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Committee: Environment and Transportation
**Testimony on: HB 64 - "State Highways – Designated Shoulder Areas - Establishment
And Use by Transit Buses"**
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: January 20, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB 64 to authorize the State Highway Administration (SHA) to designate shoulder areas on State highways for travel by state and local transit buses.

The transportation sector is Maryland's primary generator of climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions. Our state's Greenhouse Gas Inventory indicates that gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles account for 89% of this sector's pollution. Tailpipe emissions from these vehicles are also hazardous to human health and contribute to cancers, heart disease, asthma, emphysema, and other respiratory diseases. More than 80% of Marylanders live in counties that do not meet federal clean air standards for ozone, due in large part to tailpipe emissions.

Getting individuals out of their cars and onto public transit, riding bikes and walking more would be a positive development for our environment and residents' health, as well as an effective way to reduce traffic congestion. Relying more on transit vs. cars to get residents to and from work and other locations is also a much more equitable approach to transportation as many people do not own or have access to a car. Latino and Asian workers are twice as likely as White workers not to own a vehicle; Black workers are three times as likely. Also, an increasing number of young people are driving less than older generations.

The rising costs of transportation projects inevitably are affecting the Maryland Department of Transportation as well as county and city departments of transportation across the state. A consequence of tight budgets is that many of these transportation departments would likely be interested in gaining access to more travel lanes for transit at little or no cost to them.

A useful and cost-effective way for SHA to facilitate more use of transit in the state without having to build more traffic lanes on state highways would be to allow state and local transit buses to travel on highway shoulder areas where it would be safe to do so. Requiring SHA to consult with the Maryland Transit Administration and State Police, as the legislation calls for, would ensure this change could be conducted in a reasonable manner.

In summary, this proposal would be a good use of an underutilized state resource at minimal cost to the state and would offer many benefits to residents. We urge a favorable report on HB 64.

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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.