

**Friday, March 1, 2024**

**TO:** Marc Korman, Chair of the House Environment and Transportation Committee; Ben Barnes, Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, and Committee Members

**FROM:** Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager; Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations

**POSITION:** Support HB 924 Transportation – Regional Transportation Authorities

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 924 offered by Delegate Spiegel. HB 924 will establish regional transportation authorities in the Baltimore, Capital, and Southern Maryland regions. Establishing regional transportation authorities allows transportation decisions to be influenced by the people who live in these geographic areas and use these transportation services most frequently. Regional governance over transportation systems will also allow for more flexibility in applying for federal grant funding, as well as in choosing transportation projects that support and address the communities' needs. This will improve safety, reliability, and accessibility when traveling, and reduce dependence on personal vehicles.

The transportation sector one of the largest sources of air pollutant emissions. Air pollution caused by increased congestion harms respiratory health in heavily trafficked areas. These respiratory health problems, including asthma and impaired lung function, disproportionately impact Black and brown communities and low-income neighborhoods. Safe, reliable, accessible, and well-connected transportation systems are crucial to promoting public health, equity, and jobs.

When compared to its peer agencies in other states across the nation, the MTA transit system, including subway, light rail, buses, and MARC commuter trains, each rank among the worst for breakdown rates. In addition to posing a safety risk to transit workers and riders, maintenance and repair issues cause low reliability and restrict access for those riders. More than a third of transit riders in Maryland are essential workers; lack of reliable transportation can put their economic wellbeing at risk.

The Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022 set state goals to reduce emissions by 60% by 2031 and reach net-zero by 2045. In order to meet these ambitious goals, Maryland needs to take immediate action to mitigate emissions economy-wide. By establishing these regional transportation authorities, Maryland would take a step toward improving transportation within and between these regions, which will reduce reliance on personal vehicles and expand access to mass transit options. Decreasing the number of vehicle miles traveled in our state reduces greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollutant emissions.

TNC commends Delegate Spiegel for introducing HB 924, which seeks to improve transportation options and availability, and ultimately lead to increased transit accessibility and reduced emissions from vehicles in Maryland.

**Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 924.**