ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 789

Supporting the Heartland Corridor.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 4, 2005
Agreed to by the Senate, February 24, 2005

WHEREAS, the Heartland Corridor proposes the development of a seamless, efficient rail intermodal route from an Atlantic Ocean gateway, opening up a significant portion of western Virginia and West Virginia currently excluded from international intermodal markets, enhancing south central Virginia global market access, and connecting to a center of existing domestic and international distribution in the Midwest, thereby strengthening the economic vitality and improving the efficiency and capacity of Virginia's and the nation's transportation network; and

WHEREAS, the Heartland Corridor will fundamentally alter the competitive position of the ports of Hampton Roads, because intermodal containerized traffic between the ports and their primary rail market, the United States Midwest, will no longer travel north to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and from there westward, but will now move directly across the heartland, thus reducing the distance traveled by about 250 miles; and

WHEREAS, this means a container delivered in Norfolk this morning is available for pick-up in Chicago on a "second morning" basis, as opposed to the "third afternoon" availability as offered today; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Port Authority will effectively occupy a different space in the global competitive market, to its own benefit, and to the benefit of the new regions with enhanced market access to global markets, e.g., Hampton Roads, south central Virginia, the Roanoke Valley, the Huntington/Charleston region of West Virginia, and central Ohio; and

WHEREAS, for rail movements of containerized traffic to succeed in diverting freight away from highways, connections must be seamless and the trains themselves must be efficiently structured, thus requiring double-stacking intermodal containers on trains; and

WHEREAS, the Heartland Corridor will be a robust transportation corridor with full double-stack capacity between the ports of Hampton Roads, Virginia, through south central and western Virginia, via West Virginia, to central Ohio; and

WHEREAS, rail intermodal transportation also requires adequate and efficient ramp facilities for the seamless transfer of rail-to-truck and the reverse; and

WHEREAS, such facilities must be cleanly structured for ease of movement internally, and they must be well situated relative to other infrastructure, most critically, roadway connectors; and

WHEREAS, within Virginia, the Heartland Corridor will include, near-term, the provision of an intermodal ramp to serve the south central Virginia market, capturing the Richmond and Tri-Cities markets and another facility to be located in the Roanoke Valley region, which can be provided around the time that the double-stack clearances in western Virginia and West Virginia are available; and

WHEREAS, for both south central Virginia and the Roanoke Valley, the intermodal facilities associated with the Heartland Corridor will represent a fundamentally different level of access to global markets; and

WHEREAS, the highest-value commodities moving in international commerce today, short of extremely high-value items which move by air freight (e.g., jewelry, pharmaceuticals), move in containers; and

WHEREAS, without access to efficient, low-cost rail intermodal service, regions face very high transportation costs to move products to market (or inversely, to bring in components or retail items for local sale or distribution); and

WHEREAS, the train service along the Heartland Corridor will connect south central Virginia and the Roanoke Valley directly, via rail, to the ports of Hampton Roads and to the Midwest, and from there provide direct rail connections to the West Coast and Asia; and

WHEREAS, the Heartland Corridor represents a leap to multiple market access for these key regions in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, combining multiple market access with other economic development tools will allow both regions to leverage themselves for types of investment they today cannot easily attract due to the higher cost of freight transportation; and

WHEREAS, the Heartland Corridor will also benefit the traveling public and address congestion by growing freight opportunities via rail instead of road (alleviating the magnitude of higher highway maintenance costs); and

WHEREAS, the Heartland Corridor will facilitate the diversion of freight from highways to rail, and

thereby achieve a better public outcome by providing for greater mobility for both motorists and truck freight that cannot move by rail, reducing congestion, improving public safety, and providing for freight movement which is environmentally beneficent and less expensive for shippers; and

WHEREAS, in Virginia, the Heartland Corridor will substantially reduce truck traffic in the U.S. Route 460 corridor, and more modestly on Interstate Route 64 in addition to providing placement of intermodal facilities in south central Virginia and in the Roanoke Valley region which will play an important role in diverting highway traffic; and

WHEREAS, the Heartland Corridor also specifically provides for fully grade-separated access for a shortline railroad (the Commonwealth Railroad) to access the new terminal facility being proposed in Portsmouth, Virginia; and

WHEREAS, this terminal represents the single largest private investment in Virginia history; and

WHEREAS, the Heartland Corridor will greatly enhance the competitive position of this investment vis-à-vis maritime terminals elsewhere on the Atlantic coast; and

WHEREAS, this same Western Freeway Rail Corridor component of the Heartland Corridor also provides access to the site of the fourth marine terminal planned for Virginia Port Authority, which represents the 2030 vision for the Ports of Hampton Roads; and

WHEREAS, the Heartland Corridor provides for closure of 12 at-grade crossings in the City of Portsmouth, allowing for full separation of roadway and rail movements through an urban neighborhood which would otherwise suffer the brunt of the increased rail traffic that otherwise provides massive environmental benefits to the region at large; and

WHEREAS, the Heartland Corridor provides significant truck diversion from Interstate Route 64 and U.S. Route 460 to the enhanced rail corridor running to the Midwest; and

WHEREAS, the Heartland Corridor provides full double-stack clearances for the economic operation of intermodal trains through western Virginia and West Virginia and connecting to the Midwest; and

WHEREAS, the Heartland Corridor allows lower costs to accrue to shippers throughout the Midwest, from central Ohio through the Chicago and Detroit regions, to the extent that they are favored by another competitive route for the movement of their product, inbound and outbound; and

WHEREAS, much lower costs will accrue to shippers in south central Virginia, the Roanoke Valley, and northwestern West Virginia, who today lack inexpensive access to intermodal freight options; and

WHEREAS, due to the overall cost of the projects associated with the Heartland Corridor (total is approximately $270 million), there is a recognition that this will require a public-private partnership to bring to fruition; and

WHEREAS, ideally, that partnership should include support from federal funding sources and the backing of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the State of West Virginia, the State of Ohio, the transportation, port and/or rail industry agencies of the three states, Norfolk Southern Corporation, the Columbus Regional Airport Authority, and the specific localities best situated for direct benefit (in Virginia—Hampton Roads, south central Virginia, and the Roanoke Valley); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly support the Heartland Corridor project.