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NC Go! WARNS OF DIRE TRANSPORTATION DANGERS AHEAD

Coalition proposes six steps to get transportation back on track and keep good jobs coming to North Carolina

RALEIGH, NC – North Carolina’s transportation infrastructure is vastly under-funded, endangering the mobility, quality of life and job opportunities of North Carolinians. *NC Go!* – the state’s only statewide group of organizations, businesses and individuals fighting to improve transportation in North Carolina – focused on these challenges and potential solutions during the group’s annual meeting Wednesday night in Raleigh.

NC Go! co-chair Bill Carstarphen outlined the coalition’s recommendations, including:

- 1) **Eliminate diversions from the Highway Trust Fund** – Over the last 17 years, more than \$3.7 billion has been redirected to non-transportation purposes. NCDOT projections show revenue raised from current sources will fall short of needs by \$30 billion over the next 25 years. These ongoing diversions are a significant obstacle to keeping pace with transportation needs.
- 2) **Support local option financing** – Increasingly, localities will have to play a larger role in addressing their unique transportation needs. Local leaders should consider options to modestly increase local sales taxes, with the revenue designated for local transportation projects.
- 3) **Preserve the state gas tax** – North Carolina’s gas tax is the primary source of funds for both maintenance of our existing roads and public transportation. It is true that revenue from the gas tax has increased. But outlays for construction, fuel and other costs have increased at a far greater rate. The result has been a net reduction in transportation investment. Reducing the gas tax would result in a greater backlog of unmet needs.
- 4) **Expand the list of candidate toll roads** – Transportation officials should consider as candidates for toll roads existing roads, such as I-95, that require repair and capacity expansion. These projects should be comprehensively planned, designed, scheduled and executed. A majority of North Carolinians favor establishing toll roads if the revenues would benefit transportation.
- 5) **Invest in rural roads** – Earlier this year, The Road Information Program (TRIP) – a well-respected national transportation think tank – released a report listing North Carolina’s rural highways as among the deadliest in the nation. Additional resources are needed to allow NCDOT to make the necessary safety improvements in road design, lane markings, signage and safety features such as safe shoulders and guardrails.

- 6) **Continue to examine and improve management practices at NCDOT** – One specific area in need of improvement is the environmental permitting process. Inefficiencies and delays in this process are chief causes of increases in project costs. Also, the bureaucracy in the department should be streamlined. Redundant positions, unnecessary reviews and duplicate tasks should be eliminated to increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness. As a stretch objective, NCDOT should revise current design practices and construction processes such that, without compromising safety, construction cost could be reduced by 10 percent.

The program, “*Transportation Investment in North Carolina: Fueling the Jobs of Tomorrow*,” also featured: Winston-Salem mayor Allen Joines; Bob Leak, president of Winston-Salem Business, Inc.; and Robert Langford, operations senior manager of Dell Inc.’s new Winston-Salem facility.

These speakers addressed the key role transportation plays in economic development, using Dell’s decision to locate in Winston-Salem as a case study.

“The work *NC Go!* is doing is crucial to North Carolina because no issue is more vital to our state’s continued economic prosperity than transportation,” said Leak. “In our negotiation with Dell, the commitment to get needed transportation improvements done in time was a key to landing the project. Without a commitment by the state and the community, the project would not be where it is today.”

Langford spoke about how transportation figures into Dell’s business model.

“For Dell, coming to North Carolina allows us to optimize our transportation spending and improve our operations infrastructure,” said Langford. “The Triad location allows us to reach 65 percent of our U.S. customers by ground within two days.”

About *NC Go!*:

NC Go! was launched in 2001 with fewer than 10 members. Today, the coalition has more than 130 members representing more than 22,000 businesses and organizations and one million individuals across the state. It is the only diverse statewide organization fighting to relieve traffic congestion and to increase transportation funding.

Since its inception, the organization has worked to protect dedicated Trust Fund money, expand Highway Trust Fund flexibility, maintain efficient cash management practices, terminate annual transfers from the Highway Trust Fund to the General Fund, increase multi-modal transportation funding and has commissioned polls to gauge North Carolinians’ opinions on transportation problems and solutions.

In years past, *NC Go!* has been instrumental in the passage of several pieces of legislation including NC Moving Ahead and the Cash Management Bill. In 2003, *NC Go!* called for an independent study of project delivery, a project that came to fruition when the legislature released its findings – the NCDOT Project Delivery Study Final Report – in July 2004. *NC Go!* continues to motivate transportation policy and reach out to thought leaders across the state.

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