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July 19, 2022

The Honorable W. Sheppard Miller III
Secretary of Transportation
Commonwealth of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building, Third Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Reference: Additional Fairfax County Comments on the Commonwealth Transportation Board's
FY 2023-2028 Six-Year Improvement Program – Commonwealth Financial
Assistance to Localities for Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Dear Secretary Miller:

On behalf of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, I am writing to provide you and the members of the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) additional comments regarding the FY 2023-2028 Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP). The Board provided initial comments on May 16, 2022.

First, as we noted in our previous letter, the Board appreciates funding included in the SYIP for various projects in the County, including funding for the Fairfax Connector and our transportation demand management (TDM) programs; Revenue Sharing for the Fairfax County Parkway and Lincoln Street projects; and Transportation Alternatives funding for several of our bicycle and pedestrian projects.

I believe we can all agree that transit assistance is essential, especially as the Commonwealth recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly impacted transit in the National Capital Region, throughout Virginia and the nation. Metrorail and Metrobus are vital to Northern Virginia's transportation networks and economic growth, and are fundamental to the functioning of the federal, state, and local governments, carrying thousands of government employees to their posts every day. The County supports WMATA's efforts to enhance the safety and security of the system and its riders through adequate funding and oversight.

In Virginia, local jurisdictions are responsible for providing substantial funding for WMATA (Fairfax County provides approximately \$200 million in funding for operating and capital costs each year, including approximately \$100 million in state aid). Until recently, WMATA was the only major transit provider in the country without a permanent, dedicated revenue source for a significant part of its revenue base – the vast majority of the \$2.2 billion operating and \$2.6 billion capital budgets are derived from passenger fares and contributions by member jurisdictions, although the additional assistance provided by the federal and government and the Commonwealth to assist during the COVID-19 pandemic has been vital in continuing service

over the past two years. Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia recently took a major step forward by providing \$500 million annually for state of good repair needs, as well as requiring governance reforms to enhance the safety, security, and efficiency of the system. The County and the region have implemented these governance reforms.

As ridership continues to increase, state transit assistance is vital to ensuring continued operations of WMATA, the Fairfax Connector and other transit systems throughout the Commonwealth. For this reason, we are concerned about the recent proposal to redirect over \$71 million in state transit assistance that localities use to help provide funding to WMATA. The Draft FY 2023 SYIP for DRPT, released in April 2022, proposed the allocation of approximately \$272.8 million in state aid to localities for WMATA. At the June CTB meeting, the Commonwealth Transportation Board discussed a proposal to reduce that state assistance by \$71,984,017 and redirect it to highway paving projects to provide reserves to protect against cost escalations that have occurred.

We are concerned about timing of this proposal. As noted above, state aid helps Virginia localities with WMATA payments. This proposed redirection of funds could mean that our future budgets will require additional local funding for WMATA service. Unlike the diverse set of revenue sources supporting the Commonwealth Mass Transit Fund, local governments in Virginia must rely disproportionately on the real estate tax, and as such, any increase in local revenue requirements will impact taxpayers, especially landowners, in the County and throughout the region. WMATA has estimated that they will have a significant budget shortfall in FY 2024, if ridership doesn't increase faster than currently anticipated.

Beyond our concerns about the burden borne by the real estate tax, if funds are to be redirected to paving projects, we ask that the redirected funding be used for projects in Northern Virginia. Our region continues to have significant maintenance needs. In Northern Virginia, 65% of high-volume secondary roads and 52% of low-volume secondary roads are in Fair or Better condition. While the condition of the region's roadways has improved in the past five years, additional investment is needed as these roads remain below the statewide targets (82% and 60%, respectively). We regularly hear from our residents about the conditions of our state secondary roads and the need for repaving. Millions of people drive our roads every day, and the deteriorated pavement will only worsen until the situation is adequately addressed. High construction and paving costs have already hit the County – in fact, the FY 2022 paving schedule was reduced to address cost increases. In addition, the Board of Supervisors has approved supplemental local funding to add additional mowing cycles on state roads in the County over the past several years. Despite this supplemental funding, the level of grass mowing of these state properties in Fairfax County is still inadequate.

Further, the Smart Scale program is extremely oversubscribed, and many of the costs for our construction projects continue to increase. Without additional revenues, it will be difficult for some projects to advance in the foreseeable future, and timelines for numerous existing County projects will continue to be affected. As such, it may also be beneficial to provide that funding to the Northern Virginia District Grant Program programmed within Smart Scale. These are just some examples of the need for additional resources in our region.

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Thank you for your consideration. If you need any clarification or further information, please call me at (703) 324-2321 or Noelle Dominguez at (703) 877-5665.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. McKay
Chairman

cc: Members, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
Members; Commonwealth Transportation Board
Members, Fairfax County Delegation to the General Assembly
Stephen Brich, Commonwealth Transportation Commissioner
Jennifer DeBruhl, Acting Director, Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation
Bryan J. Hill, County Executive
Rachel Flynn, Deputy County Executive
Tom Biesiadny, Director, Department of Transportation