

“TRANSPORTATION REFERENDUM: VOTE 'YES' AND AVOID 'SHOULD-HAVES'”
[Final Edition]

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It's the year 2010, the failed transportation referendum of 2002 is only a dim memory, and you're stuck in a terrible traffic jam while trying to get to safer grounds as the highly destructive Hurricane Harry approaches.

However, because the referendum failed, Interstate 64 was not expanded to the James City County/New Kent County line, and now you find it wall to wall with cars that simply aren't moving.

There is no third crossing of Hampton Roads or widened Route 460 that might enable you to exit the area via a different route. Nor has the Midtown Tunnel between Norfolk and Portsmouth been widened, or any new passenger rail service been constructed.

And, if you are unlucky enough to find yourself near the ocean in Virginia Beach when Hurricane Harry comes, there's no Southeastern Expressway to help you exit that area, either, because the referendum failed.

"Curses!" you shout. Why didn't we pay attention? What could we have been thinking about? Traffic congestion already was a huge problem in 2002, but we chose to ignore it. Now, it's absolutely killing us. It's going to take at least another 10 years to fix the problem, and now it's really going to be expensive. Meanwhile, my business is suffering, my customers simply can't get to me, and my morning commute has become next to impossible.

A fictional situation? Yes. Improbable? Hardly. The Hampton Roads region is headed for a transportation crisis if it does not take swift action. The most intelligent way to take action is to approve the one-cent regional increase in our sales tax on Nov. 5.

We have an estimated 1.2 million autos and trucks registered now in Hampton Roads; this is up about 20 percent since 1997. This reflects the fact that nearly 90 percent of all individuals in our region commute to work by means of a personal auto. It does not take an expert to understand the impact that this trend and simple population growth will have on highway congestion.

By 2015, 25 percent of all vehicle miles traveled on the Peninsula during peak commute hours will be under conditions the Virginia Department of Transportation classifies as severe congestion -- bumper to bumper traffic in which the typical car repeatedly comes to a complete halt even though no stop sign or traffic light is near.

The means to avoid this looming disaster is available. A "yes" vote on the regional sales tax referendum will spur business, increase our leisure time, enhance our safety and make our lives more enjoyable. If you're like me, you don't like to pay taxes. Nonetheless, either we take steps to deal with our traffic problems now or these predictable troubles will suffocate us in a few short years. Vote "yes" on Nov. 5.

Koch is a member of the Board of Visitors, professor of economics and president emeritus of Old Dominion University.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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