

# Senate parks transportation tax increases for now

## Vote may lead to a state budget adoption before the fiscal year ends June 30.

By Michael Sluss, The Roanoke Times, May 24, 2006

RICHMOND — The Virginia Senate abandoned efforts to incorporate transportation-related tax increases into a new state budget on Tuesday, a move that could help pave the way for a compromise with the House of Delegates on a spending plan for the next two years.

Recognizing that the General Assembly's long-running transportation fight could leave the state without a budget when the new fiscal year begins on July 1, the Senate approved a spending plan that increases funding for education, health care and public safety programs but contains virtually no new money for roads and transit.

Senate leaders said they expect their House counterparts to honor their commitment to continue negotiations over transportation funding after lawmakers pass a budget. And they insisted they have not given up on efforts to raise new money for the state's transportation program. The Senate has offered a variety of proposals to increase transportation funding by as much as \$1 billion annually and give the traffic-choked regions of Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads the authority to generate additional revenue.

"Is our resolve the same? You bet your life it is," said Sen. John Chichester, R-Northumberland County, the chairman of the powerful Senate Finance Committee.

The Senate voted 24-8 on Tuesday to substitute its own budget for a two-year, \$72.2 billion spending plan that the House passed on April 12. The House may act on the Senate proposal as early as Thursday, taking the necessary procedural steps to put the budget in the hands of senior negotiators from the two Republican-controlled chambers.

House leaders said the Senate's action removed a major barrier to a budget deal, even though the two sides still have other significant differences to settle before agreeing on a spending plan.