



January 20, 2021

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

Position: Favorable

Indivisible Howard County SB 199- an organization with over 700 members- supports SB199. The Transit Safety and Investment Act. Sixty percent of Howard County residents (pre-Covid) commute to work. A vital regional public transportation system is a key component for the ongoing economic and environmental health of the region of which Howard County is a part.

In 2004, Richard White, the then Chief Executive Officer of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA/Metro) stood before his Board of Directors and warned that the regional system was facing a death spiral due to deferred maintenance if the WMATA contributing jurisdictions did not increase capital funding so that the enormous Metro infrastructure could achieve a state of good repair. This followed a capital needs inventory that showed alarming deficiencies. That threat has remained an ever present possibility in the intervening years and Maryland has joined with the other WMATA jurisdictions to ensure adequate, stable and reliable capital funding for a profoundly valuable regional asset. *The rest of Maryland's transit systems' infrastructure deserve the same consideration and support because the same threat exists for those systems if they are not provided the funds identified as necessary to achieve and maintain a good state of repair.*

In July, 2019, the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) released its own first ever Capital Needs Inventory (CNI) to assess MTA's 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. The Maryland Department of Transportation's FY2020-2025 Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) does not provide the MTA enough over the next six years to address the annual maintenance and repairs in the CNI. In fact, the backlog will increase.

Sadly, the result of the years of underfunding is reflected in the performance metrics for the modal components of the MTA system which are the worst in the nation. Incredibly, given those, metrics, MTA Bus ridership has fallen much less (60%) than the national average (up to 90% in some areas) during the Covid-19 pandemic. These statistics highlight the significant reliance that is placed on public transportation in the Baltimore area and cast into sharp relief the social equity considerations that should inform the Committee's work and the General Assembly's ultimate action.

Public transportation must be reliable, safe and affordable in order to keep its current riders and attract new riders. The result of the neglected maintenance will be buses, light vehicle, subway trains and commuter trains that break down far more frequently than is the case with MTA's peer agencies. This leads to poor service which, in turn, leads to a drop in ridership and a negative spiral, trends that are very difficult to reverse. Again, the fact that MTA Bus Ridership has not fallen as much as it has for other transit agencies speaks to the crucial role that public transit plays for the region. 29.5 % of Baltimore residents do not have access to vehicles. The people riding those buses are essential for keeping the area's businesses running and health care centers fully staffed. Equity demands that they be provided with safe and reliable public transportation.

Indivisible Howard County believes that robust transit systems are vital to the economic and environmental health of Maryland and of Howard County. This view is supported by a research paper published by the American Public Transportation Association titled: "2020 Update on the Economic Impact of Public Transportation Investment." There are a wide range of benefits discussed in the paper, but to name just two: 1) for every billion dollars of capital spending on

public transportation, 12,600 jobs are created and 2) \$1.80 of GDP value is added for every dollar of capital investment, both of which increase tax revenues for the funding entity.

Finally, climate change is the existential threat we now face and transportation is the #1 contributor to climate pollution in Maryland. It is essential to first adequately maintain and then expand Maryland's public transit systems to reduce congestion and cut the emissions that cause climate change. It is hoped that Maryland will, ultimately, be a signatory to the Memorandum of Understanding that will underpin the Transportation and Climate Initiative which recognizes that a cleaner more efficient transportation and transit sector will "improve public health, create new economic opportunities and provide enhanced mobility for all communities." The Transit Safety & Investment Act will mandate that MTA's capital budget be funded at a level that allows it to address the critical needs identified in the 2019 CNI and return the system to a state of good repair so that it can operate safely and reliably and be a driver of equity and the economic health of the region.

We encourage a favorable report.

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