

ITEM 12-C.7.a

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ITEM 12-C.7.b

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Local

Officials urge increase in federal funds for Metro

Taryn Luntz, The Examiner

2008-06-06 07:00:00.0

Current rank: # 109 of 4,497

WASHINGTON -

Regional transportation leaders and the area's congressional delegation issued a joint cry Thursday for an increase in federal funding for Metro but acknowledged that a key funding bill is unlikely to help the transit agency this year.

Metro, which is the only major transit system in the country without a dedicated source of funding, is scrounging for money to fix \$489 million in urgent, unbudgeted capital needs for the aging rail system.

The agency also is scrambling to come up with money for its considerable capital needs, such as for old railcars and deteriorating station platforms — which are estimated to cost in the billions of dollars — after Metro's current capital funding program expires in 2010.

A congressional bill sponsored by Rep. Thomas Davis III, R-Va., that would provide \$1.5 billion in federal matching funds for Metro over the next 10 years has stalled in Congress and is unlikely to overcome political challenges this year.

"Even if we do get it passed this year, we're not going to get [money] appropriated this year," said House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md.

Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia pulled together money to match the federal dollars, but Virginia's money fell through when the state's Supreme Court ruled in February that its funding method was unconstitutional.

While Gov. Tim Kaine has scheduled a special legislative session later this month to address the issue, Davis was pessimistic. "I don't think you're going to be getting a transportation bill out of Virginia this year," he said.

Metro General Manager John Catoe, who is co-chairman of the American Public Transportation Association's legislative task force, said he wasn't banking on the federal money this year.

"I always felt it would be very challenging this year, and I didn't hear a great deal of optimism today," he said.

Catoe said the association is focusing on pumping up transit dollars in the federal Surface Transportation Funding bill, which is up for renewal in 2009.

The group is advocating doubling transit funding in that bill to more than \$120 billion over six years.

In the meantime, federal legislators are trying to shepherd a climate-change bill through the Senate this week that contains a provision authored by Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Md., that would direct about \$171 billion to states and localities for public transportation over the next 40 years.

That bill is scheduled to come to a vote today but is expected to be defeated.

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Examiner
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Bipartisan Bill Funding Amtrak Passes in House

Associated Press
Thursday, June 12, 2008; A04

A nearly \$15 billion Amtrak bill passed the House yesterday as lawmakers rallied around an alternative for travelers saddled with soaring gas prices.

The bipartisan bill, which passed by a veto-proof 311 to 104, would authorize funding for the national passenger railroad over the next five years. Some of the money would go to a program of matching grants to help states set up or expand rail service.

Besides the \$14.9 billion provided for Amtrak and intercity rail, an amendment to the bill would authorize \$1.5 billion for Washington's Metro transit system over the next 10 years if Maryland, Virginia and the District provide matching funds. All three have pledged to do so.

The provision, sponsored by Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va.), Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) and House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.), was added as an amendment to the Amtrak funding bill.

The region's congressional delegation, especially Davis, has been trying for the last two years to seek a dedicated funding stream for Metro, the only major transit agency in the country without one. A similar measure is being blocked in the Senate by Tom Coburn (R-Okla.).

The White House has threatened a veto, saying the House bill does not hold Amtrak accountable for its spending. Similar legislation has passed the Senate, also with enough support to override a veto.

"Nothing could be more fitting to bring before the Congress today, on a day when gasoline has reached \$4.05 a gallon across the United States on average," said Rep. John Mica, R-Fla., a longtime Amtrak critic who teamed up with Transportation Committee Chairman James Oberstar (D-Minn.) on the legislation.

Amtrak's previous authorization expired in 2002.

Unlike the Senate version, the House bill includes a requirement for the Department of Transportation to seek proposals from private companies to create a high-speed service that would take travelers from Washington to New York City in two hours or less.

Critics say the proposal would undermine Amtrak by peeling off its most valuable asset, the Northeast Corridor.

