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Support Builds for Amending the Rail Enhancement Fund

RICHMOND, VA - Two pieces of legislation have been introduced that will amend Virginia's Rail Enhancement Fund (REF), SB 371 sponsored by Senator John C. Watkins (R - Chesterfield) in the State Senate and HB 856 sponsored by Delegate Adam P. Ebbin (D-Arlington) in the House of Delegates. These pieces of legislation will give the Director of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) the authority to waive or reduce the 30 percent match requirement, and it will make the REF compatible with a \$1.4 billion passenger rail grant authorized in S.294, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2007 that recently passed the United States Senate 70 to 22.

The impact from changing the match requirement is that localities will have easier access to the REF for improvements for passenger rail. Of the \$53,408,000 presently allocated from the REF, 89.07% or \$47,570,000 is directed to CSX and Norfolk Southern for freight rail improvements. Only 10.93% or \$5,838,000 is allocated for improvements that would affect passenger rail, which includes both Amtrak and Virginia Railway Express.

If enacted, these amendments could have a positive impact on nearly 4,996,603 Virginians whose cities and counties would have greater access to the REF for passenger rail.

"With oil at nearly \$100 a barrel, congestion on our interstates at record levels, Virginia reaching 1,000 fatalities on our interstates for the first time in 17 years, it only makes sense we would invest in passenger rail" said Lois L. Walker, President of Virginians for High Speed Rail, she continued *"passenger trains use less fuel, move more people, creates less pollution, and cost less to fund and maintain compared to roads. I cannot imagine why anyone would oppose these commonsense amendments."*

The governor-appointed Rail Advisory Board voted at its October 11th meeting to endorse legislation that would give the director of DRPT the authority to waive or reduce the 30 percent match requirement, which is included as part of these amendments.

The Rail Enhancement Fund amendments are supported by the Virginia League of Conservation Voters, Williamsburg City Council, the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce, Virginia Association of Railway Patrons, C'ville Rail, and Virginians for High Speed Rail.

Virginians for High Speed Rail is a non-profit that advocates and educates for reliable higher-speed passenger and freight rail. For more information, please visit our website at www.vhsr.com.

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