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MEDIA ADVISORY **FROM THE OFFICE OF COMMISSIONER TIM ECHOLS** **Meeting to Promote Macon-Atlanta Passenger Rail**

Atlanta, May 12, 2011 - Commissioner Tim Echols is pleased to play a role in assembling stakeholders interested in the Macon-Atlanta passenger rail. This meeting on Monday, May 16th, will be from 11am to 3pm in the media center in the infield at the Atlanta Motor Speedway located at 1500 Tara Place, Hampton, GA 30228.

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the possible use of the state's excursion train for several days in the week leading up to the NASCAR race on September 4th, the Sunday before Labor Day.

“After riding the state’s premier excursion train from Cordele to Plains, I got the idea of moving the train up to the proposed Macon-Atlanta route to give people a taste of what that route would be like,” said Echols. “Having actual train equipment running part of this route will give organizers and stakeholders a chance to discuss the project and bring attention to it in a more tangible way.”

Echols said that he got together with DNR Commissioner, Mark Williams, to discuss the idea and so far all parties have signed off on the proposal. Echols said the train would probably run from Macon to Hampton on September 2nd full of middle Georgia folks interested in the rail project. On Friday, September 3rd the train would make numerous trips between Hampton, near the racetrack, and Griffin, the next stop down.

“The planning meeting and the "Taste of Rail" is organized only to help proponents of the Atlanta-Macon Consortium gain additional momentum and to showcase their vision,” said Echols. “My role is simply to use my platform as a Constitutional officer to bring parties together to have meaningful and effective discussion.”

Echols said that of the fastest growing 50 private companies in Atlanta, none of them were below I-20. “As a statewide official elected on the same ticket with Nathan Deal, I realize the importance of each and every Constitutional officer to be thinking about economic development and jobs for all of Georgia, not just North Atlanta,” said Echols.

In attendance at the planning meeting will be Gordon Kenna of Georgians for Passenger Rail, Lee Kinnamon of the Southwest Georgia Railroad Excursion Authority, Joel Harrell of Norfolk Southern, a representative from Congressman Westmoreland’s office, several legislators, many mayors and Chamber personnel, and business people.

Background: Long ago the Public Service Commission regulated railroads in our state as the Railroad Commission, originally made up of three members. The need for that has since passed, but many in middle Georgia and the Southern Crescent believe that a Macon-Atlanta passenger rail line would be an economic catalyst for that part of our state. The idea has been languishing, but with the new transportation project selection procedure, it may come back to life.

Commissioner Echols grew up in Clayton County, has three degrees from the University of Georgia and makes his home in Athens.

Directions:

If arriving from Ga. Hwy. 20 – Turn right at Lower Woolsey Rd. Turn right on Speedway Blvd., then turn right into the infield tunnel. Continue to the Media Center.

Southbound on Hwy. 19/41 – turn right on Speedway Blvd. (north of the main entrance). Turn left into the infield tunnel. Continue to the Media Center.

Northbound on Hwy. 19/41 – turn left on Speedway Blvd. (north of the main entrance). Turn left into the infield tunnel. Continue to the Media Center.

The Commission web site is www.psc.state.ga.us.

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