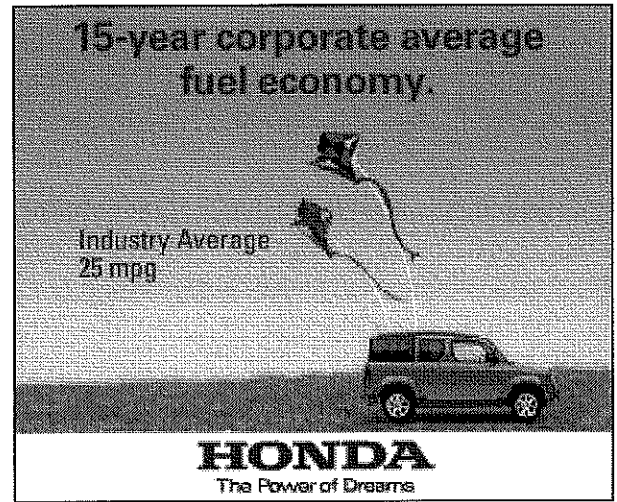
Amtrak said it is pleased that the House and the Senate had acted.

"This reflects strong support for intercity passenger rail service, and we look forward to working with Congress as they move forward to reconcile a final authorization bill," spokesman Cliff Black said.

May was the biggest month in Amtrak's 37-year history, with total ridership up 12 percent over last year and ticket revenue up 16 percent over last year. Black said Amtrak's research indicates that about half the increase can be attributed to gas prices.

Staff writer Lena H. Sun contributed to this report.

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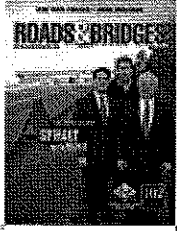
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Senators announce plan to address HTF shortfall

HTF would get \$8 billion from U.S. Treasury under plan
June 13, 2008



A bipartisan group of senators on June 13 announced a new plan to address the projected Highway Trust Fund (HTF) revenue shortfall in fiscal year 2009.

The plan would transfer as much as \$8 billion from the U.S. Treasury to the trust fund. These funds were previously taken from the trust fund during TEA-21 negotiations as a tradeoff for future funding guarantees. The HTF faced a surplus at the time.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Ranking Member Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), and Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Patty Murray (D-Wash.) developed the plan, which would ensure sufficient HTF revenues to fulfill SAFETEA-LU commitments.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Treasury projected an approximately \$3.7 billion revenue shortfall in the HTF's highway account. If not offset, the shortfall would require a reduction in states' federal highway funding of about \$14 billion or 34% below the level guaranteed in SAFETEA-LU for fiscal year 2009.

Given recent government data reporting a historic decline in vehicle miles traveled, largely in response to high gas prices, it is probable that revenue into the highway account will erode further.

The bipartisan plan would be included in legislation (H.R. 3540) soon to be taken up by the Senate that would extend authorization for Federal Aviation Administration programs, which expires on June 30, 2008.

Source: *Associated General Contractors of America* June 13, 2008

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Historic financing completed on Northern Virginia project

\$589 million issued to fund I-495 congestion-relief project
June 16, 2008

Capital Beltway drivers are one step closer to a smoother commute June 12 after \$589 million in tax-exempt private activity bonds were issued for the first time ever by sponsors of the I-495 Capital Beltway High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes Project in Northern Virginia, announced Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters.

"This financial transaction represents a historic turning point not only for the way we finance highway projects but also for the thousands of drivers who lose precious time stuck in traffic on one of the nation's most congested highways," Secretary Peters said.

The \$589 million in private activity bonds, issued by the Capital Beltway Funding Corporation, a non-profit Virginia corporation, is part of an estimated \$1.9 billion finance package to fund the 14-mile project. It includes two new variably priced HOT lanes in each direction to be added to the Capital Beltway between Georgetown Pike and the Springfield Interchange. Once construction is finished in 2012, there will be two additional lanes on each side of the Beltway. The two existing middle lanes would then be converted to HOT lanes with prices that vary depending on traffic volume—ensuring that traffic in these lanes keeps moving at all times.

Two private companies, Transurban and Fluor Enterprises, will finance, operate and maintain the express lanes using facility revenues to repay the \$589 million in private activity bonds as well as a \$589 million U.S. DOT direct loan. The loan was made through the Department's Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act loan program, which encourages private sector participation in the financing of highway projects with flexible repayment terms. The Commonwealth of Virginia is also providing significant resources to this historic public-private partnership.

As part of the surface transportation legislation signed in August 2005, private companies building and operating public use facilities are authorized to borrow up to \$15 billion nationwide on a tax-exempt basis to build highways and certain freight facilities. So far, the Department has authorized the issuance of \$5.6 billion in these private-activity bonds to seven projects around the country, including the Capital Beltway HOT Lanes. However, this is the first time such bonds have actually been issued.

