



Transportation Alliance

March 1, 2024

Testimony on HB 924 – *Transportation – Regional Transportation Authorities –* Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: Favorable With Amendments

Leaders in the Greater Baltimore region have been seeking to reform the way its local public transportation is governed and financed. Structural challenges in the current centralized governance structure of the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) make maintaining and improving transit performance difficult. The result is an unreliable public transportation system that further disadvantages many users already negatively impacted by poverty and structural racism, discourages ridership growth, and puts the region at a competitive disadvantage compared to other metropolitan areas with robust, reliable public transit.

Moreover, the lack of local participation in planning and funding decisions has been a contributing factor to ongoing maintenance problems and lack of significant expansion or improvement. Of the 50 largest transit agencies in the country, the MTA is the only one that is part of a state department of transportation without a board of directors and where decision-making lies solely with a governor. The General Assembly has taken a step toward reform through legislation that recently established a Baltimore Regional Transit Commission (BRTC).

However, the BRTC is largely an advisory body that lacks the full power of a regional transportation authority. That's why we are encouraged that the General Assembly is considering bills such as HB 924 that seek to go beyond advisory commissions by establishing Baltimore Region, Capital Region, and Southern Maryland Region transportation authorities.

While we support the general intent of HB 924, we urge the committee to consider key amendments, such as:

- Replacing the focus on congestion relief with a charge to implement the MTA's Central Maryland Regional Transit Plan, the Baltimore Regional Transportation Board's Long-Range Plan, and the Baltimore-area elements of the Maryland Transportation Plan. Creating a body whose primary goal is the ever elusive "congestion relief" will likely lead to plans for wider highways and more traffic lanes. Evidence has proven that this is a failed strategy. Instead, the regional authorities should focus on goals that are developed publicly and responsive to the needs of each region.
- Including transit operations support as an eligible expenditure of the Fund, in addition to financing facilities.

We encourage a FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS report for House Bill 924.