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September 18, 2008

Mr. Pierce R. Homer
Secretary of Transportation
Chairman, Commonwealth Transportation Board
Patrick Henry Building, 3rd Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As you may know, the City of Chesapeake held a transportation working group meeting on August 19, 2008 with elected federal, state, and local representatives, federal agency officials, and state officials concerning the transportation needs of Chesapeake. During that meeting, Mr. Dennis Heuer, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) Hampton Roads District Administrator, announced that due to the shortfall of available state funds, VDOT was reducing the number of projects in its 6-year plan so projects that do begin are finished, rather than funding many projects that are never completed.

I understand that because of inflation in construction costs, the Gilmerton Bridge project is now facing a \$25 million shortfall. Towards that end, Mr. Heuer announced that VDOT would be seeking additional federal bonus funds for Fiscal Year 2008 from the Federal Highway Administration to complete the Gilmerton Bridge. He noted however, that if Virginia was unsuccessful in securing the necessary federal funds, VDOT would attempt to transfer funds from the Dominion Blvd project to the Gilmerton Bridge project, in keeping with the principle of finishing projects rather than having several open projects.

As you may know, both Senator Webb's staff and I are committed to finishing transportation projects, but we are equally committed to opposing such a transfer of state funds between Dominion Blvd and the Gilmerton Bridge. In our view, the relevant congressional committees would be extremely hesitant to appropriate more funding towards either project if state matching funds that were represented to the committees were then shifted to other projects.

Fortunately, I am happy to share with you that we are unlikely to have to resort to that option. In response to the information provided by the City and Mr. Heuer, I wrote a letter of support to the Federal Highway Administration in August in support of VDOT's bonus funds request. As you probably know, my office has been informed that the Commonwealth successfully secured nearly \$32 million in bonus federal highway funds.

I am writing therefore, to urge you to follow through on your plan and obligate these bonus funds towards completion of the Gilmerton Bridge project. Especially following the recent announcement that another bridge crossing the Elizabeth River, the Jordan Bridge, must be closed

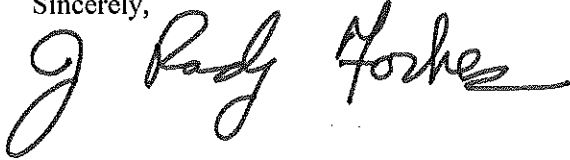
by the end of the year, it is critical that we move as quickly as possible to provide a way for the shipyard workers at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard and other commuters to travel safely over the Elizabeth River. This closing will increase congestion on the Gilmerton Bridge by an additional 4,000 vehicles per day, and without a replacement, the congestion will be twice as worse on the remaining tunnel and bridge over the Elizabeth River.

In terms of safety, VDOT assigned the Gilmerton Bridge a sufficiency ranking of 3 on a 100-point scale and the bridge has been closed 10 times in five years for repairs. Built in 1938, the bridge has exceeded its expected design life and is functionally obsolete, and weight restrictions for heavy truck and commercial traffic have been imposed. In terms of traffic, the bridge is designed to accommodate 15,000 vehicles per day but it currently handles approximately 35,000 vehicles per day – more than twice its design capacity.

The combination of a deteriorating structure, inadequate capacity, the closing of the Jordan Bridge, as well as our concern that future federal funding from Congress will be in jeopardy if previously committed matching funds are shifted from one project to another make the replacement of this bridge a top priority not just for the City of Chesapeake and the Fourth Congressional District, but for the Commonwealth as a whole.

I appreciate your assistance with this matter and thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions with respect to the foregoing, please do not hesitate to contact me or my Legislative Assistant for transportation, Brian Perkins (bperkins@mail.house.gov), at (202) 225-6365.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Randy Forbes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

J. RANDY FORBES
Member of Congress