



Maryland Chapter

7338 Baltimore Avenue, Suite 102
College Park, MD 20740-3211

Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB 771 “Transportation – Regional Transportation Authority Study”
Position: Support
Hearing Date: February 28, 2019

The Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB 771, which would authorize the General Assembly to contract with a qualified transportation entity to conduct a study of regional transportation authorities (RTAs), and develop recommendations on the feasibility of creating, financing, and operating an RTA in our state.

The study would determine the geographical boundaries of a potential RTA that would operate in Maryland, and explore the options an RTA might use to finance transportation systems within those boundaries, including obtaining funds from state and federal grants, taxes, bonds, fees, fares, and the sale or lease of real estate or other property. The study would examine RTAs throughout the U.S. to gain an understanding of how they operate, the range of powers granted to them, and the transit-oriented development strategies they have adopted.

Maryland is facing significant challenges in its transportation system. The Department of Transportation plans to cut the Maryland Transit Administration’s capital budget by 58% over the next six years, which means funds needed to make major improvements in transit will be in short supply. In addition, the state’s Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) is becoming depleted for a number of reasons, including a reduction in revenue from the gas tax because of improving vehicle gas mileage and low gas prices, and the requirement approved last year for the TTF to provide an additional \$167 million per year in dedicated funding for WMATA-Metro.

Another major challenge that needs to be addressed is that transportation is now the largest contributor of climate-damaging greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in our state (and the country), with most of that CO₂ coming from the tailpipes of gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles. The more highways are expanded, the more people are encouraged to drive, which leads to more congestion, more GHG emissions, and more health-damaging air pollution.

What is needed instead is to have our transportation dollars devoted to an equitable, multi-modal, reliable and cleaner transportation system that emphasizes more public transit (especially buses and trains), more electric vehicles, and more walkable, bikeable communities, especially in under-served, over-burdened areas like Baltimore.

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 approximately 800,000 members.

In light of the limited funds now available to create the transportation system we need, it makes sense for the state to consider a different approach. We support authorizing the General Assembly to conduct a study of whether an RTA might be the best way to raise the necessary funds to create and operate the clean, regional transportation system that we want and need in Maryland.

We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on this legislation.

Brian Ditzler
Chapter Chair & Transportation Chair
Brian.Ditzler@MDSierra.org

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org