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## **Virginia Sees Rail Ridership Boom While Congress Considers Eliminating Service**

**Richmond, Virginia-** Virginia's Amtrak trains that connect to Washington, D.C. and the Northeast region saw a phenomenal 21.1 percent growth in passengers between fiscal year 2011 and fiscal year 2010, as ridership grew from 594,214 to 719,579 passengers. Yet the United States House of Representatives recently passed a Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development budget (THUD budget) which reduced Amtrak's budget by hundreds of millions and specifically targets state supported and regional trains such as Virginia's very successful Northeast regional service.

The Commonwealth's twelve regional trains (and their direct bus connectors) link Virginia communities of Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Newport News, Williamsburg, Roanoke, Lynchburg, Charlottesville, Henrico, Downtown Richmond, Ashland, Fredericksburg, Culpeper, Quantico, Manassas, Woodbridge, Burke Centre, and Alexandria to Washington and the northeast corridor. Virginia's regional trains connect over 66 percent of Virginians and represent 67 percent of the intercity passenger rail service in the Commonwealth.

While the U.S. House of Representative's THUD budget eliminated Amtrak's state supported and regional services, as well as zeroing out funding from the federal high speed rail program, the United States Senate THUD budget kept Amtrak's funding level the same and continues to invest \$100 million in high speed rail. As the two houses of Congress work out the differences in their THUD budgets, 16 Virginia Mayors and 21 organizations co-signed a letter asking Congress to keep funding for Amtrak's state supported and regional trains, and including funding for the federal high speed rail program. (**Letter can be found here:** <http://www.vhsr.com/system/files/THUDFINAL.pdf>)

As Congress considers the fate of Amtrak's regional trains, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 required Amtrak and the 20 states that utilize Amtrak regional service to create a uniform policy to continue the operation of those services by 2013. This new policy shifts the responsibility of all regional trains to the states and will likely mean that Virginia needs about \$30 million annually for the continued operation of its twelve regional trains.

To prepare the Commonwealth for these additional costs the Virginia General Assembly created the Virginia Intercity Passenger Rail Operating and Capital Fund (IPROC) during the 2011 legislative session. IPROC can fund the continued operation of Virginia's regional trains, expand regional service, invest in the Commonwealth's passenger rail infrastructure, and match federal high speed rail funding, however, IPROC currently has no dedicated funding source.

At the same time, Virginia and the federal government are investing nearly \$150 million to complete the environmental study on the Washington to Richmond rail corridor to create the blueprint for high speed rail; finish work between Richmond and Norfolk to expand regional passenger rail service to Petersburg and Norfolk by 2013; begin the environmental work on a new rail bridge over the Appomattox River; and complete the environmental work on the Richmond to Raleigh, NC high speed rail corridor.

Virginians for High Speed Rail is calling upon the General Assembly to provide a dedicated funding source for IPROC to allow the Commonwealth to sustain and expand its regional trains in addition to investing in our intercity and high speed passenger rail infrastructure.

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