

The Senate's Regional Transportation Plan for Hampton Roads

Poquoson readers, this plan doesn't affect you a lick. Thank goodness.

York readers, talk to your Board of Supervisors – their vote will put you in or out of the plan.

The Republicans in the Virginia Senate re-packaged the Transportation Tax Scam of 2002 as the Hampton Roads Transportation Authority. Same projects, same tax, same opportunities for political patronage cleaned up a little, but not much. It's nothing beyond the same rejected plan to pour a lot of concrete for 20 years and end up with more congestion than today. Except, the right lawyers, engineers, builders, suppliers, etc. will feed well at the public trough for a working life time on the regressive tax that punishes the poor and seniors.

See the Republicans' Senate Bill 5014, Hampton Roads Transportation Authority at "<http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?062+ful+SB5014S1>."

SR 5014 begins by creating the Hampton Roads Transportation Authority, hereinafter known as "the Authority", as "a body politic and a political subdivision of the Commonwealth." The dictionary says the body politic is a political body under an organized government, and a political subdivision is a dividing into parts. So, clearly, a political subdivision of the Commonwealth (which is a government) is a division into a new unelected, regional government. This is contrary to what the Republican Senators, the RINOs, hereinafter known as "the Apostates", claim - that HRTA is NOT another government.

The Authority will impose, collect, control and operate tolls on any new or improved highway, bridge, tunnel or transportation facility including the Chesapeake Bay-Bridge Tunnel. If transportation facility includes tolls for the Port of Virginia, that is a good user fee. They want to pull in the independent, profit-making Chesapeake Bay-Bridge as a cash cow. The Authority doesn't take over until the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and Tunnel Commission pays all of its debt. The Authority will just take the profit.

There is no reviewing authority for the tolls the Authority establishes. The Auditor of Public Accounts audits financial accounts only. There's no policy review or court of appeals for the Authority.

Eleven cities and counties send one member of their governing body, three members of the House of Delegates and two State Senators are voting members of the Authority. The House is being short changed one member in relation to the Senate – based on the number of voters they represent. And the good news for some communities, Poquoson, New Kent, and Counties on 460 (Southampton, Sussex, tiny bit of Surry), is to not be included. All sixteen politicians "shall be reimbursed for their actual and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties and, in addition, shall be paid a per diem." How much will that cost?

Among the powers listed, after the power to sue, is to procure insurance and a discussion about no “relinquishment of sovereign immunity to which the Authority, its officers, directors, employees, or agents are otherwise entitled.” Only governments, have ‘sovereign’ immunity. The HRDA looks, smells, walks, and talks like another level of government.

Back to the money, the Authority may “employ employees, agents, advisors, and consultants, including without limitation, attorneys, financial advisers, engineers, and other technical advisers” and “to determine their duties and compensation”. So, the sixteen politicians have a piggy bank to hand out jobs and make up salaries. And how much will this cost? Let’s see some numbers since the sales tax will bring in billions.

Except, until they can hire their own Bubbas, the “staff of the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission shall serve as its staff, and the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission shall provide the Authority with office space and administrative support.” The Authority will reimburse the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRDC). Must be the HRDC doesn’t have enough to do in their day jobs so they can do two jobs at the same time. Maybe the HRDC just wants more income to provide higher raises to employees or to hire more contractors. The Senate plan is for the HRDC to be paid by the local governments, as usual, and the Authority at the same time. Sweet.

Each city and county has to impose a local retail sales tax of 1% or they don’t get to be on the Authority. That is the same 1% tax the voters rejected resoundingly in 2002. This is in addition to the .5%, surplus producing, increase in sales tax the Apostates stuck us in 2004. If your city council or county board of supervisors votes to increase the tax, it won’t matter if you throw the bums out. No locality can cease the tax if the Authority has outstanding bonds. That means the tax is FOREVER. The politicians must vote to raise your taxes by November 30th, 2006. This keeps the vote from being an election issue, since local elections are over. If the voters throw out the politicians after the vote this November, the tax increasing politicians can be hired by the Authority as consultants. The laugh is on the suckers, the voters.

(Note to York County, this is a tax opportunity to NOT raise taxes and then encourage high ticket item businesses to relocate and undersell the competition by 1% with no loss of profit – and pick up their real estate and sales taxes). Same goes for Poquoson since we aren’t included in the planning or taxing.

The Authority is born on January 1, 2007 if only eight cities and counties stick it to the voters. If the political deals fall through and the localities reject the tax, there is no provision for anything. It must be a done deal, or monumental stupidity, to have no alternative.

This is the third run at unelected regional taxing government. No priorities on spending. No innovations to truly reduce congestion. But, what do expect from Apostates, the Republican Senators ‘stuck on stupid’?

James Atticus Bowden