

TRANSPORTATION SESSION WRAP UP

by Margi Vanderhye
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On July 16th I participated in the monthly Transportation Planning Board regional meeting where we had to strip out all of the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority projects for the FY 2009-2014 Transportation Improvement Program. They cannot be included in the TIP because the General Assembly provided no new additional revenue to replace the potential funds lost by the February decision of the Virginia Supreme Court nullifying the Authority's power. I cannot begin to convey my frustration and disappointment about the outcome, and I said so at the meeting.

Some of the program "casualties" of the legislature's failure include funds to match Federal money for METRO and VRE, road construction to address some of our region's worst choke points, and transit improvements that will help with the future shift of thousands of workers to Fort Belvoir and Quantico. As traffic levels of service in our region continue to deteriorate, a rural, adamantly anti-tax cabal in the House continues to block revenue measures that will let us address our problems.

The recent Special Session of the General Assembly, called by Governor Kaine to address the critical need for dedicated, sufficient, and sustainable funding for transportation adjourned on July 10th at 1:39 a.m. After a 13 hour session and an earlier week of committee hearings and floor speeches, the end result was no new money or funding sources for transportation. A compromise bill agreed to by the House and Senate Democrats and the Governor that would have generated \$1.9 billion in statewide transportation revenue and \$2.3 billion for northern Virginia, was defeated along largely party lines by the House. The compromise, which I supported, included:

- a ¼ cent statewide increase in the sales tax
a one cent increase in the sales tax raised in our region to stay in our region
- a reduction in the sales tax on food
- a modest increase in rental car and hotel taxes
- no increase in the gas tax was included

Meanwhile, the statewide funding proposal to emerge from the House Republican caucus was a measure to dedicate revenues from any future off shore drilling to transportation – a proposal that at its most optimistic would achieve a short term money stream in a decade. They also called for an expansion of public-private partnerships to fund construction through the imposition of tolls. These PPTA's can and should be a part of a solution, but we will never be able to toll our way through our statewide construction and maintenance requirements.

Their region-only proposal would have diverted a portion of future growth in direct and indirect revenues from Dulles airport and the Virginia Port Authority to transportation. At

first glance it looks feasible, but such a proposal is both illusive and elusive for several reasons: the funding is based on speculative numbers; the definition of “future growth” is easy to interpret in any number of ways; and finally, they are both future and General Fund revenues so they can easily be diverted for other purposes.

The House Republican leadership did offer one proposal that I supported that calls for additional audits of the Virginia Department of Transportation. But an audit is not a substitute for real funds. The entire administrative cost of VDOT is \$250 million annually, compared to the current annual maintenance deficit of \$400 million.

Accountability in government programs and spending is essential, but it must be a part of a transportation plan, not a substitute for it.

I am deeply distressed that we were not able to conclude a desperately needed transportation funding package that included statewide money and regional funds for northern Virginia and Hampton Roads. I remain committed to working toward a solution that benefits all of us – urban and rural jurisdictions alike – because the very economic vitality of the Commonwealth depends upon it.

I hope you will visit my website at Vanderhye.com to review a video I worked on recently with several business coalitions. The brief presentation clearly and dramatically makes the point that we are undermining our own economic interests by neglecting our infrastructure needs. I want to hear from you about your suggestions for our options, and I want you to know that I am not abandoning the fight for better transportation in Virginia. Our region requires it and our state must have it to remain economically dynamic and competitive.

Thank you
Margi Vanderhye
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