Source: U.S. DOT June 16, 2008

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House Transportation Bill Advances Without Highway Trust Fund Relief

Posted: June 23rd, 2008 09:38 AM EDT

By Colby Itkowitz, staff, Congressional Quarterly Weekly

House appropriators last week refused a request to help bail out the federal Highway Trust Fund.



"This shortfall is not of this committee's making," said John W. Olver, D-Mass., chairman of the House Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Subcommittee.

The subcommittee on June 20 approved its draft fiscal 2009 spending bill by voice vote. The bill includes \$108.3 billion, with about \$55 billion in discretionary spending for transportation, housing and other independent agencies. The bill would appropriate \$66.7 billion for transportation and \$41.5 billion for housing.

The 2005 highway law (PL 109-59) "overcommitted the dedicated revenues available for surface transportation, and I am hopeful the authorization and tax writing committees will be able to make up the shortfall as we continue to move this bill forward," Olver said.

Both the Office of Management and Budget and the Congressional Budget Office have projected that the trust fund will run up a \$3.7 billion deficit in fiscal 2009. The panel rejected requests from the Bush administration to borrow \$3.2 billion from the mass transit fund to make up for the difference.

Keeping with the guarantees in the 2005 highway law, the panel provided \$40.2 billion for highways and \$10.3 billion for public transit services.

That number includes \$1.8 billion for new commuter transit lines.

Amtrak would receive \$1.5 billion, including \$114 million additional funds for back pay to union employees who worked without a pay increase for eight years. That is significantly more than President Bush's \$625 million request, according to the subcommittee.

The Federal Aviation Administration would receive about \$15.4 billion.

The bill would provide \$4 billion for Community Block Grants, \$1 billion more than Bush requested.

Box Score

Bill: House draft -- Fiscal 2009 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development appropriations.

Latest Action: House Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies

Appropriations Subcommittee approved, 29-0, on June 20.

Next Likely Action: Full House committee markup.

Reference: Fiscal 2009 preview, CQ Weekly, p. 1345; president's fiscal 2009 budget request, pp. 383, 381; fiscal 2008 law (PL 110-161), p. 30.

Source: CQ Weekly The definitive source for news about Congress. ©2008 Congressional Quarterly Inc. All Rights Reserved.

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Wednesday, June 25, 2008

TRANSPORTATION

Projected fuel costs for VRE soar above agency's budget

By David Sherfinski
Examiner Staff Writer

Virginia Railway Express will pay almost \$3 million more for fuel next year, 80 percent above the rail agency's budget.

"Right now, when we're looking at 2009, fuel costs are almost doubling up. Our ridership's higher, so we have a little more revenue — there are a lot of punts and takes going on," said VRE Chief Executive Dale Zehner.

Ridership for May was 305,560, an 8.4 percent increase from May 2007, Zehner said.

But the single-digit increase in riders will not cover the spike in fuel costs, said board member and Prince William County Supervisor Wally Covington, R-Brentsville.

"The dark side of the lining is the fuel cost [increase] is greater than the increase in ridership," he said.

The estimated price per gallon in the 2009 budget is \$2.38; actual prices for diesel are projected at \$4.23 per gallon.

VRE was able to partially offset rising fuel prices by purchasing fixed-price contracts — called "hedging" — through December at \$2.55 per gallon.

VRE is locked in for two-thirds of diesel purchases through De-

“The dark side of the lining is the fuel cost [increase] is greater than the increase in ridership” — Wally Covington,

Prince William County supervisor

and one-third through February 2009.

"We're paying below market price right now because of the hedge, but when [it] ends, we're back to market price," Zehner said.

Fuel in the current fiscal year is expected to cost \$4.58 million, \$680,000 over VRE's revised budget.

Covington said the board was more active in buying futures contracts in the past to save money on diesel fuel.

"Last year, we cut back on futures because we thought \$2.50 that's high," he said.

Board Operations Chairman John Jenkins, a Prince William County supervisor, was hopeful that new sources of revenue in the way of increased fares and government subsidies would help to offset soaring fuel prices.

