

# Green Communities

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## Overview

In Virginia, many existing roads and bridges are in poor condition, congestion costs are high in many areas, a substantial transit funding shortfall is looming, and transportation is the leading source of carbon dioxide pollution in the Commonwealth. Despite some significant progress, we continue to focus heavily on highway construction, an approach that is costly to taxpayers and the environment while doing little to relieve congestion in the long run. This approach needs to change. We are also working to conserve land, and there are several initiatives this legislative session.

## TRANSPORTATION

### **SUPPORT** HB2136 (LeMunyon; House Transportation Subcommittee #3)

- Metrorail is experiencing serious safety problems putting passengers and workers at risk. The new Metro Safety Commission will mean the State will have oversight and enforcement teeth to ensure a stronger culture of safety and accountability at Metro.
- If VA, MD, and DC don't pass identical legislation addressing this problem, the Federal government has discretion to cut transit grants to urbanized systems throughout Virginia by up to 5% (about \$6 million this year).
- If we fail to fix Metrorail, then the system collapses with major negative impact to the economy, transportation network, and environment of northern Virginia and the Commonwealth.

### **OPPOSE** SB887 (Chafin; Senate Transportation)

SB887 would exempt from transportation prioritization projects on U.S. Route 121, commonly referred to as the Coalfield Expressway (estimated to cost \$2.8 billion), and projects on U.S. Route 460 (which could cost billions of dollars more). The General Assembly unanimously adopted legislation in 2014 creating a new statewide transportation prioritization process, now known as SMART SCALE. No specific projects were exempted. These bills would change that, and they are contrary to the entire purpose of the landmark prioritization legislation—to better ensure the wise use of taxpayer funds by using objective criteria to rank projects competing for limited funding.

- SB887 would open the door to a parade of similar bills that would defeat the whole reason for project prioritization. The projects identified in SB887 should be required to compete on their own merits.
- There are many reasons the Coalfields Expressway has not advanced, including the tremendous cost of this project and concerns about the adverse impacts of this project and the availability of less expensive alternatives. Regardless of the merits of the project, it should follow the same process as other projects.

## Land Preservation

Virginia Conservation Network  
409 East Main Street, Suite 201 | Richmond, VA 23219  
(804) 644-0283 | [www.vcnva.org](http://www.vcnva.org) | [vcn@vcnva.org](mailto:vcn@vcnva.org)

**SUPPORT adequate funding for the Land Preservation Tax Credit (LPTC) Program**, which is an incredibly valuable land protection tool.

- Virginia's LPTC was established in 1999 and has proven to be an incredibly effective tool in realizing the policy goals of our Commonwealth. It is directly responsible for conserving more than 741,000 acres of land in Virginia. The LPTC program works because it offers a meaningful incentive for landowners to voluntarily donate land or conservation easements.
- These protected lands play a significant role in meeting numerous federal, state, and local policies.

The Conservation Community can:

- Thank the members of House Finance Subcommittee #2 for tabling a bill that would have cut LPTC last week (Cline (Chairman), Orrock, Cole, Marshall, R.G., Pogge, Head, Fowler, Filler-Corn, Kory, Sullivan, Heretick); and
- Continue to emphasize the benefits and importance of this program with all legislators.

**OPPOSE provisions within HB1500 and SB900** that cut grant funding for the Virginia Land Conservation Fund, the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund, and the Virginia Farmland Preservation Fund.

- Oppose SB900 and HB1500 provisions: Item 91 G: \$1M to \$250,000 for the Virginia Farmland Preservation Fund; Item 365 D.1: \$8M to \$4.5M for the Virginia Land Conservation Fund; and Item 367 H: \$1M to \$675,528 for the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund.
- Reasons to OPPOSE these provisions:
  - Protecting the Places We Love: This funding is needed to meet water quality goals, provide new areas for public access, protect prime agricultural lands, continue the preservation of Civil War battlefields and historic sites, and provide for wildlife habitat.
  - High Demand for the Grant Programs: Projects eligible for this funding far outweigh the limited funds available. Many projects would be left on the table if these cuts are made.