

Charlottesville won, and Lynchburg lost

Routing of I-64 was major tussle

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CHARLOTTESVILLE
 After 40 years, the politics of how Interstate 64 was routed by Charlottesville, leaving Lynchburg in the lurch, probably has been forgotten by most Virginians. But it was an emotional, maddening topic in 1959, a civil war of sorts between the two cities and between states' rights and the federal government.

"The feeling was we were snookered pretty badly," said Julian Adams, who owns a car dealership in Lynchburg. "At the time, there were a lot of hard feelings about it."

The stretch of interstate slated to be built between Richmond and western Virginia was expected to bring a boom of tourists, jobs and development to any city it touched. The new-fangled interstate highways also were seen as a four-lane entry into the modern world.

The view of interstates back then may have been expressed best by the chairman of the Allegheny County Board of Supervisors in the fall of 1978, when a stretch of I-64 was opened in his county. W.G. Van Lear said: "We will no longer be illiterate hillbillies. We'll be able to get out and see the rest of the world."

I-64 did bring an economic boomlet in its wake in some ways but not in the grand manner expected. Lynchburg, still the largest city in the state and one of the largest in the country without an interstate highway, is prospering nevertheless. The twists and turns of where I-64 would be laid west of Richmond began after years of planning and hearings and political maneuverings.

The proposed "southern" route called for the interstate to follow U.S. 460 via Lynchburg to Roanoke and U.S. 220 from Roanoke to Clifton Forge, then west following U.S. 60 into West Virginia.

The "northern" route paralleled U.S. 250 from Richmond to Staunton and then U.S. 11 from Staunton to Lexington, then U.S. 60 from Lexington to Clifton Forge and the West Virginia line.

The state Highway Commission hired an engineering firm to study the costs and impact of both routes. The firm, which noticed that the northern route was some 50 miles shorter and millions of dollars cheaper, recommended it.

But the commission, in what then was termed a surprise announcement, voted 5-3 in June 1959 to go with the southern route. Vague charges of political paybacks were made after the decision was announced, but the commission remained firm.

The southern proponents got to crow for only a little bit. In February 1961, the federal government, which was providing most of the construction money, over-turned the state Highway Commission's decision and chose the northern route.

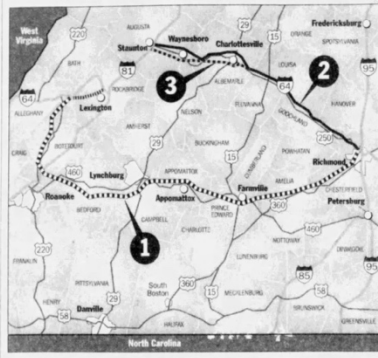
The only public reason given was that the northern route was cheaper and would provide better service.

But the federal decision to ignore the state's choice — apparently rare in highway matters then — set off a public furor. Gov. J. Lindsay Almond Jr. said the state "knows more about matters of highway location than any person or agency north of the Potomac."

State Sen. Mosby G. Perrow Jr. of Lynchburg was apoplectic. "It be-

North or south

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hooves me to observe that the last vestiges of states' rights have been eliminated."

Curiously, the state's two senators, Harry F. Byrd Sr. and A. Willis Robertson, said they would not favor one route over the other.

Howard Newlon, former director of the Virginia Department of Transportation Research Council in Charlottesville, noted, "Everybody wanted a piece of the interstate. Some people in Lynchburg still remember we stole it."



Perrow (1959)

Two ex-governors — John S. Battle and Colgate W. Darden Jr. — lived in Charlottesville at the time. "I don't know if that had any particular effect," said Newlon. "But it couldn't have hurt."

Joseph Freeman, a political science professor at Lynchburg College, said he legend he heard of how Lynchburg was snookered involved William C. Battle, the son of former Gov. Battle.

As the legend goes around Lynchburg even today, Bill Battle with the help of his friend President Kennedy managed to get the route changed.

Bill Battle, a prominent Virginia lawyer, was Kennedy's Virginia campaign manager and was appointed by Kennedy as ambassador to Australia.

But Bill Battle, who lives in Charlottesville, said it isn't true. "There was nothing behind the scenes. I never talked to [Kennedy] about it. I just went up there with a delegation from here and made our case. . . . I guess we made a better case."

Battle said he couldn't recall whether the delegation visited Washington before or after the state Highway Commission approved the southern route.

The I-64 controversy then took another twist. Which way to run I-64? North or south around Charlottesville? The south route, of course, won, although the furor was just as heated as over the route from Richmond. Hundreds of people turned out in Charlottesville to speak their minds at public hearings.

"If you look at a map, you'll see I-64 comes out of Waynesboro, loops north and then fishhooks south around Charlottesville," said Newlon. "The argument for the south was that 29 North was already congested and it would develop the southern part of the city. The north was also prime real estate territory."

