

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
RICHMOND

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FAIRFAX STATION, VIRGINIA 22039  
THIRTY-SEVENTH DISTRICT

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:  
EDUCATION  
GENERAL LAWS  
AGRICULTURE, CHESAPEAKE AND  
NATURAL RESOURCES

February 26, 2010

The Honorable Sean Connaughton  
Virginia Secretary of Transportation  
Patrick Henry Building, 3rd Floor  
1111 East Broad Street  
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Secretary Connaughton:

Congratulations again on your appointment as Virginia's Secretary of Transportation. All of us have enjoyed working with you in the past, and equally look forward to working with you now to address our Commonwealth's pressing transportation needs.

The recent winter weather put VDOT's snow management plans and capabilities to the test. While there were many heroes, including citizens, VDOT employees, contractors, fire and rescue personnel, and the Virginia National Guard, VDOT's response also revealed serious concerns relating to training, prioritization, oversight, and transparency. The purpose of this letter is to request that you take this opportunity to perform a comprehensive review of our snow removal policies and procedures so that VDOT can better serve our citizens in the future.

We know that you share these concerns and a desire to ensure that our citizens are not only safe, but that VDOT uses taxpayer resources efficiently and effectively. The following are just some of the issues that we feel need to be addressed:

- Unfamiliarity with neighborhoods by contractors and uneven prioritization of neighborhood streets resulted in several situations where main community thoroughfares were left unplowed while smaller streets and cul-de-sacs were clear. In attempting to get such problems addressed, our legislative staff had to explain in a number of instances that certain "courts," "places," and "plazas" actually serve as major ingresses and egresses into neighborhoods. Similarly, some roads were not plowed because of uncertainty about jurisdictional boundaries.
- Coordination with leaders who know the local communities to prioritize routes is essential. This process needs to be completed by July so that contracts and

instructions to contractors can be established long before the next storm. In addition, we should take this opportunity to discuss the merits of snow emergency routes. Vehicles parked on major community streets often significantly hampered clearing efforts.

- In several instances, smaller trucks with plows were dispatched to areas that they were clearly not equipped to handle given the depth of the snow. It would have been far better to recognize these limitations upfront and to utilize these trucks in different capacities – while ensuring that proper equipment was dispatched the first time around.
- VDOT needs to identify and prioritize hilly areas that warrant early attention, including sand and salt, to prevent them from becoming major safety concerns. Again, this should be done through collaboration with local community leaders.
- We are very concerned about proper contractor oversight, accountability, and training. According to VDOT, each street is assigned a contractor. While many contractors did a great job, there were an alarming number of constituents who reported no plowing at all during the series of winter storms. Additionally, many observed that contractors with inadequate vehicles would try to enter a subdivision, get stuck, and then leave – raising questions about whether these areas were reported as plowed to VDOT while leaving residents stranded and frustrated. There may be an opportunity for the use of GPS technology to help track where plows have been or where they are going to be working next, as we understand is being used in Howard County, Maryland. This could easily be placed on the VDOT website. Every single taxi in Northern Virginia already uses this technology. Not only would this tool give constituents an idea of how progress is being made, but it would also allow residents to call in if their street is being shown as plowed when it is actually not.
- There were several reports of inefficient use of limited equipment. More than one resident cited large plows that were assigned to very small stretches of road. The plows were reported to have sat around for an hour or two at a time waiting for snow to accumulate, while they could have helped clear other areas of the community.
- While we understand the potential challenges involved, VDOT should seek to establish agreements with the local school systems and other agencies to coordinate the use of snow plowing equipment. On a number of occasions it was noted that school equipment would go through a neighborhood with plows up on the way to clear school parking lots.
- Frustrated by the lack of state assistance, some residents expressed interest in helping themselves by hiring a private contractor. However, they were told by VDOT that this was either illegal or that it would require a permit – obviously impractical for an emergency. We suggest that when there is a declared state of

emergency that these restrictions be reconsidered. As one constituent said "If the government can't help, then at least it should get out of the way."

- While clearing sidewalks is the responsibility of individual property owners, VDOT absolutely must take school children and walkers into account during snow removal efforts. After the initial effort, VDOT began to use front end loaders and other equipment to better clear neighborhood streets. This was very welcome. However, previously cleared sidewalks (and driveways) were piled high with several feet of ice and snow – making them impassible and unclearable. After several complaints, VDOT contractors were told to be more sensitive to sidewalks. Unfortunately, this was done too late for many areas. Taking sidewalks into account upfront should be standard practice for VDOT contractors in the future.
- Elected leaders, especially members of the legislature, need a "real-time" way to track response information from VDOT, including where reported problems are on VDOT's "to-do list." In some cases, the real problem isn't the delay, but the uncertainty.

We strongly encourage you to involve community leaders, including local civic associations, in the discussion of how to address these issues. Their insights will be invaluable and their involvement will enable them to be partners with VDOT during the next winter storm.

