



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION CALLS ON THE VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO MAKE TRANSIT A HIGHER PRIORITY**

**Arlington, VA** -- At its meeting on the evening of January 2, 2003, the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) called upon the Virginia General Assembly to take several steps in its upcoming 2003 session to increase funding for public transit in Northern Virginia.

The first step: **Transit's current share of revenues in Virginia's Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) should be more than doubled to 32 percent from 14.7 percent.** This would allow the commonwealth to meet its current obligation to provide funds to cover 95 percent of the costs of eligible transit operating and capital expenses. Northern Virginia would directly benefit because the region receives about three-quarters of all state transit funding each year from the TTF -- while the region's share of highway funding (which varies from year to year) is considerably less.

The next step: If new sources of revenue are considered, **NVTC's own two percent motor fuels tax should be doubled to four percent.** This would increase by approximately \$20 million the annual amounts available for NVTC's local governments to support WMATA's transit services.

NVTC's Vice-Chairman, William D. Euille (who is also a member of the Alexandria City Council and WMATA's Board of Directors), explained that "NVTC's action is designed to build on the momentum of the region's transit systems in attracting new riders."

For example, the Virginia Railway Express, which is co-owned by NVTC, is experiencing strong ridership growth of 20 percent annually with a resulting squeeze on available seats. Euille added that "there are many reasons to provide more funding for public transit -- especially in these difficult economic times -- including severe air quality concerns, relief of traffic congestion, access to jobs, and equity for transit compared to the level of state aid provided to Virginia's highways."

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WMATA's 10-year Capital Improvement Program, approved recently by the WMATA Board as a vision for maintaining and expanding WMATA's regional network, is seriously short of funding and additional earmarked funds for transit -- such as increasing transit's share of the TTF to 32% and increasing NVTC's gas tax to four percent -- will help the region achieve the benefits of smart growth strategies.

Vice Chairman Euille went on to say that "both of these legislative proposals provide funds to be spent at the discretion of Northern Virginia's local governments for transit *only*, with no possibility of diversion to controversial highway projects." In the case of the NVTC gas tax increase, there is the added benefit that "all funds raised here, stay here," said Euille.

These actions were recommended by NVTC's Legislative Committee, chaired by Kate Hanley (chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors). The commission approved 13 specific legislative initiatives for state action and three related federal legislative proposals. Among those items were requests for legislation that provides:

- 1) **access for passenger rail service when state investments are made in freight railroads;**
- 2) **improved safety of transit customers and pedestrians;** and
- 3) **prompt implementation of statewide multi-modal planning using existing resources.**

"These legislative recommendations are an important step to obtain the much needed funds that Northern Virginia must have to support our vital public transit system," said Hanley.

Supervisor Elaine McConnell (newly elected NVTC Chairperson and member of the Fairfax County Board Supervisors from the Springfield district) also supports Northern Virginia's objective of finding new and sustainable funding sources for transit projects that can provide improvements to the region's congestion problems. "We want to make life easier for Northern Virginians by funding public transportation to the level that it deserves."

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 19 state and local elected officials to resolve issues involving public transit and ridesharing. Copies of NVTC's complete 2003 legislative agenda, and other information about NVTC, are available at [www.thinkoutsidethecar.org](http://www.thinkoutsidethecar.org) or call 703-524-3322.

## NVTC ##