Del. Mitchell Van Yahres, D-Charlottesville, was mayor of the city when the 52-mile stretch of I-64 between Gum Spring in Louisa County and Yancey Mills in Albemarle was opened in September 1970.

It then was the largest single road project ever opened at one time in Virginia. Gov. Linwood Holton kept his celebration speech short at the opening, perhaps because it was 92 degrees and the dignitaries were standing on the asphalt.

"I came up here not to make a speech but to open a highway. So let's get on with it," he said.

Van Yahres believes the interstate's impact has been minimal on Charlottesville.

"I don't think the interstate had a tremendous effect on Charlottesville," he said. "It's a faster trip to Richmond. But we never had it that bad before."

Lynchburg, however, is much more of a manufacturing center than Charlottesville.

"Lynchburg's industry to some degree has not prospered as much as it could have," said Adams, the Lynchburg car dealer. "When you're getting raw materials in and out, speed is a factor."

Lynchburg has seen its foundry, shoemaking and clothing industries disappear in the past decades, although foreign competition may have been a greater factor than lack of an interstate.

Adams also pointed out the positive side of being somewhat isolated. The city of 65,000 still has a small-town atmosphere.

"For quality of life, maybe growth isn't everything," he said.

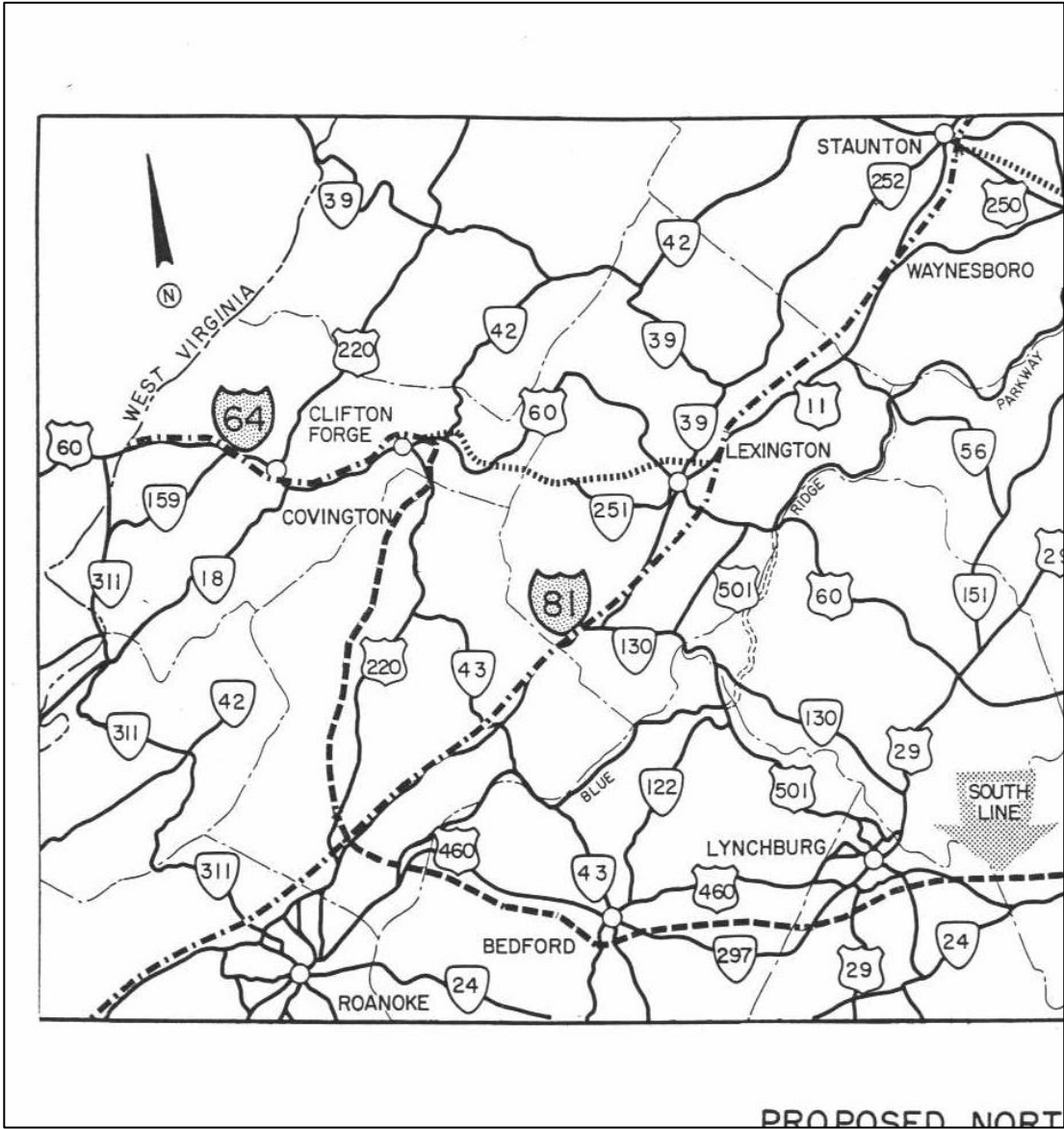
But with that said, Lynchburg still covets an interstate. A feasibility study to improve U.S. 460 from Virginia Beach through Lynchburg to Roanoke and to U.S. 220 from Roanoke to Clifton Forge, was given in the fall to the Commonwealth Transportation Board. The report should be made public in a few weeks.

