



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Hon. Maggie McIntosh, Chair
Hon. Mike Jackson, Vice-Chair
Appropriations Committee

Hon. Kumar Barve, Chair
Hon. Dana Stein, Vice-Chair
Environment and Transportation Committee

Room 121, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

January 28, 2020

Testimony in Support of House Bill 205 – Southern Maryland Rapid Transit Project - Requirements and Funding

Dear Chair King and Committee Members:

As a current member of the House of Delegates representing Charles County and a former Charles County Commissioner, I fully support this bill which would require the state to undertake the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to move the Southern MD Rapid Transit (SMRT) project forward, with light rail as the preferred option.

As recent U.S. Census and MD Dept. of Transportation data attests, Charles County residents face the worst commutes in the entire nation, spending an average of 388 hours annually commuting. Based on Bloomberg News' recent analysis, more than a quarter of our residents have to leave home prior to 6am to reach their place of employment.¹ These long commutes degrade our quality of life, reducing the ability of parents to be fully engaged in their children's education. Extreme traffic congestion also limits seniors' access to medical care and other social services, as well as young people's access to internships and entry-level jobs. High rates of traffic accidents and fatalities on both the US Rt. 301 and Rt. 210 corridors only compound the problem.² Our region faces the fastest growing population in the entire state, thus traffic and related accidents will only worsen if we do not act today.

Traffic congestion is nothing new to Southern Maryland. MD state planning agencies have **already conducted five studies in the past twenty five years, all strongly confirming the need for improved public transit in our region.** One possible solution is a proposed light rail line route along US Rt. 301 which would connect the Branch Avenue WMATA station in Prince George's County with White Plains in Charles County. In addition to alleviating long commutes, this light rail line would open up serious economic opportunity, offering residents of the tri-county region improved access to better and more jobs, as well as fostering business investment and local economic growth. The ripple effects of light rail are

¹ Hagan, Shelly and Wei Lu. "The Most Expensive Commutes in America Aren't in NYC or San Francisco." Bloomberg. 28 Feb. 2019. MD Dept. of Transportation. "2040 Maryland Transportation Plan." January 2019. p10.

² Basch, Michelle. "This is a death trap': more enforcement promised on Indian Head Highway." WTOP. 4 Jan. 2019.

enormous and would give thousands of people access to opportunities for high-quality employment –as well as businesses a new corridor in which to grow and thrive.

In order to efficiently move forward with the proposed SMRT project and take advantage of federal matching dollars, we must commit funding now to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. This legislation will allow us to qualify for federal capital funding, as the NEPA decision is a precursor to securing federal appropriations support. County governments from across the Southern MD region have prioritized this project for years on end, as is evident in the attached testimony. It is time for the state to commit the resources to move this project forward.

For all these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 205.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Debra Davis", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Del. Debra M. Davis
District 28, Charles County