



7338 Baltimore Ave
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Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB1236 - “Transit – Maryland Area Regional Commuter Train – Expansion of Service”

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: March 5, 2020

The Maryland Sierra Club strongly supports HB1236. The bill would require the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) to negotiate with the District of Columbia (DC), Virginia and the appropriate railroad companies to reach agreement on a pilot program to establish Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) rail service between Union Station in DC and Alexandria Station in Virginia.

MTA would be required to submit a report to the General Assembly each year on the status of the negotiations, and potential solutions to any impediments to carrying out the program. The proposed pilot program would include two southbound trains in the morning from Union Station into Virginia, and two northbound trains from Virginia to Union Station, making use of existing and planned track infrastructure.

The clear intent of the program is to begin creation of cost-effective regional rail connectivity to enable Maryland residents to ride MARC to existing and growing job centers in Northern Virginia, and for Northern Virginia commuters to be able to ride MARC to jobs and shopping in Maryland.

There are many additional reasons why expanding MARC service to Northern Virginia should be pursued. Our state needs more rapid and reliable regional mass transit to improve mobility choices for commuters and regional travelers. Commuter rail is efficient, reduces traffic on existing roads and, in this case, would ease the pressure on the WMATA Metrorail system which now is the only way to travel from Union Station to stops in Northern Virginia using rail transit. Enabling MARC users to have a “one seat” ride from their starting point in Maryland to their final destination in Northern Virginia would definitely attract ridership.

Another major benefit of extending MARC rail service into Northern Virginia is that it would allow more people to leave their cars at home, which would reduce the amount of air pollution emitted from car and truck tailpipes. The transportation sector is Maryland’s number one generator of greenhouse gases as well as other health-damaging toxic emissions, so the more that people use transit and not their cars, the better it is for the environment and our health.

In summary, expanding MARC service into Northern Virginia would bring many benefits to our residents, the region and to MTA. We urge the committee to issue 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 approximately 800,000 members.