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**Committee:** Appropriations

**Testimony on:** HB 778 – “Transportation – Investment Program – MARC Rail Service (Maryland Regional Rail Transformation Act)”

**Position:** Favorable

**Hearing Date:** February 17, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB 778. The bill would require the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) to establish individual investment programs to advance the Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) Rail Service Cornerstone Plan and other specified improvements in MARC service. The improvements would enhance MARC’s existing Brunswick, Camden, and Penn Lines; provide new regional service between Perryville, MD and Newark, DE; provide new regional run-through rail service to Alexandria, VA; and extend the Brunswick Line to better serve Western Maryland.

The MTA would be required to conduct a study this year to assess the total expected cost to fully implement the MARC Cornerstone Plan in addition to the investment programs needed to fund improvements mentioned above. The bill also specifies a number of steps that would need to be taken beginning in fiscal year 2023 to advance the many improvements sought in MARC operations and service.

The proposed MARC investment programs to advance the MARC Cornerstone Plan and other specified improvements in MARC service are necessary first steps to help the state compete for \$66 billion in federal funds for rail made available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Transportation is the largest contributor to climate-disrupting greenhouse gases in Maryland and our nation today, and is a major source of toxic emissions that are hazardous to human health and linked to cancers, heart disease, asthma, emphysema, and other respiratory diseases. Most of that pollution comes from the tailpipes of gas and diesel-fueled cars and trucks on the road today. The more that those vehicles can be replaced by greater use of MARC and other mass transit, as well as biking and walking, the better it would be for our environment, health, and our economy.

Improving and expanding MARC would enable the creation of a truly regional rail system that better connects more Maryland communities to each other and to Virginia and Delaware. Reliable rail service is a far more cost-effective and environmentally-friendly way for people to travel from one location to another compared to driving on highways that get clogged with traffic and generate considerable pollution. Expanding MARC would also increase access to jobs and housing, and lead to more prosperous and sustainable growth in our region.

In summary, improving MARC would bring about positive change for our state that ideally would be funded, at least in part, by federal funds for rail. We urge a favorable report on this bill.

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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.