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Contact: Anna Prince ([aprince@capstrat.com](mailto:aprince@capstrat.com))  
Phone: (919) 882-1923

## **Proposed Transportation Budget a Step in the Right Direction**

*Polling data shows citizens want transportation revenue spent on transportation projects*

**Raleigh, N.C.** – The NC House of Representatives’ proposed budget marks initial progress towards helping North Carolina regain its title of *the Good Roads State*. According to transportation advocacy group *NC Go!*, phasing out the transfer from the Highway Trust Fund to the General Fund and appropriating recurring funds to the NC Turnpike Authority will help get vital projects up and running to address congestion.

“North Carolinians expect that the taxes and fees they pay for vehicles and at the gas pump should go for what they were intended – transportation needs,” said Marc Finlayson, *NC Go!* co-chair.

Polling by the organization on May 28-29, 2008, shows 79 percent of the respondents were supportive of ending the transfer of critical Highway Trust Fund dollars to the General Fund, and 77 percent believe transportation revenue should be used for transportation purposes.

“Our polling backs up the recommendations of the House – the time has come to phase out the transfer,” said Finlayson. “Given that the NC Turnpike Authority is ready to start on the Triangle Expressway, we urge the House and Senate to quickly reach an agreement and move forward on what will hopefully be the first of many projects that deal with urban congestion.”

The majority of poll respondents (61 percent) said they would support tolling projects to ease urban congestion, provided tolls were removed when the project was paid for and non-tolled alternative routes were available.

“Tolling is becoming a concept more drivers in our state are supporting,” said Finlayson. “It provides revenue that can speed project completion by many years, and targets the actual roadway’s users. We are pleased that legislative intent seems to be adding more gap funding in coming years for projects like the Monroe Bypass and the Gaston Connector.”

Unfortunately, due to the cap on variable-rate motor fuel tax, revenue for the Highway Trust Fund is down. Appropriations for programs funded through the Highway Trust Fund are based on a formula, so any decrease in the Trust fund revenue impacts them directly. This means significant cuts to the intrastate system, urban loops, secondary roads and aid to municipalities.

“Revenue has dropped and inflation has had a crushing effect on construction,” said Finlayson. “While these reductions aren’t surprising, they point to the growing need to find additional revenue sources beyond the gas tax and user fees.”

When asked how an individual should pay for their share of highway, bridge and transportation system maintenance, participants in the poll favored vehicle weight (37 percent) and miles driven (31 percent) over the two existing measures – fuel usage (17 percent), i.e. the gas tax and vehicle cost (4 percent).

“Our poll results support the call for new, innovative financing, like through VMT (vehicle miles traveled) which offers equitable contribution to the system, or by weight-based fees which more accurately predict a vehicle’s wear and tear on highways,” said Finlayson. “Bottom line, the work begun by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Transportation Committee has been a step in the right direction and we hope they continue to deliver recommendations legislators can act upon.”

“Time moves quickly during the short session,” said Finlayson. “We urge legislators to show a spirit of compromise and work to advance the budget provisions and consider future needs for the sake of our growing state’s economy and our way of life.”

**For more information about *NC Go!*, the polling results and our legislative goals, please visit [www.ncgo.org](http://www.ncgo.org).**

**About *NC Go!***

*NC Go!* is the state’s only broad-based coalition advocating for North Carolina’s transportation system. Our coalition consists of nearly 100 businesses, chambers of commerce, associations and transit agencies representing 25,000 businesses and member organizations, with more than 6 million employees, transit riders, citizens and drivers in North Carolina. *NC Go!* has led the call to adequately invest in highways, bridges, public transportation, rails, ports, airports and ferries.

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