

Transportation group backs sale of ABC stores

McDonnell to outline plan to sell liquor stores to fund road improvements

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A Northern Virginia transportation group threw its support behind selling the state's liquor stores to fund road improvements.

The Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance formally announced their support of Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell's plan to privatize alcohol beverage control stores, an institution he called during his campaign "a vestige left over from prohibition."

"We agree with the Alliance. ABC privatization is a smart way to put significant new money into transportation as part of a multifaceted approach to the issue. By privatizing ABC, and putting Virginia in line with the majority of states, we will put hundreds of millions of dollars into building new roads immediately," stated McDonnell.

The governor is expected to formally announce on Sept. 8 how much the state stands to gain from the sale of the stores. Some are concerned the gains will only be a one-time benefit, and by selling the stores to private owners, Virginia could stand to lose hundreds of millions in annual tax revenue.

"He has been going around the state for the last two months holding town hall meetings on government reform in general, and a big part of that is touting the sale of the ABC stores as something that's important A: to get the government out of selling liquor, and B: that it presents an opportunity that the sale of the stores will generate a one-time opportunity of \$300 to \$500 million in revenue," said NVTVA president Robert Chase.

Last year, Virginia's 330 ABC stores contributed \$665 million per year to the state's general fund. ABC has contributed more than \$6 billion to the state since its founding 1934. The sale of the stores could mean money up front for projects that have sat on the backburner for so long, said Chase.

One of those projects lies in Woodbridge, at Va. 123 and U.S. 1.

An \$83-million planned interchange at the two roads, which would open up the nearby Belmont Bay neighborhood for new development as well as serve as the impetus for widening U.S. 1 to six lanes in the area, needs only \$17 million to begin construction.

“We don’t anticipate state funds being the only source of funding for the project. We’ve also been looking at getting federal and local funds, as well as grants,” said Woodbridge District Supervisor Frank J. Principi, D.

However, Principi does not support the sale of ABC stores, saying community services boards throughout the state rely on the annual tax revenues produced by the stores.

Community services boards throughout the state provide access to mental illness care, support for those with substance abuse issues and those who have an intellectual disability.

Earlier this summer, Principi traveled to Washington to lobby for the \$17 million needed to begin construction of the interchange.