



MEDIA RELEASE

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THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION VOTES TO SUPPORT BLUE RIBBON PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS; NVTC TWO PERCENT GAS TAX INCREASE PASSES SENATE (SB1099)

*FIRST EVER MEETING AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING IN RICHMOND
RALLIES SUPPORT FOR TRANSPORTATION FUNDING LEGISLATION—*

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW!

Arlington, VA – At its February 3, 2005 meeting held at the General Assembly building in Richmond, VA the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission voted to endorse Senate Joint Resolution 440 patroned by Senator Mary Margaret Whipple which would put the General Assembly on record in support of the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Dedicated Funding for Metro. SJR 440 calls on the Virginia Governor to work with the Governor of Maryland, the Mayor of the District of Columbia and federal officials to develop an implementation plan for the Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendations over the next year, in time for legislation to be introduced at the 2006 General Assembly session. SJR 440 is now awaiting action on the Senate floor after being reported from the Rules Committee.

NVTC supports SJR 440 because:

- Over the past 30 years, Metro has become an integral part of the transportation network in Washington Metropolitan area;
- Combined Metrorail, Metrobus, and MetroAccess ridership averages 1.2 million trips per day and continues to grow;
- Metro is the only transit system of its kind in the U.S. without a significant dedicated funding source. **Only 1.6 percent** (from Northern Virginia's two percent gas tax administered by NVTC) of its operating budget and **none** of its capital budget are supported by a dedicated revenue source;

- Metro supports jobs and job creation in Northern Virginia that results in significant state taxes that benefit the entire region and the Commonwealth;
- Metro is an essential part of Northern Virginia's (and the region's) system to move people during emergencies, severe weather and major events.

Because of these facts, NVTC also requested that the appropriate federal officials take action to implement the Panel's recommendations for federal financial support for WMATA.

With the action taken at the Richmond meeting of the commission, NVTC joins the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments in urging implementation of the Panel's recommendations.

NVTC will continue its efforts to help the region advance the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel by exploring how to implement them. In particular, NVTC will assist other regional bodies in developing an understanding of the nature of WMATA's funding requirements, the immediacy of need, and the desirability of both a dedicated revenue source and adequate federal participation in ensuring appropriate levels of capital maintenance and system enhancement for the region's most important transportation investment.

SB 1099 increasing the NVTC motor fuel user fee to four from two percent passed the Senate on February 7, 2004 on a vote of 28 to 10, with one abstention. SB1099 will now proceed to the House of Delegates for consideration. The increase in **this user fee would raise approximately \$25 million annually** and is vital to meeting Northern Virginia's commitment to fund Metro. **This user fee is guaranteed to go to Metro**, thus freeing up additional jurisdictional funding for other important local transportation projects and programs.

NVTC supports SB 1099 because:

- Virginia has the 12th lowest gas tax in the country.
- The Virginians for Better Transportation (VBT), a non-partisan group working to implement statewide, multi-modal transportation solutions through increased, dedicated and sustainable funding and responsible business practices, conducted focus groups throughout the Commonwealth in 2004 about the issue and found that registered voters in areas across the state, including Northern Virginia, initially thought that they were paying more state gas taxes than they actually do.
- Persons driving 15,000 miles annually in Virginia 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.

For more information regarding the Motor Fuels User Fee increase go to:

<http://www.thinkoutsidethecar.org/pdfs/NVTC%20MOTOR%20FUELS%20TAX%20Fact%20Sheet%20%20%201-05.pdf>

NVTC is *the* leading source of information about public transportation issues in Northern Virginia. NVTC is a regional agency with the mission of managing traffic congestion, restoring clean air, boosting the economy and improving the quality of life for all of Northern Virginia's citizens through effective public transit and ridesharing networks. NVTC includes the counties of Arlington, Fairfax and Loudoun and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Falls Church covering over 1,000 square miles with a population of 1.5 million. The agency manages over \$100 million of state and federal grant funds each year for public transit and serves as a forum for its board of 20 state and local elected officials to resolve issues involving public transit and ridesharing. **For information about NVTC, please visit www.thinkoutsidethecar.org or call 703-524-3322.**

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