A 3 percent fare increase will go into effect Monday.

asherfinski@doxaminer.com



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American Public Transportation Association Applauds Passage of H.R. 6052

Media Advisory

June 26 2008

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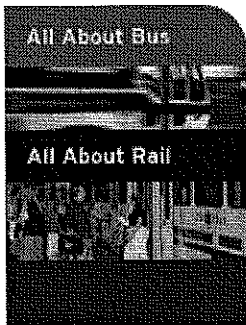
The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) applauds the House vote to pass H.R. 6052, an important piece of legislation that will authorize investing almost \$2 billion in U.S. public transportation systems.

"I want to thank the House for voting to pass H.R. 6052 today. This important piece of authorizing legislation will mean that more Americans will have transportation options to avoid the high cost of gas," said APTA president William W. Millar. "With public transit ridership at a modern record high even as high fuel costs are negatively impacting public transit systems' budgets, this legislation will help public transit systems keep fares down and expand service."

Last year 10.3 billion trips were taken on U.S. public transportation – the highest number of trips taken in fifty years. In the first quarter of 2008, public transportation continued to climb and rose by 3.4 percent.

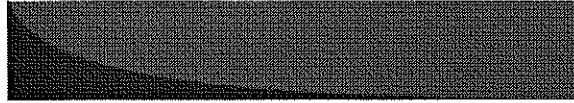
In April 2008, APTA did a survey on public transportation fuel costs. From 2004 to 2008, fuel costs rose 166%, and that increase was before fuel went to more than \$4 a gallon. As a result of high fuel prices, some public transit systems have had to raise fares, cut service or postpone needed actions.

"Just as high gas prices strain the family budget, so too do high fuel prices strain a public transportation system budget," said Millar. "We call on the Senate to take up this legislation immediately and to make a difference for the millions of Americans who need to beat high gas prices and save money."



APTA is a nonprofit international association of more than 1,500 member organizations including public transportation systems; planning, design, construction and finance firms; product and service providers; academic institutions; and state associations and departments of transportation. APTA members serve the public interest by providing safe, efficient and economical public transportation services and products. APTA members serve more than 90 percent of persons using public transportation in the United States and Canada.

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Question Everything

This is an effort to give people another opportunity to engage in the debate on the issues of the day. Debate is, "to discuss or examine a question by considering or stating different arguments." To ensure the give and take of debate this blog has one rule--Answer a question and you get to ask one. You must state at least one reason to support your position. I hope that through reasoned discourse solutions will emerge.

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Would You Support a One-Cent Increase in the Sales Tax (excl. Food) for Regional Transportation Projects?

- Yes
- No
- No Opinion
- Need More Info

Show results

Votes so far: 1
Days left to vote: 8

LINKS

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FRIDAY, JUNE 27, 2008

58.1-603.3 A Step in the Right Direction

58.1-603.3. *Imposition of additional state retail sales and use taxes in certain regions.*

A. As used in this section, unless the context clearly shows otherwise:

B. There is hereby levied and imposed, in addition to all other taxes and fees now imposed by law, a general retail sales and use tax at the rate of one percent in any urban region of the Commonwealth that has at any time an aggregate of at least 8.5 million daily vehicle miles traveled in the area in accordance with the most recent written determinations of daily vehicle miles traveled by the Virginia Department of Transportation. Based solely on this requirement, the Tax Commissioner shall be responsible for making the written determination of whether an urban region has met such requirement.

The tax shall be imposed on July 1 of the calendar year following the date of the Tax Commissioner's written determination, with a regular session of the Virginia General Assembly intervening between the time of the written determination and the imposition of the tax.

The Tax Commissioner shall promptly provide a copy of any written determination to the Governor and the chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations, the House Committee on Finance, and the Senate Committee on Finance. The written determination shall include the date on which the tax shall be first imposed in the respective urban region.

(Sections C. through G pertain to what is subject to the sales tax. Food is excluded.)

H. The revenues generated and collected pursuant to the tax imposed under subsection B shall be deposited by the Comptroller into a special nonreverting fund within the state treasury for the respective urban region entitled the "Revenue Fund for the Urban Region of" The Fund shall be established on the books of the Comptroller when the tax under subsection B is first imposed in the respective urban region. Interest earned on moneys in the Fund shall remain in the Fund and be credited to it. Any moneys remaining in the Fund, including interest thereon, at the end of each fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund but shall remain in the Fund.

