

MY OPINION: COMPARISON OF TRANSPORTATION PLANS

SENATOR EDD HOUCK, (D. Spotsylvania)

Recent letters to the editor from area House of Delegates members extol the virtues of their Transportation Plan while casting the Senate's Transportation Plan in a negative manner. In particular, they fail to mention that the House Plan leaves behind the entire Commonwealth except for Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia, including the Fredericksburg and Culpeper Districts. They also fail to mention their use of debt financing and taking funds from other core governmental services. Their plan falls entirely on Virginians, leaving out-of-state travelers scot-free! Sadly, high growth areas like ours receive little benefit in the House Plan.

To the casual observer, both the Senate and the House Plans provide more funding for each transportation district. But a close examination reveals the dramatic differences and clearly shows that the House Plan is operating under the premise that "something; even crumbs, is better than nothing". For the Fredericksburg and Culpeper Districts, their plan is mere window dressing, which would not begin to make a meaningful difference in our choked transportation system either now or into the future. The House Plan is for only two years and uses precious funding taken from education, public safety and health care services. On the other hand, the Senate Plan uses new revenue sources and funds transportation by a sustainable approach into the future, while leaving education and public safety funding intact for those intended purposes. The Senate refuses to use debt financing during healthy economic times. The House Plan depends heavily on new debt.

Living here, I know the problems we face each day getting to work, picking up our children, running errands and moving goods from point A to point B in a healthy, cost effective business environment. Window dressing and political rhetoric will not get the job done. At the end of the day, the Fredericksburg and Culpeper Districts would see little change under the House Plan.

If you agree that now is the time for action in our area, here is what is at stake when the two plans are compared. Please remember, the last time the General Assembly made a significant change in transportation funding was in 1986. Can we wait another twenty years as the House is demanding? I think not! Each month the cost of labor, materials, right-of-way acquisition and engineering work escalate. Additionally, new subdivisions and shopping centers seem to appear overnight, causing more congestion on a strained system where commuters have to fight long delays just to get to work and return home. Ask yourself, what is the cost of doing nothing, or the case of the House Plan, settling for crumbs? See for yourself how the competing plans stack up.

**COMPARISON OF SENATE AND HOUSE TRANSPORTATION PLANS
(FROM 2007 THROUGH 2012)***

LOCALITY	SENATE PLAN (IN MILLIONS)	HOUSE PLAN (IN MILLIONS)
	(Secondary Roads)	
Spotsylvania	\$68.9	\$21.2
Stafford	65.5	16.5
Louisa	19.9	7.3
Madison	9.1	4.1
Culpeper	25.1	8.1
Orange	17.6	6.3
	(Urban System—Cities and Towns)	
City of Fredericksburg	\$17.9	\$5.0
Town of Culpeper	6.5	2.5
Town of Orange	2.6	1.0

*Senate Finance Committee Staff Analysis from VDOT sources, March 10, 2006

The Senate plan utilizes several transportation related user fees which have a direct link to roads and individuals who use them, including out-of-state users of our system, which is only fair. The House plan depends entirely on Virginians, which in my mind is short-sighted. Travelers from outside Virginia who use our transportation system should help defray its costs.

Additionally, the Senate Plan includes a local transportation funding resource based on real-estate sales whereby proceeds collected in a given locality remain in that locality for transportation improvements. This feature is especially helpful in high growth areas like ours where rapid development is causing serious transportation difficulties. The Senate Plan utilizes this local self-help feature which allows development to help pay for needed infrastructure.

In addition, the Senate initiated several precedent setting legislative measures, which have passed the General Assembly and awaits the Governor's signature. Many of these measures I have advocated for years deal with local land use planning and transportation planning with VDOT. Also included were Transfer of Development Rights and Clustered Housing legislation to deal with growth related transportation issues. My bill calling for Multi-modal Transportation Planning also passed.

In summary, the Senate's Transportation Plan creates a program with dependable, sustainable funding sources from all users of the Commonwealth's system, including those from out-of-state. It addresses transportation in all areas of the state without resorting to huge new debt or raiding other essential core governmental services. High growth localities are given another funding tool to help defray the cost of transportation infrastructure caused by development.

The harsh reality is that the House Plan falls short on every count when compared the Senate's Plan. Recent news articles reveal the obvious; the entire Fredericksburg/Culpeper area is one of the fastest growing in the entire United States, with no end in sight. A long range, sustainable transportation funding program is essential for our economic wellbeing, as well as, to protect our time with family; not setting in traffic grid-lock. The Senate offers a reasonable, cost effective plan to meet current and future transportation needs.