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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Virginia Transit Association honors  
Senator Mary Margaret Whipple and Chairman Gerald Connolly  
for leadership on behalf of Public Transportation**

**The Virginia Transit Association hosted its 2005 Awards Luncheon on May 10<sup>th</sup> in Williamsburg, VA to recognize the individuals, organizations, and programs contributing to high quality public transportation service in Virginia.**

**Richmond, Virginia** - The 2005 VTA Awards Luncheon honored the contributions and leadership of individuals and successful innovative public transit programs in Virginia. Awards were presented by Chris Zimmerman, President of VTA and Vice-Chairman of the Arlington County Board, and Sandy Modell, General Manager of the Alexandria Transit Company.

**Senator Mary Margaret Whipple**, representing district 31, received the *Public Transportation Distinguished Leadership Award*.

In describing Senator Whipple, Chris Zimmerman stated, "She is a tireless champion in the General Assembly for improved and expanded public transportation, always willing to provide a voice for transit when it is needed. Her leadership has been integral to transit's legislative successes since 1996."

Senator Whipple graciously accepted the award and said, "Receiving this honor today does not indicate that I have reached the end of my fight for public transportation but that I will redouble my efforts to ensure all my colleagues in the General Assembly realize the important service transit provides to the citizens of the Commonwealth."

In 2005, Senator Whipple also worked to secure \$40 million for additional rail cars to add capacity to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority and \$20 million for the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) as well as \$5 million for bus purchases.

**Chairman Gerald Connolly**, Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, received the *2005 Public Official of the Year*.

"As Chairman, he has worked diligently to improve Fairfax County's transportation network and ensured that it remains in good repair and adequately funded for the foreseeable future." Zimmerman went on to say "This work includes the extension of Metrorail through Tysons Corner and out the Dulles Corridor to Loudoun County, and the September 2004 launch of the South County Bus Service Plan, including the "REX" – the Richmond Highway Express, offering limited-stop, rapid transit-style bus service connecting Fort Belvoir with the Huntington and King Street Metro stations."

Chairman Connolly pledges to continue his work in support of public transportation. Consequently, he is implementing his Four-Year Transportation Plan, which has been approved unanimously by the Board of Supervisors. It called for a \$165 million bond referendum to be put before Fairfax County voters in November 2004. Of this \$165 million bond, \$110 million was allocated for Fairfax County's share of the "Metro Matters" capital renewal and improvement program. The bond passed with a record 78 percent approval rate.

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***Rollo Axton***, Chief, Transit Services Division of the Fairfax Connector, received the ***2005 Transit Professional Distinguished Service Award***.

“Rollo served as the Greater Richmond Transit Company’s (GRTC) Chief Executive Officer for twelve years before accepting an opportunity in Fairfax County.” Sandy Modell continued, “During his tenure, GRTC was recognized as one of the top ten transit systems of its size. The Editorial Page of the Richmond Times singled Mr. Axton out for special recognition citing his leadership at GRTC and in the Richmond region.”

In accepting his award, Mr. Axton mentioned the importance of having options in all things, especially in transportation.

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*VTA is a trade association based in Richmond, VA representing transit agencies of all sizes throughout Virginia and businesses that support public transportation. VTA’s members provide a wide range of services to the communities in which they operate. [www.vatransit.com](http://www.vatransit.com)*