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House Transportation Committee Applauded by Transit Advocates *Diverse Groups Rally in Support of Local Option Funding Bill*

Raleigh, N.C. – Today’s vote by the NC House of Representatives Transportation Committee in support of House Bill 148 (S151) is an important step in putting North Carolina on track to better meet mobility needs around the state, according to statewide transportation coalition *NC Go!* The group joined 40 other organizations from around the state in urging legislators to support transit. This diverse list of groups believes citizens deserve the right to decide about funding public transportation in their communities and meeting local mobility needs.

The list of diverse allies, including Carolina Asphalt Pavement Association, the North Carolina Sierra Club and the North Carolina Chamber, continues to grow. To date it includes:

- American Council of Engineering Companies of North Carolina
- Cabarrus County Transportation System
- Capital Area Friends of Transit
- Carolina Asphalt Pavement Association
- Carolinas Associated General Contractors
- Carolinas Concrete Pipe and Products Association
- Cary Chamber of Commerce
- Chapel Hill Transit
- Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce
- Charlotte Chamber of Commerce
- Charlotte Area Transit System
- Conservation Council of North Carolina
- Duplin County Public Transportation
- Durham Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Wilmington Chamber of Commerce
- Greene County Transportation Department
- Greensboro Partnership
- Moore County Transportation Services
- North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning Association
- *NC Go!*
- North Carolina Alliance for Health
- North Carolina Aggregates Association
- North Carolina Association of County Commissioners
- North Carolina Chamber
- North Carolina Concrete Pavement Association
- North Carolina League of Municipalities
- North Carolina Metropolitan Coalition
- North Carolina Public Transportation Association
- North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center
- North Carolina Sierra Club
- North Carolina State Ports Authority
- Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation
- Pitt Area Transit System (Pitt County)
- Professional Engineers of North Carolina
- Raleigh Chamber of Commerce
- Regional Coordinated Area Transportation System (Randolph and Montgomery Counties)
- Regional Transportation Alliance
- Rutherford County Transit
- Triangle Transit
- Unifour Rural Planning Organization
- WakeUP Wake County
- WTS NC Chapter

House Bill 148 (S151), the Congestion Relief/Intermodal Fund, would help areas throughout the state address traffic congestion and mobility in their communities. For those communities who deem public transportation a priority, the bill would give them the opportunity to put the matter before the public for a referendum.

“The issue is about granting the same options to all counties that were extended to Mecklenburg,” said Marc Finlayson, co-chair for *NC Go!* “Voters strongly supported – twice – funding for transit projects. And the people are using that system which continues to flourish.”

“This bill doesn’t impose a tax,” he added. “This is about giving communities the right to vote on their own mobility needs. We applaud the bill sponsors and committee leaders for advancing this bill.”

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Mecklenburg County is cited as a case study for letting citizens vote. Since 1998, voters have twice approved a ½ cent sales tax for transit. On 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 – almost double the original projection of 9,100 trips. The entire system has 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.

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.

Our state is projected to see a 50 percent growth in population by 2030, and with growth comes traffic congestion which 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 such as light rail, buses and vans. In addition to relieving traffic congestion, strategically planned use of transit creates more walkable 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.

“All communities need public transportation options,” said Finlayson. “Transit helps connect citizens to jobs, health care, family and friends. Urban, rural, east and west – there are transit needs across our state and every community is unique. Having a full life should not depend upon owning a vehicle.”

“Public transportation projects create jobs and boost local economies,” said Finlayson. “Transit reduces traffic congestion, is better for the environment than private vehicles and promotes access to physical activity.”

“Transit by itself is not the answer, but part of a total transportation solution that includes roads,” said Finlayson. “If we want to offer real mobility, and compete with other states and cities like Salt Lake, Denver, Phoenix and Minneapolis, we need meaningful options to let voters decide on transit in their communities.”

“Current budget concerns should not deter elected leaders from supporting this important legislation,” added Finlayson. “Let citizens and communities vote.”

About NC Go!

NC Go! is the state’s only broad-based coalition advocating for North Carolina’s transportation system. Our coalition consists of more than 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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