Whether the improvements will consist of changing the roads to modern, four-lane divided highways or to an interstate still is in the air.

But Lynchburg, with 40 years of brooding behind it, wants the road upgraded.

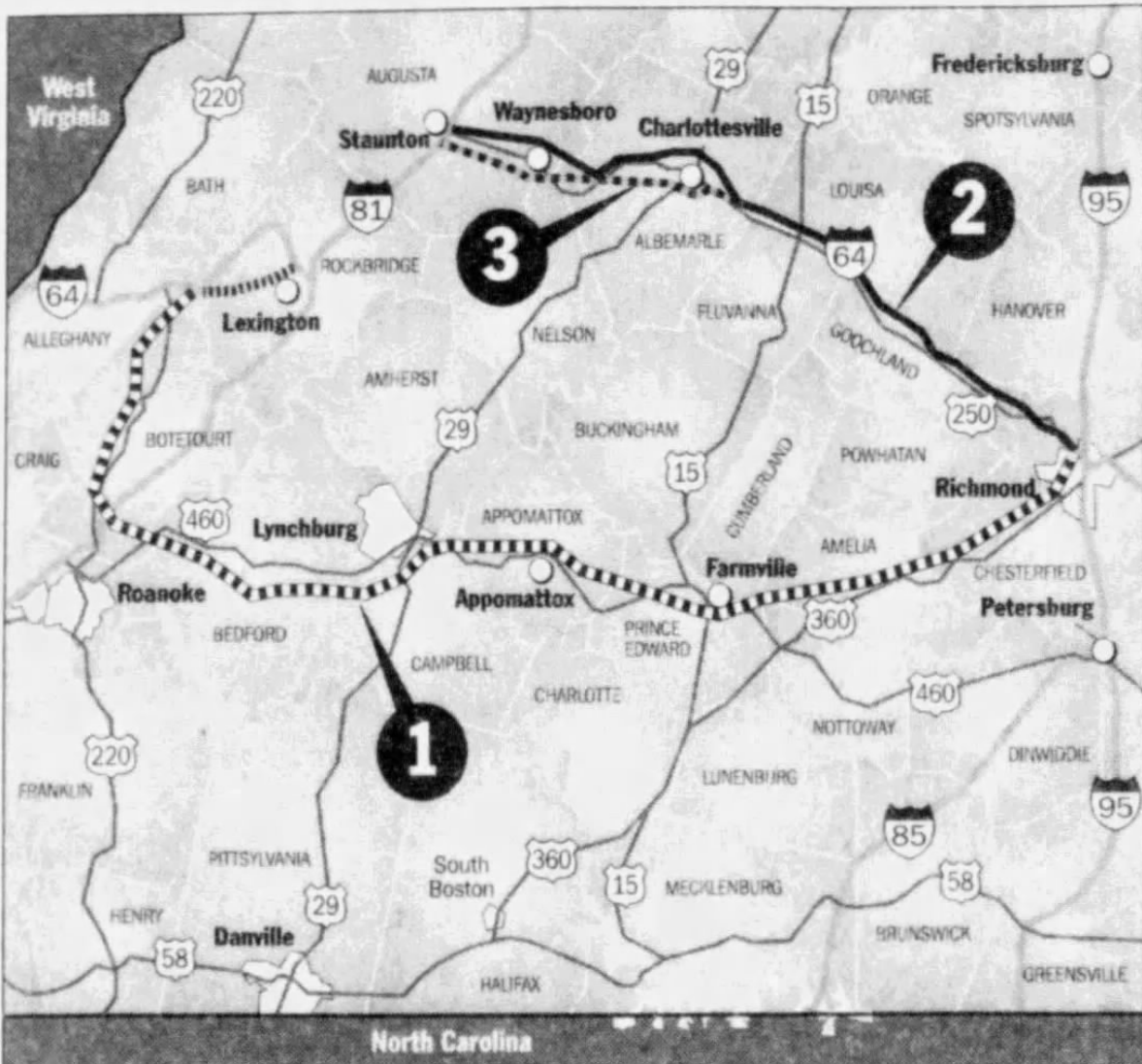
"We certainly would welcome it," said Pete Warren, the city's mayor. "We hope the discussion turns into reality. We'd do anything to get it coming through here."

