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Local

Vehicle decal user fees rise as funding craters

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WASHINGTON -

Prince William County supervisors are preparing to raise the decal fee on cars and trucks from \$24 to \$38 next budget year as the county attempts to recover millions of dollars in losses for road funding.

The 58 percent increase would pull in an additional \$4 million during a transportation finance crisis that has county leaders preparing to kill two major road projects and delay another.

Local governments use the decals to identify registered cars in their jurisdictions and collect money for transportation projects.

The plan would add about \$900,000 in dedicated transportation funding to County Executive Craig Gerhart's \$924 million budget proposal.

Recordation taxes tied to property transactions are slated to fall \$5.5 million during the county's marked housing slump, reducing funds the county had spent on roads.

Also, supervisors are concerned the county could lose about \$45 million in funding from Northern Virginia Transportation Authority regional taxes and fees that the state's highest court ruled unconstitutional last month unless the General Assembly restores the money.

As a result, plans to expand University Boulevard and Route 28 have been removed from the county's five-year capital plan, and improvements to the Prince William County Parkway were delayed by four and a half years.

The dire situation means the county needs transportation funds, Gerhart said.

The fee increase was made possible by a major transportation plan the Virginia General Assembly approved last year that authorized a \$10 increase in the maximum fee local governments charge for the decals, or \$38.50 per vehicle.

Because Prince William County was charging \$4.50 less than the cap in 2007, the law resulted in a larger potential increase than anticipated.

Supervisors, continuing to grapple with a proposed tax rate increase of 28 percent that would result in an 8 percent increase to the average homeowner, are mulling how much can be raised through other means.

Although the \$10.9 million raised by the decal fee is not required to be spent on transportation efforts, Gerhart said, "Frankly, we need it there."

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