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 CONTACT: Frank Dorman (804) 225-4491 4/19/2001

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Board Approves Almost \$40 Million For Improvement Projects, New Location For Proposed Route 17 in Chesapeake

Richmond - The Commonwealth Transportation Board today approved 37 contracts for highway improvement projects valued at more than \$40 million.

In other action, the Board approved a proposed new location for Route 17 (George Washington Highway) in the City of Chesapeake between Dominion Boulevard (Route 104) and the North Carolina line along a route east of its existing location along the Dismal Swamp Canal. In 1997, anticipating widening the highway to improve safety and accommodate future traffic growth, a previous Board had approved improving the existing road, but significant environmental concerns resulted in a new location being chosen. The Board approved the new location with the understanding that it will be a limited access highway, so that future development along the proposed highway will not cause more traffic than it will be designed to handle. Following a public hearing process conducted by the Virginia Department of Transportation, the Board will consider approving a design for the project. With final Board approval, advertising for construction could occur in late 2002, with construction costs expected to exceed \$70 million. The project will replace the existing two-lane highway with a four-lane, divided highway, carrying traffic to and from the Outer Banks in North Carolina, where Route 17 already is a four-lane divided highway.

The Board also approved a location and design for much-needed widening and other improvements to Routes 29/50 (Lee Highway) and Route 123 (Chain Bridge Road) where they meet in the City of Alexandria. Advertising for construction for this \$11 million project should occur in mid-2004.

In other action, the Board approved a location and design for improvements to Route 603 (Konarock Road) in Washington and Smyth counties, from just west of its intersection with Route 58 to just east of Route 600 (Whitop Mountain Road) in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. The \$12 million project should be advertised for construction in late 2002.

In action affecting Page County, the Board voted to drop Almond Drive from further development, and to permanently barricade the road approaching the former Sandy Hook Bridge, which was damaged by flooding in 1996. The Board had approved a bridge proposal in 1999, but the county board of supervisors has withdrawn its support for the project.

The Board also approved resolutions honoring Max Barkley Porter, for his service as a member of the Commonwealth Transportation Board from 1994 through 2000, and commending Metrorail, which the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority has operated since service began 25 years ago, and which now provides 40 percent of daily

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