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Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 836- Major Highway Capacity Expansion Projects - Impact Assessments and Mitigation Plans (Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024)

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 6, 2024

The Transportation and Climate Alignment Act is a **priority bill** for the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club, and we urge the Senate Finance Committee to support it.

This bill is modeled after legislation that passed in Colorado and Minnesota. It would require the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and regional transportation planning agencies to measure and mitigate any increases in climate pollution and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) caused by planned highway expansion projects over \$10 million. The bill would also require these transportation agencies to assess whether the planned projects are in compliance with the state's climate targets and VMT goals. The bill does not apply to projects that were submitted for approval, inclusion in, or funded for construction in the Consolidated Transportation Program, Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, or Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Improvement Program before July 1, 2024. This legislation requires that future projects would need to be evaluated for their VMT and GHG effects and for mitigation actions to be taken to offset those effects.

Mitigation actions in the bill can be tailored to the needs of urban, suburban and rural communities and include improving and expanding public transit, creating protected bike infrastructure, expanding broadband access, and promoting transit oriented development. MDOT and regional planning agencies would also need to prioritize mitigation actions in overburdened and underserved communities (as defined by the Climate Solutions Now Act) impacted by the highway project. This will help expand people's transportation choices while reducing climate and other harmful air pollution.

Maryland established itself as a leader on climate policy with the Climate Solutions Now Act, and now our attention should now turn to aligning state policies with its ambitious goals. Transportation remains the number one source of climate pollution in Maryland. The 2023 Maryland Climate Pollution Reduction Plan indicated that electrification of vehicles is only one part of the solution needed to meet our climate targets from the transportation sector. The Plan indicates that increasing investment in public transit, bikeways, pedestrian improvements, transportation demand management, parking and congestion pricing, and other strategies that reduce vehicle traffic is needed to meet our climate goals. MDOT set a goal to reduce per-capita vehicle miles traveled 10% by 2030 and 20% by 2050 as a strategy to help meet Maryland's climate targets in the transportation sector. However, Maryland is not on track to reach its VMT targets. MDOT's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan indicates that under the business as usual scenario, VMT per capita will grow 1.03% annually, but we need to be reducing VMT .065% under 2019 levels in order to achieve a 20% per capita VMT reduction by 2050. The Transportation and Climate Alignment Act will provide agencies the tools they need to get Maryland on track to achieving this goal.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

We are facing a budget shortfall for our transportation needs, and we need to make the best use of scarce dollars. To do that it is important to align our investments in projects that meet state and regional goals to advance equity, improve mobility, and address the climate crisis. We urge a favorable report on this legislation.

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