

STATEMENT OF

Herbert Harris, Jr.
Chairman / State Representative
District of Columbia - State Legislative
Board
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers &
Trainmen

to

House – Environment and
Transportation
Maryland General Assembly

on

HB- 1236: Transit – Maryland Area
Regional Commuter Train (MARC) –
Expansion of Service

Thursday, March 4, 2020

Good Afternoon, Chairman Barve and Members of the House – Environment and Transportation Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 1236: Transit – Maryland Area Regional Commuter Train – Expansion of Service”

My name is Herbert Harris, Jr., Chairman, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen / District of Columbia – State Legislative Board.

I am the legislative representative and safety officer for the passenger locomotive engineers that operate Amtrak; Acela, Regional, and Inter-City Service, and MARC – Penn Line Commuter Service. I have 25 years of railroad experience as a locomotive engineer.

LEGISLATION

Today, I encourage this committee support and favorably approve of HB-1236. This legislation represents an important first step towards improving the future viability MARC commuter rail service.

The potential to offer Marylanders a one-seat ride to the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia will significantly expand job and educational opportunities.

It will attract ridership growth on the three MARC commuter lines by offering an alternative to single occupant car commutes.

Most importantly, Maryland needs to authorize this expansion to prevent becoming less competitive and further behind rail investments in Virginia.

COMMUTER RAIL CORRIDORS

Over the past twenty years, I witnessed first-hand the growth and expansion of commuter rail services in this region. Unfortunately, Maryland has not made comparable investments in commuter rail service to Virginia.

Virginia is a national leader because of its long-term and sustained investment in passenger and commuter rail service. For the past twenty-five years it has made smart and sustained investments to expand its passenger and commuter rail network. Today, Virginia Rail Express and Amtrak – Virginia its regional state supported passenger service reach 70% of the state population and 80% of state economy.

In January, VA Governor Ralph Northam announced a pledge to invest \$3.7 billion dollars over the next decade to improve passenger and commuter rail service in the Commonwealth. This investment will include acquiring 350 miles of right-of-way and 250 miles of track from CSX.

Additionally, Virginia will lead construction of a new rail bridge over the Potomac River from Northern Va. – District of Columbia eliminating a major bottleneck for expanding passenger rail service.

Commuter and passenger rail have also become major branding and marketing tools enabling Virginia to attract record colleges admissions, new investment, and major corporations – Amazon.

Unfortunately, we have not seen the same Executive Leadership or commitment in Maryland. Maryland has the ridership potential and railroad infrastructure, but has lacked the courage, vision and financial commitment to grow its commuter rail service.

Maryland has 770 miles of railroad owned by the Class I railroads, Norfolk Southern, CSX, and Amtrak. An overlay of the state rail network will show the most populated and traveled commuter rail corridors are also the primary (North – South) and (East – West) freight rail corridors. Freight rail traffic and delays are also major obstacle to expanding and improving commuter rail service.

Today, approximately 35K commuters daily utilize MARC Service on the Penn Line, Camden Line, and Brunswick Line. Over 22K, commuters daily ride the MARC Penn Line between Perryville, Md. – Washington, D.C.

The stations: Aberdeen, Baltimore, Rockville, New Carrollton, and BWI Marshall Airport are the most utilized in the state with over 1.8 million annual passengers.

FUTURE MOBILITY

The U.S. Census Bureau projects the population of Maryland from 2007 – 2030 will grow by 25% to 7.0 million residents.

How will you meet the transportation needs of these new residents and connect them to career and business opportunities? The region has become a borderless Mega-Region from Richmond – Baltimore. Residents are making important professional and family decisions based on a criteria that includes Transportation Mobility.

The importance of transportation mobility on the lives of Marylanders warrants your favorable approval of this legislation. Expansion of commuter rail service to meet the future needs of Marylanders supports economic development, an improved environment, and better overall quality of life.

CONCLUSION

We look forward to participating in future discussions on the expansion of MARC service. We additionally feel this legislation compliments on-going discussions regarding expansion of commuter rail service to Western and Southern Maryland.

Thank you for the opportunity to present these comments. We strongly encourage your approval and favorable report of HB-1236. I would welcome any questions you may have at this time.