

March 3, 2020

Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building, Room 251
Annapolis, MD 21401

HB 1249 – Maryland State Department of Transportation Promises Act of 2020 (Support)

Testimony for March 5, 2020

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Thank you Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Environment and Transportation Committee members. This testimony is on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization in the D.C. region advocating for walkable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities. I am also a member of the Maryland Advocates for Sustainable Transportation coalition, which includes over 20 organizations and continues to grow.

HB 1249, or the MDOT Promises Act, would hold state officials legally accountable to the promises they made to Maryland residents regarding the I-495/I-270 highway expansion proposal. It would require that at least 10% of the revenues from the toll lanes be distributed to a special fund and budgeted with input from the counties where the toll facilities are located. It would also require that public transit systems may use the toll lanes without charge, and the American Legion Bridge to have separate pedestrian and cyclist lanes. This bill would ensure that the local Maryland governments and residents are given the accountability they were denied when this project was initially approved.

The I-495/I-270 expansion project was rushed through the approval process by the Board of Public Works with nearly no input from local governments or residents. Unlike investments in improved public transit options, highway widening will provide only short-term relief, and in the case of HOT lanes, the general purpose lanes and all intersecting roads fill up in short order. Maryland residents deserve sustainable and equitable transportation solutions, not destructive 12-lane highways. The provisions in HB 1249 are not enough to offset the negative impacts on the environment, neighborhoods, and social equity that will result from this highway expansion, but MDOT has shown they will not support sustainable alternatives without external pressure.

The promises laid out HB 1249 are very limited concessions to an unpopular and unnecessary highway expansion, but it is nonetheless important to hold MDOT accountable for the promises made to Maryland residents. P3 projects have historically evaded the level of scrutiny and accountability that public projects are required to meet, and this has come at a great cost to taxpayers. For these reasons, I urge the committee to support HB 1249.

Thank you.