

## REDUCING THE COST OF COMMUTING

Using public transportation is the quickest way to beat high gas prices, save fuel and help the environment.

- **Beat high gas prices**—Families who use transit have found it is an affordable alternative to driving and that it can save them about \$6,251/year. That's about the cost of the average family's annual grocery bill, almost covers a semester's tuition, fees and board at a state school, or certainly puts a dent in mortgage or rent payments. Ridesharing, vanpooling, taking the bus or train even a few days a week or for part of a commute saves dollars, and it can put a big dent in congestion. Nationally, Americans living in areas served by transit save \$18 billion annually in congestion costs.
- **Save fuel**—Public transportation use saves 1.4 billion gallons of gasoline per year – the equivalent of 108 million cars filling up.
- **Help the environment**—Using public transportation is one of the most significant actions to reduce household carbon emission, far exceeding the benefits of energy efficient light bulbs or adjusting thermostats. It reduces greenhouse gases by shrinking carbon emissions by 37 million metric tons annually – equivalent to the electricity used by 4.9 million households.

As the price of fuel soars, a record number of Virginians have turned to ridesharing, vanpooling and public transportation in rural, suburban and urban areas. Nationally, vehicle miles traveled are down 4.3 percent from last year while transit ridership is at a staggering 50-year high.

Ridership is up across the state but especially on suburban routes; Hampton Roads Transit reported a 32 percent ridership increase on commuter express bus routes in the last four months; Williamsburg Transit increased 16 percent over the prior year; Charlottesville Transit increased 12 percent; Loudoun County Transit increased 23 percent and GRTC Transit here in Richmond increased 12 percent on suburban Chesterfield County commuter routes— routes that some said no one would ride. Washington Metro, serving Northern Virginia, reported its five highest volume days were on weekdays this year.

The outlook for fuel doesn't suggest there will be any return to the days of cheap oil. According to the Wall Street Journal, John Hess, Chief Executive of Hess Corp, warned that an oil crisis was looming if the world did not deal with runaway demand and strained supplies and a May 1 Richmond Times Dispatch Editorial declared that "the era of relatively cheap fuel is over—or at least has been interrupted, and likely will stay interrupted for a long time.

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Public transportation can help provide an alternative. Added investment is needed to expand access and ensure more frequent and convenient service. Governor's Kaine's transportation proposal recognizes the need for a greater investment to develop a more balanced transportation network which includes roads, transit and rail.

Virginians want relief from the high cost of fuel. During the upcoming Transportation Special Session, the General Assembly must not miss the opportunity to provide this relief by funding expanded and improved transit and rail in addition to investing in the state's roads.

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