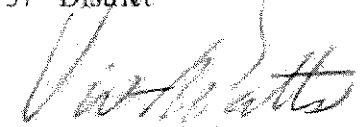
We appreciate the historic nature of the snow storms. However, the lessons learned from this experience must be used to strengthen VDOT's response in the future. We stand ready to assist you in any way possible, including making statutory changes that may be required. We also request a meeting with you at your earliest convenience while we are all still in Richmond for the General Assembly Session.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Delegate David Bulova  
37<sup>th</sup> District



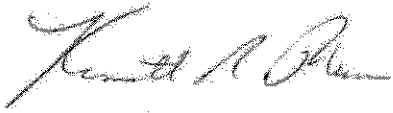
Delegate Vivian Watts  
39<sup>th</sup> District



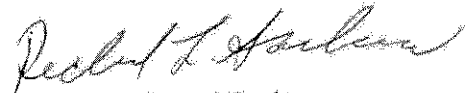
Senator Chap Petersen  
34<sup>th</sup> District



Senator Dave Marsden  
37<sup>th</sup> District



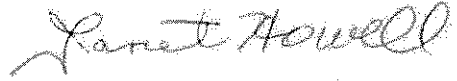
Delegate Kenneth Plum  
36<sup>th</sup> District



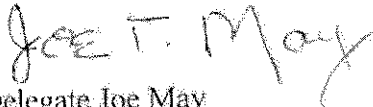
Senator Richard Saslaw  
35<sup>th</sup> District



Delegate David Albo  
42<sup>nd</sup> District



Senator Janet Howell  
32<sup>nd</sup> District



Delegate Joe May  
33<sup>rd</sup> District



Senator Mary Margaret Whipple  
31<sup>st</sup> District



Delegate James Scott  
53<sup>rd</sup> District



Senator Patricia Ticer  
30<sup>th</sup> District



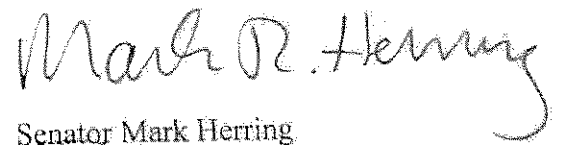
Delegate Scott Lingamelter  
31<sup>st</sup> District



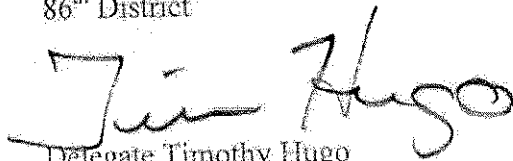
Senator Toddy Puller  
36<sup>th</sup> District



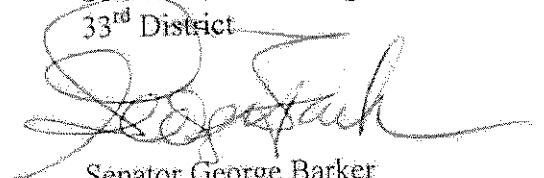
Delegate Thomas Rust  
86<sup>th</sup> District



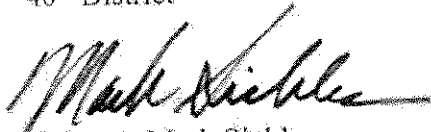
Senator Mark Herring  
33<sup>rd</sup> District



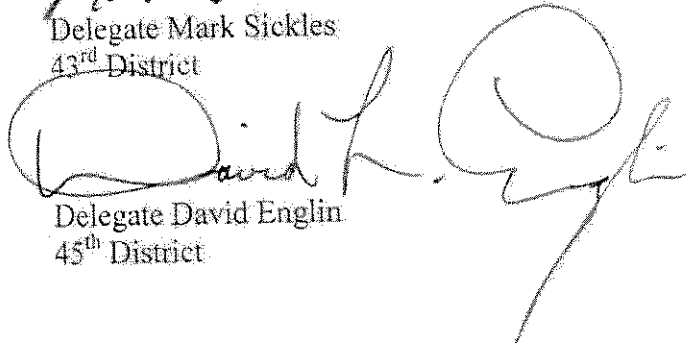
Delegate Timothy Hugo  
40<sup>th</sup> District



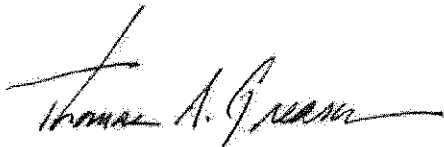
Senator George Barker  
39<sup>th</sup> District



Delegate Mark Sickles  
43<sup>rd</sup> District



Delegate David Englin  
45<sup>th</sup> District




Delegate Thomas Greason  
32<sup>nd</sup> District




Delegate Kaye Kory  
38<sup>th</sup> District



Delegate Richard Anderson  
51<sup>st</sup> District



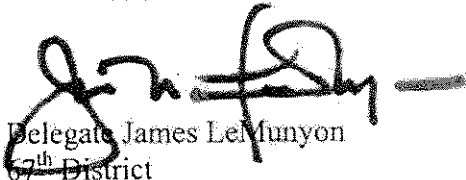
Delegate Mark Keam  
35<sup>th</sup> District



Delegate Scott Surovell  
44<sup>th</sup> District



Delegate Barbara Comstock  
34<sup>th</sup> District



Delegate James Lemunyon  
67<sup>th</sup> District