



February 2, 2005

An Open Letter to Northern Virginia Legislators: Stop the Unfair and Unnecessary Toll Increase on the Dulles Toll Road

Dear Northern Virginia Legislator:

On behalf of the thousands of members of the National Taxpayers Union (NTU) in Northern Virginia, I urge you to help stop the Commonwealth Transportation Board from passing any toll increase on the Dulles Toll Road. During the Board's meeting on February 16 and 17 in Richmond, members of the Board will discuss and possibly finalize plans to increase tolls from 50 to 75 cents at the main plaza on the Toll Road and from 35 to 50 cents at other exits. This means that most residents of Northern Virginia will be unable to attend a hearing and that the Board will be making its decision without necessary input.

There can be no doubt that raising tolls for any purpose other than maintaining or constructing road capacity is nothing more than a tax increase. The fact that the Legislature is delegating to an un-elected, bureaucratic body a decision over whether or not to raise taxes – without so much as a hearing in Northern Virginia – is shameful. Even worse is the fact that this tax increase is likely to be only the first of many needed to pay for the Dulles Rail boondoggle. Construction of the project is expected to cost \$3.5 billion and, if history is any guide, with costs likely be revised upward, (they have already risen by \$80 million).

Even after the Dulles Rail project is completed, the bills for taxpayers will keep coming. Since Metro fares only cover about 55 percent of the agency's operating costs and the system is in a long-term decline, it is likely that to keep Dulles Rail operational, taxpayers will be forced to pay at least 50 percent of the \$94 million in expected annual operating costs. From the perspective of relieving gridlock on and around the Dulles Toll Road and in Northern Virginia, spending multiple billions of dollars to extend Metro is very inefficient. Even upon its completion, this project is expected to have a minimal impact in removing cars from the roads.

Forcing motorists to pay a disproportionate share of the cost of a project they may never use – without ever holding a local hearing or a vote – is not only patently unfair, it is poor politics. As an elected official it is your responsibility to stop un-elected bureaucrats from raising taxes. Motorists and taxpayers throughout Northern Virginia are counting on you to make sure that they have a say as to whether this tax on driving will be raised!

Sincerely,

Paul Gessing
Director of Government Affairs