Virginia General Assembly Legislative Issues:

HB1887 (Jones) Omnibus Transportation Plan

HB 1887 is an omnibus transportation bill that provides an estimated $40M annually for transit capital to help address a 62% projected drop in funding expected to occur in the next 2-3 years. The Mass Transit Trust Fund will be supplemented by reallocating existing transportation funds from the recent gas tax increase, which will take effect on July 1, 2016. It also reallocates $9 million from the Rail Enhancement Fund to fund structurally deficient bridges.

The bill was amended in the Senate, with the input from the Administration and the House patron, Delegate Jones. It is now being reviewed a final time by the Governor to be either amended or signed. The substantive changes mostly occurred in the highway funding side, but they did change the language in one of the enactment clauses to specify that if a Public Private Transportation Act (PPTA) agreement is entered into to improve passenger rail, any public funds used will come from the Intercity Passenger Rail Operating and Capital Fund and the Rail Enhancement Fund in amounts proportionate to who the beneficiaries are.
HB 1470 (LaRock)

This bill requires that mass transit capital projects funded through the 70 percent of revenues received by the Authority (NVTA) for allocation under HB2313 be contained in the regional transportation plan and go through the HB599 rating process. The patron agreed to a delayed enactment date of July 1, 2016 so that the model developed by VDOT can be tested for transit. The Project Selection Model was developed to test the impact of roadway improvements on key factors. The bill has passed both houses and has been sent to the Governor.

Budget Amendments

Retain Interest from the Commuter Rail Trust Fund

Delegate Eileen Filler-Corn and Senator Chuck Colgan both submitted budget amendments to strike language allowing for the general fund to retain the interest earnings generated in the Commuter Rail Trust Fund at the Department of Treasury. Interest earnings in that Fund are estimated at $68,343 each year. Prior to a legislative policy change 2011, VRE received the interest earnings from the funds invested in the pool.

The Senate included the amendment in their budget that was released earlier in session and the final budget adopted by the legislature retained the language allowing VRE to retain its interest earnings.

Review of REF and IPROC Funds by Secretary of Transportation and DRPT

The final budget also included language directing the Secretary of Transportation and DRPT to complete a comprehensive review of REF and included IPROC funding as well. This would be happening concurrently with the CTB completing a review of REF as directed in HB 1887, explained earlier in the report.

Here is the language included in the budget:

“No later than December 1, 2015, the Secretary of Transportation, in conjunction with the Department of Rail and Public Transportation, shall provide a comprehensive review to the Chairmen of the House and Senate Transportation Committees, House Appropriations Committee and Senate Finance Committee on the usage of monies deposited in the Rail Enhancement Fund since its establishment in fiscal year 2006. Such a review shall include the amounts of funds allocated to rail freight projects, the amounts allocated to rail passenger projects, and the outstanding commitments to each type of project by year. Also included in this review shall be an accounting of any funds transferred in or out of the fund for other purposes, and additional funds made available, by year, for rail projects in the Commonwealth. The review also shall include the uses of any funding deposited into the Intercity Passenger Rail Operating and Capital Fund, and the source of such funds. Finally, the review shall assess outstanding needs for rail improvement projects and any modifications to the Commonwealth’s rail programs that would help better address those needs.”