FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 27, 2006

Contact: G. Paul Nardo
(804) 698-1228
gpnardo@house.state.va.us

Speaker Howell Unveils House Republican Transportation-Land Use Reform Package

-- Speaker Announces House GOP Plan to Reduce Congestion by Managing Growth, Limiting Sprawl --
-- Republican Delegates See Controlling Over-Development as Key to Transportation Solution --
-- Localities to Receive Incentives to Increase Local Control, Responsibility over Growth and Roads --
-- Landmark Reform Package Characterized as “Most Significant Advance Since Zoning” --

RICHMOND, 27 December 2006 – At a Capitol Square news conference today, House of Delegates Speaker William J. Howell (R-Stafford) announced that House Republicans would make fundamental land use reforms – giving localities new powers to manage growth and limit sprawl – a central component of their transportation improvement package for the 2007 Session, which begins January 10, 2007. According to Howell, the initiatives amount to the most significant change to the Commonwealth’s approach to land use since the advent of zoning.

“For Virginians living in fast-growing communities, the effects of sprawl on transportation are readily apparent,” noted Speaker Howell. “I represent one of these communities, Stafford County, on the outskirts of Northern Virginia. In talking with lawmakers of both parties as well as business and community leaders, I know that residents from many Virginia communities witness first-hand the strains placed on Virginia’s transportation network by the Commonwealth’s antiquated approach to land use and planning. As was noted by the successful candidate for Governor in 2005, ‘Virginia cannot tax and pave its way out of congestion.’ We must adopt a bold new approach to better manage growth and to control sprawl. Today, we’re announcing a plan to do just that.”

Speaker Howell noted that the plan has much in common with one introduced by House Republicans during the 2006 Special Session. At that time, Howell announced the formation of a special subcommittee to review and examine the proposals – using the three-month period between the 2006 Special Session in September and the 2007 Regular Session in January to refine and strengthen the legislation as well as broaden and consolidate support for its passage. During today’s news conference, Howell also made clear that Delegates Clifford L. “Clay” Athey, Jr. (R-Warren), Jeffrey M. Frederick (R-Prince William), and Robert G. “Bob” Marshall (R-Prince William) would continue to lead the legislative effort to win General Assembly passage for these landmark reforms. Athey, Frederick, and Marshall sponsored different components of the proposal during the 2006 Special Session on Transportation.

The package has three main components, all of which are intended to grant more control over development to localities experiencing rapid residential growth.
The first component would allow localities to gain more efficient and effective use of existing infrastructure and roads by providing for the adoption of land use policies that focus growth in pre-designated “urban development areas.” This change would curtail growth in less-densely populated areas of localities, while targeting growth to the areas with the corresponding infrastructure to support it. Delegate Clay Athey will patron this reform bill.

To reinforce the effectiveness of this transportation and land-use plan, the second component would initiate a pilot program permitting participating localities to assess impact fees on development in areas that are currently more rural and less densely populated, often characterized as “open spaces.” It would be the first time that impact fees would be permitted on what it commonly known as “by-right” development in Virginia. In addition to impact-fee revenues, participating counties would receive funding from the state – and potentially the ownership of current equipment from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) – to maintain secondary roads within new “urban transportation service districts.” Delegate Jeff Frederick will patron this reform bill.

The third component would place a moratorium on the acceptance of new roads created by development into the VDOT-maintained system. The policy change would end the current increase in road miles that are automatically accepted by the state’s transportation agency and place responsibility with either the local government that approved the new subdivision and is participating in the urban development district program or a local neighborhood association. Delegate Bob Marshall will patron this reform bill.

Delegate Athey noted, “Speaker Howell and Delegates Marshall, Frederick, and I all live in communities where growth and its effects on transportation are felt everyday. Of course, the challenges in Prince William are more immediate than they are Warrenton, but there are communities in every region of the Commonwealth that will benefit from this new approach to managing growth and reducing the stress placed on our transportation system. Our existing laws in this area were adopted during the Great Depression. They aren’t just woefully outdated, they’re truly obsolete. For localities dealing with rapid residential growth and sprawl, this comprehensive and forward-looking plan is the most significant advance since zoning became commonplace over 40 years ago.”

“Of all the ideas proposed, floated, or introduced to improve transportation in Virginia, the public has expressed the most enthusiasm over initiatives that address the challenges of over-heated development,” said Speaker Howell. “When I charged the Virginia Reform Initiative with crafting ideas to address our 21st Century transportation challenge, it was my hope that an innovative, cutting-edge plan would be the result. I am pleased today to announce that these initiatives meet that standard, and that House Republicans, once again, are taking the lead in addressing the root cause of congestion and gridlock – namely growth and sprawl.

“These proposals are just one part of the comprehensive transportation plan House Republicans will be introducing for the 2007 Session. We’ve already made clear our commitment to requiring that no less than 50% of the surplus be dedicated to transportation. In the weeks ahead, we’ll be announcing our proposals to increase the accountability and responsiveness of VDOT. And of course, we’ll have a very specific, far-reaching proposal to provide a substantial injection of funding to jump-start and advance a number of critical transportation projects.

“For House Republicans, transportation is neither a wedge issue nor an occasional focus. We made improving transportation the single, most prominent component of our agenda for the 2005 and 2006 legislative sessions, and we were the first to call for the 2006 Special Session on Transportation. For 2007, combating sprawl to improve transportation will be the centerpiece of our agenda for Virginia. We are offering new ideas, initiating discussions, building consensus and working toward real progress – now, not later. It is my great hope for the new year that the Governor and legislators representing both chambers and both parties will join our efforts, seeking solutions over political advantage, and, in the process, improving the travel, commutes and overall quality of life for all Virginians.”

###

NOTE: See separate handout for more information about the 3 bills that directly tie transportation and land use.