



# SIERRA CLUB

## MARYLAND CHAPTER

Maryland Sierra Club  
7338 Baltimore Ave #102,  
College Park, MD 20740

**August 26, 2019**

Dear National Governors Association Executive Committee,

We are writing on behalf of the Maryland Sierra Club. The Maryland Sierra Club is a volunteer-led, community-based environmental organization with more than 72,000 members and supporters in the state. Governor Larry Hogan of Maryland, now Chair of the National Governors Association (NGA), has stated his focus will be on infrastructure. In its 2017 Infrastructure Report Card (issued every four years), the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave the United States a grade of D+. We must repair our existing infrastructure, plan for a growing population, and realize how we advance our infrastructure goals is critical.

Our default mode in the United States is to build mostly as we did in the 20th-century. But with climate change accelerating, we must look at new approaches. The [Washington Post says July 2019 was the hottest month in recorded history on earth](#). Given Governor Hogan's I-270 and I-495 Expansion Plan in Maryland, we fear that this huge emphasis on roads and highways will carry over to the infrastructure push at NGA.

Stalled traffic on highways is a big problem. Building more lanes provides immediate, but only temporary relief. Because of induced demand, the widened roads quickly become congested once again. By adding more lanes, we invite more cars, which means even more emissions. Our past carbon emissions have led us to the hottest years on record and to rising sea levels. Climate change also exacerbates extreme storms that degrade our infrastructure.

The scale of future climate warming and the consequent impacts depends on us taking bold steps. We have to provide transportation options that avoid and reduce congestion, while reducing emissions.

Some examples include:

- Add buses in HOV lanes and expand Bus Rapid Transit systems (one bus moves as many people as 60 cars).
- Upgrade and expand rail travel (rail travel is low-carbon).
- Promote carpooling.
- Promote more electric vehicles (bus fleets and passenger vehicles) and charging infrastructure.
- Provide safe and separated bike and pedestrian facilities as part of roadways.

We cannot look at transportation in isolation. Transportation and land-use are inextricably linked. We must plan land use with sufficient density and infill development so that people can live and work in activity centers where transit options, biking and walking infrastructure support commuting and access to everyday activities.

We should not circumvent National Environmental Policy Act review processes for any infrastructure projects as we responsibly invest in our nation's infrastructure.

NEPA requires federal agencies to engage in a review process to identify any significant environmental, economic, social, or health impacts a project may have before a decision is made and construction begins. It is a critical law that has made informed decision-making about public health and the environment a key component of every major federal action.

Unfortunately, over the past several years, Congress has passed numerous pieces of legislation that weakened, waived, or otherwise undermined NEPA based on the demonstrably false premise that NEPA and other regulations are a major cause of delay in infrastructure development. Many of these provisions limited the scope of environmental review specifically to ignore climate impacts, waived NEPA via legislative categorical exclusions, or limited public input in government decision-making, a hallmark of good government and the NEPA process.

We urge the NGA to advise all state governments to increase investment in green infrastructure, with a strategic plan for reducing emissions. At the same time, we urge that transportation investment is done with a full environmental review, including climate-change impact and follow regulatory review under NEPA with a focus on projects that expand and upgrade transit, pedestrian, and bicycling infrastructure.

Reinventing transportation for more equity, more efficiency, and cleaner air is possible, but it will require bold leadership from visionary governors who are willing to work together in the interest of our long-term future.

Sincerely,

Josh Tulkin

Director, Maryland Sierra Club

Brian Ditzler

Chapter Chair, Maryland Sierra Club