



January 18, 2021

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

Position: FAVORABLE

Sunrise Movement Baltimore supports SB 199, the Transit Safety & Investment Act.

MD transportation is failing, and we cannot afford to let it fail any longer. [For the third year in row](#), the Central Maryland Transportation Alliance's 2020 report card gave. The current state of transportation is unacceptable, and it impacts all sectors of Maryland life. Transportation has asserted itself as the nexus of economic opportunity and racial justice across the country, and by neglecting it, we fail communities of minorities, hiring firms, and, ultimately, ourselves. By funding the basics of transportation, the system will become more efficacious to its users and the greater economy.

Amidst this growing disparity between income groups, the number of low income individuals that grow up in poor neighborhoods, isolated from job opportunities, has been rising. The inadequacy of Maryland's transportation infrastructure has allowed it to persist. Based on a rigorous study analyzed in the book *Poverty and Place* by Paul A. Jargowsky, job opportunities are found increasingly in outlying suburban areas that many minorities do not have access to, partly because of a lack of transportation accessibility and reliability. As it exists, public transportation does not provide adequate services to meet the existing demand for job seekers and employers.

Why is this impacting Black individuals, specifically, disproportionately? Minorities are more likely to live in areas composed of other members of their minority group. This phenomenon is known as residential segregation and may partly reflect living preferences of the group; however, racial segregation of residences reflects lower wealth levels, barriers to housing market integration, and discrimination by landlords and financial institutions due to the tendency of whites to exit changing neighborhoods.

According to [Dr. Rodgers in an article evaluating race in the labor market](#), low-income urban residents, especially minorities, have difficulties accessing job opportunities in suburban areas, where job growth is occurring. This spatial mismatch between jobs and job seekers limits employment opportunities for inner-city minorities. Applying Jargowsky's analysis, transportation barriers prevent minorities from accessing employment options in other neighborhoods. This is a reality for the Baltimore region wherein only 9% of jobs were reachable within an hour using public transportation in 2018 as cited by the prescribed report card, citing data from the Accessibility OBservatory at the University of Minnesota.

Legislators in the 2021 Maryland Legislative Session have an opportunity to remedy neglected transit systems and improve economic opportunity. [The Transit Safety and Investment Act](#) requires the State invest in transportation by compounding on the previous years' budget allocation from the Transportation Trust Fund. Funds generated over a 10-year period, starting in 2021, will go towards the operation of the Maryland Transit Administration for basic safety and accessibility upgrades for public transportation. This bill will enhance the reliability of transit services through maintenance and safety assessments, prioritization issues that arise, and accurate analysis will be uninhibited by funding constraints.



The transit recovery initiative reduces the spatial mismatch of job seekers to job opportunities. Beyond direct employment access, transportation to these neighborhoods will improve minority access to information and contacts. A large percentage of workers generate their jobs through friend and family contacts. Jargowsky found that by increasing transportation options, minorities will have the opportunity to partake in more activities near job opportunities, thus improving their access to employment information and contacts.

Beyond growing networks and connections, reliable transportation will strengthen job retention. [Currently, MTA buses have an on-time rate of only 70%](#), not including the buses that do not show up at all. With better transportation, employees can reduce the unnecessary stress of bated breath and wasted time, wondering and waiting for transportation to child care or employment, improving their well-being and efficacy.

Transportation investment is further incentivized by the benefit to employers. This initiative improves the labor supply for suburban institutions seeking employees as well by expanding the pool of potential hires by inviting everyone who is qualified, not just those who have the highest level of access given their living proximity and transportation provisions. Job candidates will be composed of everyone who can perform well at the job. These potential hires can be discovered within networks composed of individuals connected to firms and in the job places themselves. As reliable transportation enables workers to come to work consistently and on time and, with minds no longer pre-occupied by transportation issues, they can be more efficacious in their work in addition to improving their quality of life.

By improving the equity of transportation, Black individuals will be institutionally repositioned to reclaim income and wealth opportunities withheld from them as a result of being redlined into neighborhoods with fewer employment opportunities. More reliable transportation will improve transit user well-being, productivity, and labor supply at hiring institutions. In addition, an improvement in transportation will benefit us all, even those of us who are not daily public transportation users. As a young person living in the agricultural reserve, this public transit improvement will not affect me directly, but I believe the social and economic benefits of improved transportation are more than enough of a reason for me to take action.

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.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this important legislation.