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Committee: Finance

Testimony on: SB359 - “Department of Transportation and Department of the Environment - Purple Line Tree Replacement Plan”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 3, 2021

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports SB359, which would require the Department of Transportation (MDOT), in collaboration with the Department of the Environment (MDE), to devise a plan to replace tall, mature trees that were removed for construction of the Purple Line in Prince George’s and Montgomery Counties.

A forest conservation plan for the Purple Line project documents the removal of approximately 200 large trees, including towering oaks, tulip poplars, and pines.¹ To comply with the Maryland Forest Conservation Act, forest bank credits were purchased to mitigate the tree loss, but unfortunately the new trees will be planted at a location some distance from where the trees were removed.

HB80 directs MDOT and MDE to consult with a range of stakeholders from communities where the trees were removed when developing the plan to replace trees in each community where trees were cut down. The bill specifies that initial replacement of trees would occur in communities that are affected by environmental justice issues or the “heat island effect” when buildings, roads and other infrastructure absorb and re-emit heat from the sun causing higher temperatures than in surrounding areas. The bill says that trees may be replaced on state, county, municipal or private property.

The benefits of trees to the health of people and the environment are well documented. A single mature tree can absorb climate-damaging carbon dioxide at a rate of 21.6 KG/year and release enough oxygen into the atmosphere to support two humans. Ozone, a powerful respiratory hazard, is reduced by 3 to 7% for every 10 % increase in the urban tree canopy. Trees also capture nitrogen, provide shade and lower ambient air temperature, and provide vital habitat for animals in the water and on land. They slow and filter storm water runoff, stabilize streambanks and reduce erosion. Trees have aesthetic value, too. In summary, trees help create clean air, clean water, and habitat for life, and play a vital role in our lives.

It is unfortunate that so many mature trees needed to be removed for the construction of the Purple Line. HB80 would help address that problem by directing the replacement of trees in each community where trees were removed. Trees provide a bonanza of benefits for our health, communities and the environment, so we urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on this legislation

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¹ <https://www.purplelinemd.com/about-the-project/studies>

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

