



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Daniel Plaughner - 804.864.5193

November 29, 2011

VIRGINIA'S REGIONAL AMTRAK SERVICE SAVED, BUT CONGRESS ZEROES OUT FUNDING FOR HIGH SPEED RAIL

Virginia local elected officials, business, and non-profit leaders made case to Congress

Richmond, Virginia - After much debate in Congress, the House of Representatives and the US Senate agreed to a compromise federal appropriations bill, H.R. 2112, that continues funding Amtrak at near current levels, and allows for the continued operation of state supported regional trains, including Virginia's twelve daily trains. Congress zeroed out the federal high speed rail funding for FY 2012 (ending September 2012). However, while the high speed rail program has been zeroed out for FY 2012, states can compete for grants for high speed rail through other funding programs, but would be competing against road and transit projects. Furthermore, all previously appropriated and obligated high speed rail grants are still intact, of which Virginia has been appropriated \$119 million under the program.

Virginians for High Speed Rail, 16 Virginia mayors, and 21 other business and non-profit organizations demonstrated the depth and range of support for Virginia's critical intercity Amtrak service and for investment in high speed rail in the Commonwealth. In joint and individual letters to Virginia's congressional delegation, the groups asked our representatives to support the Senate's funding for the federal high speed rail program and oppose language included in the House appropriations bill that targeted Amtrak's state supported and regional trains. The House's language could have led to the elimination of all twelve of Virginia's regional trains which connect 67% of all Virginians and serve the communities of Alexandria, Woodbridge, Quantico, Culpeper, Fredericksburg, Manassas, Ashland, Burke Centre, Williamsburg, Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Newport News, Richmond, and the future stops in Petersburg, Roanoke, and Norfolk.

"Virginia's state-supported intercity Amtrak service has become increasingly important for connecting the state economy and its workforce, particularly as our highways have become more congested and unreliable. The state's wise, phased investments in the rail network have improved service reliability and led to large increases in ridership," said Stewart Schwartz, executive director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, one of the groups which signed on to the joint letter to Virginia's Congressional Delegation.

"We are very appreciative of our congressional delegation for supporting the continued operation of the Commonwealth's state supported and regional trains which serve as the backbone of Virginia's intercity passenger rail network" stated Danny Plaughner, executive director of Virginians for High Speed Rail, *"however, we are disappointed that high speed rail program was zeroed out this year. High speed rail isn't just about bullet trains, it's about creating jobs, generating economic development, and keeping America competitive in the global marketplace."*

"People want more transportation choices. Virginia had two of the three state-supported rail lines with the greatest ridership increase in the entire country last year," noted Trip Pollard, director of the Southern Environmental Law Center's Land and Community Program. *"Both Congress and the General Assembly need to expand funding for cleaner transportation options such as passenger rail."*

Elected officials and groups signing the joint letter included:

Mayor Calvin L. Coleman, Town of Culpeper
Mayor William D. Euille, City of Alexandria

Chesapeake Alliance
Coalition for Smarter Growth

Mayor Joan Foster, City of Lynchburg
Mayor Paul D. Fraim, City of Norfolk
Mayor Clyde Haulman, City of Williamsburg
Mayor Linda Johnson, City of Suffolk
Mayor Dwight C. Jones, City of Richmond
Mayor Alan P. Krasnoff, City of Chesapeake
Mayor Brian Moore, City of Petersburg
Mayor Dave Norris, City of Charlottesville
Mayor McKinley Price, City of Newport News
Mayor Faye O. Prichard, Town of Ashland
Mayor William D. Sessoms, City of Virginia Beach
Mayor Iris Tharp, Town of Quantico
Mayor Molly Ward, City of Hampton
Mayor Kenneth I. Wright, City of Portsmouth

Danville Pittsylvania County Chamber of Commerce
Future of Hampton Roads
Greater Norfolk Corporation
Greater Richmond Partnership
Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce
Hampton Roads Partnership
Piedmont Environmental Council
Piedmont Rail Coalition
Portsmouth Partnership
Rail Solution
Richmond Friends of Rail
Rockbridge Area Conservation Council
Sierra Club - Virginia Chapter
Southern Environmental Law Center
Southeast High Speed Rail Association
Virginia Association of Railway Patrons
Virginia Brotherhood of Maintenance and Way Employees
Virginia Conservation Network
Virginia League of Conservation Voters

Virginians for High Speed Rail (VHSR) is a non-profit 501(C) (3) coalition of citizens, localities, economic development agencies, community organizations, and businesses that educate and advocate for the improvement and expansion of rail service in Virginia. For more information visit www.vhsr.com.