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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 458

Offered January 21, 1999

Requesting the Department of Rail and Public Transportation, in cooperation with the Department of Transportation and the Secretary of Commerce and Trade, to study the operation of excursion trains as tourist attractions in Virginia.

Patron—Edwards

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, excursion train rides offer a unique opportunity for tourists to ride on an early 20th-century steam-powered train through picturesque and scenic mountains, forests, and farmlands, and rich and attractive historical sites and cities; and

WHEREAS, a strong rail excursion industry that attracts tourists promotes a healthy and robust economy in the communities they serve; and

WHEREAS, the success of the excursion train industry in other states has been attributed to railroad carriers' ability to use low density or abandoned trackage, state-owned rails, such as the Great Smoky Railway in North Carolina, or regional freight lines, like the Ohio Central; and

WHEREAS, Virginia is a victim of its own railroad business success because almost all of its rails are privately-owned, carry a fairly heavy traffic flow, or are committed for future development; and

WHEREAS, previous efforts to offer excursion programs in Virginia during the 1970s and 1980s met with several difficulties, including low ridership, under-capitalization, and concerns about carrier liability and the interference with freight traffic; and

WHEREAS, among the mid-atlantic states, Virginia is the only state that does not operate excursions trains for tourists; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Department of Rail and Public Transportation, in cooperation with the Department of Transportation and the Secretary of Commerce and Trade, be requested to study the operation of excursion trains as tourist attractions in Virginia.

In conducting this study, the Department shall examine (i) train excursions for tourists in the other states, (ii) the capitalization requirements and logistics of operating train excursions in Virginia, (iii) economic incentives, including property and income tax credits, for the development and promotion of an excursion train industry; and (iv) the feasibility of state acquisition or construction of rail routes in the Commonwealth.

The Department of Transportation shall provide staff support for the study. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Department of Rail and Public Transportation, upon request.

The Department of Rail and Public Transportation shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 2000 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

INTRODUCED

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