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Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Testimony on: SB 943, Vehicle Laws - Bus Obstruction Monitoring Systems (Better Bus Service Act of 2024)

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 6, 2024

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports SB 943, which would authorize local jurisdictions to use a bus lane monitoring system to enforce the prohibition against driving a motor vehicle in a designated bus lane.

An authorized bus lane monitoring system would record images of vehicles traveling in a dedicated bus lane where there is a prohibition of unauthorized vehicles using such a lane. The bill specifies the training that monitoring system operators would need to complete, and the information that should be included with the citation which would be mailed to the registered owner of a vehicle caught violating the prohibition. Violators would be subject to a civil penalty that may not exceed \$75. Failure to pay the fine could result in suspension of the motor vehicle registration.

Bus lane monitoring systems are needed to allow dedicated bus lanes to work as intended. Buses traveling in dedicated lanes carry upward of four times more travelers per hour than a general traffic lane. Dedicated lanes allow buses to travel two or three times faster than usual bus speeds by avoiding traffic congestion often caused by single-occupancy vehicles. The biggest challenge to having dedicated bus lanes work as intended is finding effective enforcement mechanisms to keep unauthorized users out of those lanes.

Faster travel in dedicated bus lanes encourages greater use of transit, which is much better for our environment and public health, and can lessen traffic congestion by reducing the number of vehicles on the road. Transportation is the largest source of climate-disrupting greenhouse gases in Maryland today, so getting more people out of their gas and diesel-fueled vehicles and onto mass transit is critically important. Tailpipe emissions from fossil-fuel powered vehicles are also hazardous to human health, and are linked to cancers, heart disease, asthma, emphysema, other respiratory diseases, and premature death.

In summary, this proposal would enable dedicated bus lanes in our state to work as intended, which would allow buses to be faster and attract more ridership. This bill would bring about positive change, and we urge a favorable report on it.

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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.