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Committee: Transportation and Environment Subcommittee- (Appropriations Committee)
Testimony on: MDOT Maryland Transit Administration-J00H01
Hearing Date: March 4, 2024

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges the Budget and Taxation Committee to prioritize maintaining critical funding needs for the Maryland Transit Administration. As an absolute baseline, we urge the Committee and MDOT to make sure that our state's existing core transit systems can operate safely and reliably without service cuts that would adversely impact transit riders. Cuts to existing service result in less ridership, a criterion that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) considers when evaluating grant proposals. This may adversely impact MDOT's application for new projects like Baltimore's Red Line. We urge the Committee and MDOT to apply all provisions of the Equity of the Transportation Sector Law to any service changes reflected in the budget, including the sections of that law that are not required until July 1, 2024. Below are critical items that should be funded in the Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP).

Provide State of Good Repair Funding for MTA: Fully fund MTA's deferred maintenance backlog in FY 2024-FY 2029 according to the Transit Safety & Investment Act. MTA reported a Capital Needs Inventory in 2021 indicating that the system has a State of Good Repair backlog of \$1.8 billion. The Transit Safety & Investment Act was passed into law to help fund the backlog so the transit system didn't fall into a state of disrepair. While MDOT restored \$15 million in funding needed to meet the critical State of Good Repair Needs required by the Act for FY 2025, these cuts are still proposed for FY 2026 and beyond. The December 2023 Baltimore light rail shutdown underscores the urgency of addressing this backlog. If this maintenance backlog is further neglected, it will result in transit riders facing even greater challenges accessing jobs, education, healthcare, and recreation.

Construction Funding for the Red Line: One of the Moore Administration's priorities is to build the Red Line. The Red Line would provide key connectivity to underserved communities in East and West Baltimore. While the FY 2024-FY2029 budget provides funding for design and engineering, it does not provide an indication of funds available for construction of the project. The capital cost for the Red Line is estimated at \$1.9 to \$7.2 billion based on a range of alternatives presented in the preliminary analysis MTA released in the Fall 2023. The State should begin budgeting for its expected share of the cost that will be needed in addition to any funds awarded through the Capital Investments Grant Program.

Additional key funding items:

- While MDOT restored the \$8 million it cut for the MARC Brunswick line operations in FY 2025, cuts to the MARC Brunswick line are still being proposed in FY 2026 and beyond and funding should be restored.
- The budget should also minimize cuts in FYs 2026-2029 for the procurement of electric buses by MTA. The final CTP would cut funding for electric bus procurement by approximately \$245 million. Electric buses play an important role in improving air quality and health outcomes for transit riders, transit workers, and surrounding communities.

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.

- MTA should replace its aging light rail cars because the mid-life overhaul failed, and the vehicles are at the end of their life and are performing below FTA and APTA averages.
- The budget should provide funding to support a fifth bus division for the MTA to improve service.
- The budget should also fund improvements at MTA bus stops to achieve ADA compliance that will increase accessibility of transit service.
- In addition, the budget should fund the plan for the North-South Rapid Transit Corridor from the Regional Transit Plan.

To address the fiscal imbalance, Maryland should reevaluate its spending priorities and raise revenue. The capital program summary in the FY 2024-FY 2029 Consolidated Transportation Program indicates there are over a billion dollars in system expansion for major and minor capital projects in the State Highway Administration. MDOT and this committee should reevaluate funding for highway expansion projects in this category that would result in increased vehicle traffic. Instead, we urge focusing the transportation budget first on system preservation and then prioritize our revenue dollars on expansion projects that would help meet the state's climate, mobility, and equity goals.

MDOT should also fund other key public transit, active transportation, smart growth, and vehicle electrification strategies identified in the Climate Partners' [recommendations on Maryland's Climate Plan](#), many of which were included in the Climate Pollution Reduction Plan.

Having a strong public transit system is a key pillar of Maryland's strategy to fight the climate crisis. MDOT's own 2023 Climate Pollution Reduction plan indicates that we need to expand public transit and active transportation strategies in order to meet the State's climate targets. Additionally, the Department set a goal to reduce per-capita Vehicle Miles Traveled 10% by 2030 and 20% by 2050. To meet these targets and improve mobility for everyone, we urge the Committee to expand and invest in these critical MTA programs and services.

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