

I am writing today asking for your support of SB 1020/HB1861 introduced by Senator John Edwards and Delegate Chris Head respectively. These Bills represent a bi-partisan effort to grant the Virginia Museum of Transportation state agency status.

The Virginia Museum of Transportation is located in the historic Norfolk and Western Railway freight station built in 1918, which is on the national register of historic places and is located in the City of Roanoke. The Museum is celebrating its 60th anniversary, having been established in 1963, and has been recognized by the General Assembly as Virginia's official transportation museum for over three decades. The Museum is by far Virginia's largest transportation museum and the most comprehensive with its collections spanning several centuries and all modes of transportation.

The Museum's educational component is the core of its existence, and it serves between 25,000 – 35,000 Virginia primary education students annually by way of field trips and other educational programs. Additionally, the Museum has a long-standing working relationship with nearby Virginia Tech and currently displays a large number of vehicles, particularly those associated with the University's "Smart Road", electric vehicles, and other transportation technology programs. The Museum also serves over 50,000 other visitors annually from across the Commonwealth, the U.S., and from around the world.

It is important to note that 1 in 10 jobs in the U.S. are related to the transportation sector, and it accounts for between 10 and 12 percent of the nation's gross domestic product or GDP. Consequently, there is a clear need to expose students and the general public to both the history and future of transportation, particularly given the need for an evolution of thought as all segments of transportation are changing rapidly with the implementation of environmentally friendly technologies and increased attention given to mass transit. Contrary to generally accepted thought, the Museum embraces not only the past, but also the present and future.

Virginia Museum of Transportation is also a significant tourism attraction. It brings tens of thousands of visitors to Virginia every year to view its collections and many thousands more when locomotive excursions are ongoing. The attendant positive multimillion-dollar economic impact supports restaurants, hotels, shopping, etc., creating significant tourism tax revenue.

For over two decades, the Virginia Museum of Transportation has supported itself through admissions, special events, fees, and the support of its Board of Directors as well as corporate and private support. However, it still lacks basic technologies to assist in its educational missions, requires significant upgrades in its HVAC systems, collections restoration, substantial building maintenance, restoration, and national marketing.

State agency status would bring the Commonwealth's official transportation museum into the next century, creating better educational opportunities through improved technology, professional curation, and expanded virtual programs available to all students across the state. It would allow the stories of Virginia's transportation-related pioneers, such as Wendell Scott (the first African American Nascar driver), to be told and inspire. Virginia deserves to have a state-sponsored transportation museum to equal or better those in nearby states such as North Carolina and Pennsylvania (which together draw well over a half million visitors annually). As a Virginia state-sponsored entity, the museum would gain the consistency and state-wide resources necessary to fulfill its educational mission and become a center of support for similar, but smaller, museums as well as for primary and secondary educational institutions throughout. The investment is modest, yet consequential.