



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 199
Maryland Transit Administration - Funding
(Transit Safety and Investment Act)
(Senators McCray & Zucker)

January 27, 2021

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Budget & Taxation Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in strong support of Senate Bill 199. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders. We ask you to support this legislation as a matter of transit equity, economic urgency, and environmental justice.

This bill requires increased operating and capital spending for the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA). State spending on transportation in Maryland has favored roads over transit, and the Washington, D.C., area over the Baltimore region. Meanwhile, MTA's subway, light rail, bus and commuter rail vehicles each have one of the worst breakdown rates in the country. According to Sierra Club - Maryland Chapters, MTA buses break down twice as much as buses in other major Northeast cities, and the Metro subway and Central Light Rail recently have undergone emergency shutdowns lasting weeks. According to the Pew Research Center, communities of color, persons with disabilities, immigrants, those over the age of 50, and low-income communities are more likely to use public transit. These communities are disproportionately harmed when their public transit options are diminished, unreliable, and underinvested.

We recently read a quote that stuck with us. Said Tamika L. Butler, a transit equity expert and Executive Director of the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition (LACBC), "If you don't have access to quality transportation, then you can't have access to quality jobs. You can't have access to quality health care. You can't have access to quality education."

Transit-advocacy nonprofits TransitCenter and the Center for Neighborhood Technology modeled the effect of a 50% service cut to peak service and a 30% cut to off-peak service in 10 regions of the U.S. and found that these cuts would eliminate access to frequent transit for over 3 million people and 1.4 million jobs. The hardest hit would be Black and Hispanic riders, but the cuts would have a big impact on second- and third-shift workers and households without vehicles as well.

To quote the eloquent Tamika L. Baker once again: “If you examine the intersection of race, equity and public transit, and look at the demographics of the transit world’s decision-makers, it is clear who currently has that power. The transit world should want to change what groups of people feel safe on transit. The transit world should want to change who has longer wait times on transit. The transit world should want to change who has access to transit. The transit world should want to change who gets a place to sit and seek shade while waiting for transit. The transit world should want to change public investment in transit.”

In addition to issues of transit equity, the General Assembly must consider environmental justice in its decisions about transportation investments. Transportation is the #1 contributor to climate pollution in Maryland and the United States. Robust public transit systems reduce traffic congestion by reducing vehicle trips in cars, which causes far greater climate pollution. This cuts greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution that exacerbates respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

Just last week, an international group of scientists released a paper stating the planet is facing a “ghastly future of mass extinction, declining health and climate-disruption upheavals” that threaten human survival because of ignorance and inaction. The 17 experts say the planet is in a much worse state than most people – even scientists – understood.

“The scale of the threats to the biosphere and all its lifeforms – including humanity – is in fact so great that it is difficult to grasp for even well-informed experts,” they write in a report in *Frontiers in Conservation Science* which references more than 150 studies detailing the world’s major environmental challenges.

Maryland must do more for climate action — in the name of environmental justice, for the health of our communities, and for the future of our families. This committee can make a commitment to that work by ensuring the transportation decisions made by our state government are equitable, environmentally-conscious, and forward-thinking.

For all of these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 199.

John B. King Jr.

Founder and Board Chair

Alice Wilkerson

Executive Director