Funding for the Atlantic Gateway will include \$710 million of state and local transportation funding and \$565 million of private sector investments.

The National Park Service and the District of Columbia Transportation Department will repair the Arlington Memorial Bridge with a \$90 million FASTLANE grant.

The bridge, which was built in 1932 and was expected to last 75 years, carries nearly 68,000 vehicles a day but tourist buses and vehicles weighing more than 10 tons are prohibited from using it.

The grant will provide most of the \$166 million cost of the first phase of repairs to the approach spans, which would keep the bridge in service through 2030. NPS officials said the bridge would be closed to vehicular traffic in 2021 without the repairs.

Local governments said closing the bridge over the Potomac would cost them \$168,000 per day, or \$75 million per year, in transportation outlays alone.

The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development will use its \$60 million FASTLANE grant to repair pavement and add a lane on I-10 in southern Louisiana as well as to begin design work on an improved entrance for Barksdale Air Force Base off I-20 in Bossier City.

"This award will make it possible to invest in infrastructure projects across Louisiana," said Gov. John Bel Edwards. "From north Louisiana to south Louisiana, east to west, we have infrastructure needs that have been ignored for years."

