

Coalition for  
**Smarter Growth**  
*Better Communities ... Less Traffic*

## **NoSprawlTax.org Campaign Launch**

### **Statement**

**Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director  
Coalition for Smarter Growth**

Good afternoon. Today we fight back against a well-funded developer, real estate and construction push for a massive \$5 billion tax increase. Major developers and businesses have already contributed nearly three-quarters of a million dollars toward a PR campaign to sell the voters on this 11% increase in the sales tax.

#### **We've Seen It All Before**

We've seen this all before. Time and again the same developers, real estate and construction groups have lobbied for tax increases and massive spending on new roads, while doing nothing to address their own development practices that have created our traffic problems in the first place.

In 1981 they pushed through the Fairfax County Parkway with a lobbying group led by Bob Chase of the Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance. Termed the "outer beltway" by the Post, this road did nothing to cut traffic on I-95, I-66 or the Beltway but did open thousands of acres to development.

In 1985 they pushed a \$135 million Fairfax County bond, the largest road bond ever proposed by a Virginia county. In 1986, they formed the "Better Transportation Association" to win the largest tax increase in Virginia history -- including a ½ cent sales tax increase to fund what was then called a 12-year, \$12 billion state construction program. At the time, Governor Baliles said, "imagine what will happen if something isn't done." Sixteen years later, that sales tax is still in place, consuming hundreds of millions of tax dollars per year, with poor results in terms of congestion relief.

Over the past 25 years Northern Virginia has built at least eight entirely new highways, while widening dozens more. Those highways include the Dulles Toll Road (since widened), Route 28 at Dulles, the Prince William County Parkway, the Fairfax County Parkway, the Dulles Greenway, and the Route 7/15 bypass of Leesburg. Widened roads include the Beltway, I-66, I-95, Braddock Road, and Route 7. According to the Texas Transportation Institute, our region's road construction has kept up with our growth in population, while our traffic has gotten worse.

## **Tax and Sprawl**

Time and again, we have seen our state government throw transportation dollars at congestion. Time and again, the congestion just continues to get worse. Why? Because we refuse to address the dysfunctionality of sprawl or to do anything of substance to stop it – we tax and sprawl.

The referendum provides no incentive for the local jurisdictions in Northern Virginia to revise their land use plans to encourage smart growth patterns of development. Instead, it provides a new source of revenues for projects that will perpetuate the land use patterns that have caused the enormous increase in per capita vehicle miles traveled – more than three times population growth in the past 20 years -- and as a result, high levels of traffic congestion. Case in point: Prince William County recently approved 5000 homes and 16 million square feet of development at Gainesville. Widening I-66 will not help existing communities, but will subsidize more sprawl development.

Central to the developer push for the tax are major radial expansions of I-66 and I-95, expansion of Route 28 and two bypasses highways west of Dulles Airport that do nothing to help current commuters but will increase sprawl development. Everything else in this referendum, particularly the transit, is the equivalent of the Trojan Horse. Wrapped in transit, this Trojan Horse will establish a permanent stream of funding to build the outer bypasses that some developers have always wanted.

## **Time for a Change**

For too long certain developers and business leaders have held sway in northern Virginia. The traffic we face can be traced to the legacy of poor planning that resulted – the scattering of development and separation of housing, offices, retail and services. In a noteworthy column, Virginia Business said that “Steve Case Needs an Attitude Adjustment.” The editor was referring to Chairman Case’s demand for more money for roads, when the very location decisions by AOL, and it’s neighbor MCI/Worldcom, have contributed to our traffic problems.

While resisting changes to their development model or to paying a fair share for the schools, roads, and other services needed with new development – most recently seen in an effort to limit increased proffers for schools in Fairfax – developers have insisted that the public pay more for infrastructure. The sales tax is the culmination of that philosophy, turning on its head the principle that developers pay their fair share.

The real problem is the fundamental lack of effective local, regional and statewide planning combined with a development industry that insists on building unconnected projects in existing suburbs and a “measles” approach of scattering development across the countryside – both of which increase traffic far beyond what it would otherwise be. It is unfair to expect the citizens of northern Virginia to pay for more and more transportation infrastructure that never produces anything other than short-term relief -- if that -- because we fail to address the underlying causes of the congestion. We urge voters to VOTE NO on the sprawl tax.