



## LABOR NETWORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY

A PROJECT OF VOICES FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE, INC.

January 20, 2021

### **Testimony on SB 199 – Maryland Transit Safety & Investment Act Budget & Taxation**

#### **Position: Favorable**

The Labor Network for Sustainability supports SB 199, the Transit Safety & Investment Act.

In July 2019, the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) released its first ever Capital Needs Inventory (CNI) to assess its ongoing, unconstrained capital needs. The CNI identified \$5.7 billion of capital needs over the next ten years, \$1.5 billion of which is an accumulated backlog of deferred maintenance. Unfortunately, MDOT's FY 2021–2026 Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) does not provide the MTA sufficient funding to address the annual maintenance and repairs identified in the CNI. At current funding levels, the maintenance backlog will grow. The result of the neglected maintenance is buses, light rail vehicles, subway trains and commuter trains that break down more often than the MTA's peer agencies, and in some cases, more often than any transit agency in the nation. In fact, MTA buses break down twice as often as buses in other major Northeast cities despite the fact that Baltimore has one of the most transit-reliant populations in the country.

The General Assembly must seize the opportunity to ensure that the administration fulfills its responsibility to the people of Maryland. As labor advocates, we especially emphasize the interconnected relationship between essential workers and the transit system. TransitCenter found that 40% of transit commuters in Baltimore City work in essential job sectors, with hospital and health care being the largest share of riders. However, despite the incalculable contribution frontline workers have made to the public's health and well-being in these trying times, Maryland has thanked them with delayed service, broken-down buses, and cancelled improvements. The road to recovery is long but it must start with a safe transit system for our essential workers. Additionally, if the road to recovery is to lead to a prosperous destination, investment in transit is critical to ensuring economic dividends. Transit spending creates good local jobs with family-sustaining wages and benefits, which will have a multiplier effect in the broader economy.

The Transit Safety & Investment Act will mandate that MTA's capital budget be at a level that allows it to address all of the needs identified and get the system back into a state of good repair so that it can operate safely and reliably. This bill is not a radical reorganization of the MTA; it is simply the opportunity to ensure that the MTA has the funding, capacity, and resources to grow into the functional transit system it's meant to be.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this important legislation.