For the purposes of depositing such revenues into the Fund, there shall be deposited into the Fund an estimate developed by the Department of Taxation of such revenues to be received into the state treasury each month, net of the estimated applicable portion of any refunds to taxpayers and after subtraction of the direct costs of administration by

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Matthew Kelly

About Me

MATT KELLY
 FREDERICKSBURG,
 VIRGINIA, UNITED
 STATES

I've been involved in local, state and national politics since 1981. I've served as a campaign volunteer, coordinator, candidate, and in 2002 was elected to the Fredericksburg City Council. I was re-elected in 2006. My plan is to take a vacation from politics at the end of this term in 2010 and spend some time reintroducing myself to my family.

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Simple Request

The goal of this blog is to have a reasoned debate on issues. Reasoned debate is NOT--name calling, over simplifications, or unsubstantiated accusations. If that is all you have to offer this site is not for you. For those who have a real interest in making our lives better I look forward to

A *the Department of Taxation. Such estimated deposits into the Fund shall be adjusted for the actual net revenues received in the preceding month.*

I. Except as otherwise specifically provided by law, the net revenues generated and collected from the tax imposed under subsection B shall be allocated by the Commonwealth Transportation Board solely for transportation projects in the respective urban region that are included in the federally mandated Regional Transportation Plan approved by the metropolitan planning organization for the respective urban region (or any successive plan).

As outlined in previous posts, the Fredericksburg Metropolitan Planning Organization (FAMPO) has spent the last two years reorganizing itself and planning to meet our region's future transportation challenges. Over the next few months the public will begin to see the results of these efforts--

--A multi-modal (cars, trains, buses, trails) transportation plan based on a comprehensive review of the development plans of member jurisdictions.

--An approved set of guidelines to prioritize transportation projects based on categories such as safety, congestion mitigation, and cost-to-benefit.

--Plans to look beyond large transportation projects to consider smaller, and possibly more cost effective, projects; i.e., adding turn lanes, intersection improvements, etc.

--Finalizing plans with VDOT to allow local jurisdictions more authority in planning and building secondary roads.

--A policy to ensure public involvement in discussions on regional transportation.

FAMPO has done, and is doing, everything it can do to ensure that transportation dollars spent in this region have the maximum positive impact in meeting our transportation needs. We now need help to ensure we have sufficient resources to meet our future needs.

Our current Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP) through 2035 identifies \$1.4 billion dollars available to our region. FAMPO has identified almost \$7 billion in projects to maintain a passable transportation system. As local elected representatives, we will need to review our respective Comprehensive Plans to bring them more in line with the resources available. In turn we must expect our elected representatives in Richmond to recognize the growth rate for this region and provide realistic funding.

For the past two years, we have taken every opportunity to remind our representatives in Richmond that we are the fourth largest and fastest growing region in the Commonwealth and that the current process and funding dynamic for meeting our transportation needs is inadequate. As the current Special Session on Transportation opened, two members of our delegation had taken steps to address this issue.

Delegate Mark Cole introduced two bills, HB601 and HB603, that change the current funding formula. HB601 would allocate transportation dollars based on the number of vehicles registered in a jurisdiction, while HB603 would allocate funds based on population. Either bill would benefit this region but neither has any chance of passing. In a recent interview on the special session, Governor Kaine

nearing your ideas, comments and concerns.

For additional information or news stories on issues I would strongly suggest you visit the Links listed above.

Thoughts To Remember

"People demand freedom of speech to make up for the freedom of thought which they avoid."

Kierkegaard

"When ideas fail, words come in very handy."

Goethe

"A witty saying proves nothing."

Voltaire

echoed the position of a majority of General Assembly members when he said, "I don't think that's helpful to Virginia. I don't think it's helpful to get in a deep allocation debate that pits one region against another." So we will put off that critical discussion for another day.

Senator Houck attached an amendment, 58.1-603.3, to Transportation Bill SB6009 which imposes a one cent sales tax (excluding food) in areas serviced by an MPO where there are more than 8.5 million daily vehicle miles a day. FAMPO would easily qualify under these conditions. What would this amendment mean to us?

Over the coming years FAMPO can expect transportation funding at a level of between \$28 to \$30 million dollars. A one-cent increase in the sales tax as outlined in 58.1-603.3 would generate an additional \$36 million dollars-- more than double funding for transportation within the MPO.

