



**A Message
to
Virginia General Assembly Members**

-- February 7, 2005--

NVTC requests your support for SB 1099 -- a bill to increase its motor fuels user fee to four percent from two percent.



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As a General Assembly Member you might ask:

Even if I know that public transit is a good thing and needs more funding now to protect the Commonwealth's investment in environmentally friendly and effective transportation, how can I possibly vote for a gas tax increase in NVTC's jurisdictions in an election year?

Did you know that in September 2004, Virginians for Better Transportation sponsored a series of eight focus groups with registered voters in areas across the state including two each in Northern Virginia, the Tidewater area, Richmond and Southwest Virginia to determine the public's opinion of transportation issues and general awareness of the transportation funding crisis facing the Commonwealth.

They found that participants initially thought that they were paying more state gas taxes than they actually do. Persons driving 15,000 miles annually pay an estimated \$281 annually in gas taxes, of which \$131 is state tax. When focus groups were informed of this fact, most participants felt a 10-cent state gas tax increase would be reasonable (NVTC is seeking the equivalent of less than four cents per gallon in its district).

- The focus groups also revealed that they believe transportation and related funding to be a *quality-of-life* issue for residents of the Commonwealth. This message was, by far, the strongest with focus group members - surpassing safety, economic development, tourism and several other issues.

Ultimately Virginians indicated that they are ready and willing to pay higher gas taxes to support an effective multi-modal transportation system, if they can be assured that the funds will be used responsibly, not diverted from transportation and allocated fairly. NVTC's dedicated motor fuels user fee passes all those tests.

You might also ask:

Didn't Northern Virginia voters oppose new taxes to provide more transit funding when they failed to pass a sales tax referendum in November, 2002?

Research by NVTC shows that a referendum on transit alone in NVTC's jurisdictions would have been likely to PASS and still would today:

- The referendum proposed funding primarily for highways as well as transit and in the entire Planning District 8, the referendum lost 55% to 45%.
- In Arlington, Alexandria and Falls Church it passed and in precincts near Metrorail it had much higher levels of support.
- Persuading just 24,235 voters (out of 485,822) to vote "yes" instead of "no" would have passed the referendum.
- The referendum was opposed strenuously by environmental and Smart Growth advocates who would not have cause to oppose an increase in NVTC's gas tax that is dedicated to public transit.
- Other voters didn't believe the new funds would all stay in this region, but NVTC's user fees do.
- A Blue Ribbon Panel convened by civic and business leaders has now (January 2005) reinforced the immediate need for a dedicated source of funding for transit in Northern Virginia.

For a complete copy of the report visit:

<http://www.thinkoutsidethecar.org/pdfs/REF%20DFT%20COMPL ETE%209-7-04.pdf>

A more detailed fact sheet on SB 1099 is also attached for your information. Please contact NVTC with any questions.