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Study sees ICC as boon to area

UM report says suburban road would help BWI, jobs; SHA-financed probe criticized; Highway linking I-270, I-95 is priority of governor

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A University of Maryland study predicts that building an east-west highway between Montgomery and Prince George's counties will bring billions of dollars of benefits to users of the road over a 20-year period while creating thousands of new jobs.

The report, paid for by the State Highway Administration, also concluded that the road known as the Intercounty Connector, or ICC, would also strengthen Baltimore-Washington International Airport in its efforts to compete with Washington Dulles International Airport.

Maryland Transportation Secretary Robert L. Flanagan called the report "very encouraging," but a leading opponent dismissed the study as "suspect."

Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. has made the ICC, which would link Interstate 270 and Interstate 95, his top transportation priority. The proposed toll road has long been opposed by environmental groups.

The study, part of the administration's effort to win federal approval for the project, does not take into account the possible environmental costs of the highway. That assessment will come in a draft environmental impact statement due late next month, transportation officials said.

The UM study was conducted by a team led by Hani Mahmassani, professor of civil and environmental engineering at College Park. The report concluded that users of the highway would benefit economically from reduced travel times, lower vehicle operating costs, improved freight movement and greater overall reliability.

Flanagan said the report shows the ICC would yield \$6.7 billion in savings over 20 years if it follows the original proposed route and \$5.7 billion if built along an alternate northern route.

"It supports our intuitive conclusion that there are tremendous economic benefits to be derived from building the Intercounty Connector," he said.

Mahmassani also estimated that the road would generate 14,000 to 16,000 new jobs in the ICC's "impact area" - taking in parts of Montgomery, Prince George's, Howard and Anne Arundel counties. Despite fears in Prince George's that the road would drain jobs to Montgomery, the report concludes that 37 percent of the employment would be generated in Prince George's County. Dan Wallace, co-chairman of the Montgomery Intercounty Connector Coalition, questioned the independence of the study. "In my view, it's suspect," he said.

Wallace said that Montgomery County, where the study says most of the new jobs would be created, has an



unemployment rate of about 2 percent. The highway, he said, would produce more, rather than less, congestion.

"The ICC is just a great funnel into the job machine of Montgomery County to the detriment of Prince George's County and other counties in the state that are going to be footing the bill," Wallace said.

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