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Legislation Introduced to Ease Traffic Congestion *Citizens Deserve the Right to Vote on Funding for Mobility*

Raleigh, N.C. – Communities facing unique local transportation challenges should be given the freedom to choose how to fund their transit needs. According to transportation advocacy group *NC Go!*, the introduction of HB 148 and SB 151 helps put North Carolina on track to better meeting mobility needs around the state.

House Bill 148 (S151), the Congestion Relief/Intermodal Fund, would help rapidly growing urban areas address traffic congestion in their communities. Additionally, for those other communities around the state who deem public transportation a priority, the bill would give them the opportunity to put the matter before the public for vote.

“We commend the lead sponsors in the House and Senate who have introduced this legislation to help communities determine how to fund their local needs,” said Marc Finlayson, co-chair for *NC Go!*. “Given the success of Charlotte’s system and the growing needs around the state, now is the time to give all areas similar flexibility.”

Among its provisions, the legislation would:

- Grant two urban areas (the Triad and the Triangle) the authority to hold referenda on a ½ cent local options sales and use tax to be designated for transit purposes; and,
- Allow all other counties to hold referenda on a ¼ cent sales and use tax to be designated for transit purposes.

With our state projected to see a 50 percent growth in population by 2030, traffic congestion is becoming a more pressing and widespread concern. Traffic congestion wastes time, fuel and money. Residents lose time stuck in traffic, and goods and services cannot be moved efficiently. The result is a negative impact on our quality of life and the economy.

Accessible public transportation helps move drivers from behind the wheel, off the roads and onto transit. In addition to relieving traffic congestion, strategically planned use of transit creates more walk-able communities, spurs economic development, reduces air pollution and encourages physical activity.

Public transportation means different things to different audiences. Large urban areas and metropolitan regions utilize city buses, light rail, streetcars and regional buses. Smaller towns and rural communities rely on buses and vans. In all areas Human Service Transportation Systems transport clients to local human service agencies for medical, educational, employment or recreational needs.

“Given the shortage of federal and state funding, this bill is an ideal solution to help urban areas address congestion and other areas meet their own public transportation needs,” said Finlayson. “It isn’t a tax. It is about giving citizens a vote on improved mobility.”

Ridership for 2008 on all forms of public transportation was up, with Charlotte leading by example with the CATS LYNX Blue Line (light rail). Ridership continues to grow with the line averaging more than 16,000 trips a day during the week - double the original projection of 9,100 trips. Throughout the system, regional express routes, Special Transportation Services and Community Circulators all witnessed large growth in ridership during 2008. Plus, investment in private development along the LYNX line exceeds \$1.86 billion with property values in the corridor growing by 52 percent since 2000. All thanks, in large measure, to the citizens voting in favor of transit funding.

“We have gotten a recent break with lower fuel prices, but that won’t last forever,” said Finlayson. “The demand for transit will continue to grow and neither state funds nor federal stimulus is going to be the magic bullet.”

“We understand there are concerns about new taxes, but voters should at least have the option to decide how to deal with growth and traffic congestion. The legislature should consider the broad support similar legislation received last session and work to enact the recommendations of the 21st Century Transportation Committee.”

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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