



AMERICAN TRUCKING ASSOCIATIONS

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Bill Graves
President and Chief Executive Officer

March 13, 2009

The Honorable Timothy M. Kaine
Office of the Governor
Patrick Henry Building, 3rd Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Governor Kaine,

The American Trucking Associations (ATA)¹ strongly objects to a proposal by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to shut down 25 safety rest areas on the Commonwealth's Interstate Highway System. As a former Governor, I can appreciate the difficult choices you have to make during these tough economic times. However, it is simply beyond comprehension that Virginia would be willing to put lives at risk in order to balance the Commonwealth's budget.

VDOT's own analysis shows that there is already a severe shortage of truck parking along the highways where the agency plans to make these capacity reductions. When truck drivers cannot find a safe and legal place to park, they must decide between continuing to drive while fatigued – possibly in violation of federal hours-of-service limits – or find an illegal, possibly unsafe, location to rest. This usually includes highway and ramp shoulders. Tragically, another symptom of the parking shortage was revealed on March 9 when Jason Rivenburg, a truck driver from New York, was shot to death while sleeping in the cab of his truck at an abandoned gas station along Interstate 26 in South Carolina.

According to a 2004 study of commercial truck parking on Interstate highways in Virginia by the Virginia Transportation Research Council, "there are shortfalls at rest areas on I-66, I-77, I-85, and I-95, varying from about 6 percent on I-85 to about 32 percent on I-95." The study estimated that if no new parking spaces are provided by 2010 there will be a shortage of large truck parking on all Interstate highways in Virginia, and the shortfall could be as high as 40% on I-95. Despite these findings, VDOT proposes to eliminate 135 of the 219, or 62%, of the currently available recreational vehicle, bus and truck parking spaces in safety rest areas along I-81 and 200 of the 256, or 78%, of the spaces along I-95.

¹ The American Trucking Associations is the largest national trade association for the trucking industry. Through a federation of other trucking groups, the industry-related conferences and its 50 affiliated state trucking associations (including the Virginia Trucking Association), ATA represents more than 37,000 members covering every type of motor carrier in the United States.

Good stuff.



Even a VDOT official acknowledged this problem recently when he told *Land Line Magazine* on February 13 that he was aware the state of Virginia is “deficient in providing adequate parking for commercial vehicles, especially along the I-95 and I-81 corridors.” VDOT’s Statewide Safety Rest Area and Welcome Center Master Plan Draft states, “research indicates that the presence of safety rest areas has a direct correlation to a reduction in the number of shoulder stop and driver fatigue related accidents.” It is logical to assume, therefore, that eliminating safety rest areas has a direct correlation to an increase in the number of these accidents. In fact, the Master Plan Draft states that “the absence of safety rest areas would result in a 52 percent increase in accidents related to shoulder stops.”

Governor, the trucking industry today has the lowest fatality rate since records began being kept in 1975. This achievement was possible only through a cooperative relationship between the trucking industry and our public sector partners. It would be a shame to squander these hard-won gains due to a temporary lack of resources. We urge you to consider the potentially tragic outcome of this critical decision. On behalf of the trucking industry and the motorists with whom our members share the road, we ask you to please reject this reckless and irresponsible proposal.

Sincerely,



Bill Graves

cc: The Honorable Pierce Homer, Secretary of Transportation
David Ekern, Commissioner, Virginia Department of Transportation
The Honorable William T. Bolling, President of the Senate
The Honorable Richard L. Saslaw, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Thomas K. Norment, Jr., Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable William J. Howell, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Ward L. Armstrong, House Minority Leader
The Honorable Yvonne B. Miller, Chairwoman, Senate Committee on Transportation
The Honorable Stephen D. Newman, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Transportation
The Honorable Joe T. May, Chairman, House Committee on Transportation
The Honorable Jeion A. Ward, Ranking Member, House Committee on Transportation
P. Dale Bennett, Executive Vice President, Virginia Trucking Association
Mark Goodwin, ATA State Vice President