I would prefer that the jurisdictions of the MPO be given the option of imposing this tax; i.e, all three MPO jurisdictions – Stafford, Spotsylvania, and Fredericksburg – would have to make the case to residents of the need for the tax increase. We plan to begin the public involvement phase of our CLRP review at the end of this summer and this would provide the forum for such a discussion. However, in making this recommendation I would have to acknowledge the hypocrisy of my position after I have on numerous occasions criticized our state representatives for pushing off the tough decisions onto local governments.

I have also read some criticism of the proposal since the Commonwealth Transportation Board would have the final say on what projects the money could be spent on. As noted in the legislation, that decision would be based on "federally mandated Regional Transportation Plan." The CTB would be picking the projects from a list provided by the FAMPO. While I would question the need to involve the CTB, I understand the rationale of working under the current process. We can, and must, deal with the process another day.

While I have some issues with Mr. Houck's legislation, I have to acknowledge that this is an effort to address an issue that FAMPO has been putting forward for years. There are also the political realities consider – what we can realistically expect to have some small chance of passing.

While there are big issues still unresolved -- the funding formula, reforming the process, and more local control of transportation projects – 58.1-603.3 represents a step in the right direction. Finally, there is an acknowledgement that there are regions in the Commonwealth beyond Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads that face transportation challenges. I believe FAMPO is prepared to make the case that the additional funding is needed and will fund projects that will have a positive impact on the region's transportation system.

The political reality is that SB3009 will be used by both sides to meet perceived political objectives – either to show one side's commitment to raise taxes or pointing to the inaction of the other. It does not look like Richmond has reached the point where the transportation needs of the Commonwealth trump political considerations. However, should we be surprised and some compromise is reached, I would hope that Senator Houck's amendment in some form is part of it.

If you agree with the position to support Houck's amendment 58.1-603.3 I would urge you to contact your elected representatives in Richmond. If not, please provide

alternatives to meet our transportation needs.

Posted by MATT KELLY at 3:26 PM 4 comments

SUNDAY, JUNE 15, 2008

THE SLAVERY MUSEUM PARTNERSHIP?

At our last meeting former Governor Douglas Wilder addressed the City Council in support of a request to provide the National Slavery Museum a three-year exemption on real estate taxes. The amount involved is \$42,745.00 per year for a total exemption of \$128,235.00. In his statement before Council Governor Wilder placed the request in the context of, "Either you want the museum here or not."

Many I have talked to question why Governor Wilder would seem to be drawing a line in the sand over such a small amount of money in light of the over all cost of the project which now must be significantly higher than the original \$200 million price tag established over six years ago. Some are asking whether the former governor is only looking for an excuse to take the project back to Richmond blaming the move, and lack of progress, on the city. I hope this is not the case as such a decision would be both unfortunate and unfair to Fredericksburg. The City has in fact tried to work with the Slavery Museum staff to move the project forward. Unfortunately this effort to form a working partnership has not been reciprocated.

In June of 2005 Council members were asked to respond to a March request by the National Slavery Museum to consider waiving construction fees. Comments by all members of the Council were positive. My comment was, "I don't think it's excessive (fee waivers) in comparison to the museum's potential to the community,"

The actual request for the fee waivers came before City Council at its meeting of July 12, 2005. Based on conversations held with other members of Council I moved to defer the vote on the fee waivers until we could have an update on the project provided by representatives of the museum. As I stated at the meeting, "We're not asking anything we haven't asked of any other organization that is asking for money."

The response to the City's request for additional information was answered in a memo sent by museum Executive Director, Ms. Vonita Foster, to City Manager Phil Rodenburg. The request for fee waivers was withdrawn without explanation.

A few days later Ms. Foster responded to the Council's action in an interview with the Richmond Times Dispatch in which she was quoted as saying, "We need partners who are visionary, fair and unbiased." She went on to imply that the museum many not be built in Fredericksburg. An E-mail was sent directly to Governor Wilder, again expressing support for the project, and requesting clarification of Ms. Foster's statements. In part the e-mail stated, "I hope that the decision of the museum board to withdraw their request for fee waivers is not an indication that the information requested will not be forthcoming; or that the museum may be considering relocating as implied by your Executive Director in comments to the press."