"Interstates are particularly dear to Lynchburg," said Adams. "Because we were on the first interstate — the James River."

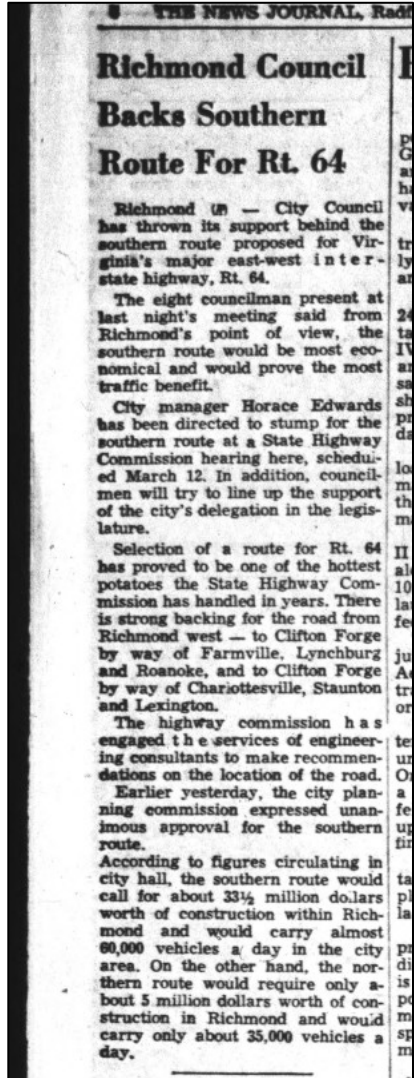


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Road Fund Compromise Poses Virginia Delay

Richmond, Va., August 1. —A compromise formula for financing the huge federal interstate highway program hammered out by a Congressional committee will mean an immediate cut in Virginia interstate funds, highway officials said here yesterday.

If the committee plan is approved by Congress, however, it appears that federal aid for the construction of primary, secondary and urban roads will remain unchanged.

There were indications the plan worked out by the House Ways and Means Committee in Washington will be approved by Congress. The committee rejected any increase in the federal gasoline tax to pour more money into the federal highway trust fund.

Instead of the group approved plan which will slow the pace of the 40 billion dollar interstate construction program four years behind its 1972 target date.

Under the old federal aid schedule Virginia was allocated about 105 million dollars for the current fiscal year. The state's tentative allocation for the year beginning July 1 also would have been about 105 million.

But under the slower financing method approved by the committee Wednesday Virginia officials anticipate only 63.5 million dollars in federal interstate grants for the current financial year.

And instead of another 105 million dollars in 1960-61, Virginia could expect about 25.5 million dollars in interstate grants. The following year Virginia's share would be about 59 million. The interstate program calls for the federal government to pay for 90 per cent of the interstate costs, the states 10 per cent.

Actually, however, the state's share runs to about 12.5 percent instead of 10 percent, because of some expenses involved in interstate highway construction which the federal Bureau of Roads will not reimburse.

The other highway federal aid programs remain unchanged under the committee formula. In 1958-59 Virginia's federal grants—on a 50-50 matching basis—totaled \$16,622,000 for primary roads and \$6,153,000 for secondary roads. This year the grants will total \$9,498,000 for primary and \$4,195,000 for secondary roads.

Estimates for 1960-61 for Virginia's federal grants total \$9,830,000 for primary and \$4,270,000 for secondary roads.

There also were indications the reduced federal interstate grants—if they are reduced—may cloud the chances of federal approval of the southern route for interstate 64 between Richmond and Clifton Forge.

The State Highway Commission has approved the longer and more expensive southern route through the Farmville-Lynchburg - Roanoke areas, despite estimates it would cost 37 million dollars more than the earlier route selected—via Charlottesville, Staunton and Lexington.

Highway Commissioner S. D. May said he had "no idea what the slowdown of the interstate program will mean for Interstate 64. That's up to the Bureau of Roads."

May acknowledge if the committee formula is approved there would be far less federal funds available for the next few years. But he said it would take at least two years after a decision is made on Interstate 64 before construction could start.

Also, he said, if the state gets only 63.5 million dollars in interstate funds for the current financial year the State Highway Commission will have to change existing allocations for highway construction.

Earlier this year the commission accepted only \$87,011,109 of the 105 million dollars available in interstate grants, requiring only

11.6 million in state funds to match the federal money.

H. H. Harris, May's executive assistant, said the reduced interstate program will free about 2 million dollars in state funds which can be reallocated to secondary or primary roads.