



Testimony in Support of House Bill 632
Baltimore East–West Corridor – Transit Study – Requirements
Delegate Samuel Rosenberg
Favorable

February 22, 2022

Dear Chairman McIntosh and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in strong support of House Bill 632. 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 long-awaited matter of equity and accessibility for the people of Baltimore City.

Governor Hogan’s infamous strike of the Red Line light rail remains a massive barrier to connecting Baltimore residents to job opportunities, grocery stores, commercial hubs, and healthcare services. The proposed Red Line, initially introduced well over a decade ago, stretched 14.1 miles to connect Baltimore County to the City from east-to-west. The project was projected to total \$2.9 billion, partially paid for by Governor O’Malley’s gas tax increase, which has remained intact despite the project’s cancellation and widespread pushback from transit advocates and constituents.

Transit activists from Baltimore City have cited numerous economic, health, and environmental benefits of the line’s completion. The project was estimated to create 13,000 jobs, largely in construction, and generate \$6.5 billion in development along the route along majority Black communities, with the potential to dramatically reduce unemployment levels. This opportunity for job creation is especially important as we rebuild from the pandemic. In addition, the Red Line would ideally take thousands of cars off the road, reducing air pollution -- this is critical in Baltimore City where 20% of children, mostly centered in low-income communities and communities of color, suffer from asthma.

In 2015, as Baltimore endured a reckoning with police brutality, a rising crime wave, and insufficient support from Annapolis, Governor Hogan justified the project’s end saying, “We just spent \$14 million extra money on the riots in Baltimore City a few weeks ago.” He then returned \$900 million in federal funding and redeployed \$736 million in state funding towards roads in Baltimore’s surrounding, predominantly white and wealthy counties. Then, in 2017, Hogan devoted \$135 million to launching BaltimoreLink in order to construct bus-only lanes downtown and shortening routes by adding more transfers -- this is widely disliked and wait times are

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astronomically higher than they were before BaltimoreLink. According to the Accessibility Observatory at the University of Minnesota, “A Baltimore transit passenger could get to only 11% of the region’s jobs within an hour in 2014. By 2018, after BaltimoreLink, they could reach only 9% within an hour.”

The General Assembly is implored to take actionable steps to complete the planning, preliminary engineering, and budgeting to ensure the Red Line finally comes to fruition. It is owed to the people of Baltimore and a critical step in instilling faith in our state government.

For all of these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 632.