



May 13, 1999

**NEWS RELEASE  
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**LEGISLATORS RECEIVE AWARDS FOR SUPPORT OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

Richmond, Va. -- Five state legislators received awards for their support of public transportation today at the Virginia Transit Association's (VTA) annual meeting in Williamsburg. The annual awards recognize state legislators for their efforts to expand public transportation.

Senator Mary Margaret Whipple of Arlington was presented the Legislator of the Year Award. "Senator Whipple has been a champion for public transportation throughout her four years in the General Assembly," said VTA President and Charlottesville Vice-Mayor Meredith Richards.

Senator Whipple serves on the General Assembly's Transportation Committee and in 1997 sponsored legislation to create a major transit capital fund that enables new transportation projects to go forward while ensuring continued funding for existing properties. "This is a significant change that will make it easier in coming years for major public transportation and rail projects to move ahead," said Richards. Senator Whipple also is a long-time member of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission.

Senators John Watkins of Midlothian, Henry Marsh of Richmond and Delegate Frank Hall of Richmond received 1999 Transit Leadership Awards for their two-year undertaking to make public transportation available to people throughout the Richmond region. They spearheaded an effort to secure an additional \$5.1 million to expand Greater Richmond Transit Company service into surrounding counties.

Delegate Panny Rhodes of Richmond received the 1999 Multi-modal Transportation Leadership Award. She was recognized for galvanizing support for a variety of transportation modes including public transportation. She also helped to obtain representation of public transportation on the Commonwealth Transportation Board and worked to establish an airport revolving loan fund.

"Public transportation helps business reach out to more workers and contributes to a cleaner environment and a more livable community by reducing congestion on the roads," said Richards. "We are saluting these legislators for supporting funding for transit and making public transportation a viable and attractive alternative to more Virginians."

The Virginia Transit Association represents transit properties from throughout the state. VTA has 26 transit property members and 28 associate members. Founded in 1977, VTA provides public education and legislative advocacy to support public transportation systems throughout the state.

According to VTA, transit ridership throughout Virginia increased by almost 900,000 boardings between 1993 and 1997. Public transit offers alternative transportation that benefits riders, motorists and the community, according to association officials. "Public transit systems add capacity to existing roadways, reducing congestion. During rush hour, a standard passenger bus has the potential of removing at least 40 single-occupancy vehicles from the highway," said Richards.

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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*