



Transportation Association of Maryland

March 25, 2021

OPPOSE

HB 656

Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Bus Stops

The Transportation Association of Maryland is a 501(c)(3) organization representing 104 member organizations and 20,000+ individual members. TAM is the legislative voice and vigilant eyes and ears of the transportation industry in Maryland. TAM's mission is to strengthen community transportation in Maryland through advocacy and professional development.

TAM members provide Locally Operated Transit Services (LOTS) that are funded by federal state and local grants and charged with the responsibility of providing an array of public transportation services that include fixed route bus and paratransit services, which expand as new needs arise and the population increases, ages, and expands.

What has not increased over the last 20 years has been the state and federal funding needed to provide the additional and expanding needs of the population in the areas where the LOTS provide transportation services. The requirement in HB 656 to alter fixed routes and add additional, special stops for early voting locations during elections is a perfect example of why the demands on LOTS continually exceeds available resources.

While the position of my client is in opposition to HB 656, the LOTS sincerely believe their purpose is to serve the transportation needs of the people in the community and appreciate the importance of ensuring that every voter is allowed the opportunity to vote.

LOTS have been doing and will continue to do whatever is reasonable and practical to assist voters with transportation needed to reach the polls, including paratransit services for Americans with Disabilities Act eligible voters to and from the polls on election days.

Notwithstanding the Fiscal Note, details about how HB 656 would be implemented are hard to envision. The number and location of many early voter locations are yet to be determined and may not be precisely known until close to the election. That information must be provided to the LOTS in sufficient time to allow them to plan how the buses can deviate from the fixed routes to reach the early voting centers, safely discharge, and board passengers without disrupting traffic or creating a traffic hazard.



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This will not just be a matter of coordinating efforts between the LOTS and Public Works or State Highway Administration, although those departments will likely be involved. It will primarily be a coordinated effort between LOTS and the local board of elections in each of 24 jurisdictions.

As indicated in the letter from Mr. Duklewski, the Executive Director of TAM, there are unintended consequences that might result from even one deviation from any fixed route bus on any given day to an early voting center. Many people who ride on fixed route buses need to get from “Point A” to “Point B” at a predictable time. A 20 - 30-minute delay in a bus schedule to visit several early voting centers can seriously disrupt the life of someone who needs to arrive at work on time, or keep a doctor’s appointment, or pick up their child at day care, or a make a scheduled train connection, etc.

To provide special buses for this purpose would be prohibitively expensive for LOTS and a waste of taxpayer dollars.

As indicated above, LOTS lack sufficient drivers and vehicles required to provide all the services that are demanded in the areas they currently serve. We need to consider that it is highly unlikely that there would be enough registered voters interested in such a service that would ever justify such an expense.

The best solution for all concerned, and likely the least expensive, would be for the local board of elections to provide a taxi service, or ridesharing service trips (such as UBER or LYFT) between the early voting centers and fixed route bus stops. This would only be available to individuals who cannot access a fixed route that stops within 500 feet of an early voting center.

This solution would serve those individuals who need transportation to and from early voting centers that are determined to be too far from a fixed route bus, without creating an expensive logistical problem for LOTS or possibly disrupt the lives of everyone else who rides the bus.

My client sincerely hopes that Committee will review this information and consider their concerns. If you vote to pass HB 656, the LOTS will make every reasonable and practical effort to provide the transportation that the legislation requires; however, they do ask that the committee monitor this issue and allow for it be revisited at a future date should unreasonable financial and/or logistical complications arise.

Sincerely,
Christopher B. Costello
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