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Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: SB423 - "Maryland Transit Administration – Conversion to Electric Buses (Electric Bus Transition Act)"

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 19, 2020

The Maryland Sierra Club strongly urges a favorable report on SB 423. The bill would initiate a series of critically important steps to reduce the significant amount of climate pollution that currently is produced by our state's transportation sector.

Specifically, the bill would require a phase-in of electric buses for the Maryland Transit Administration's (MTA's) bus fleet by prohibiting MTA from purchasing any non-electric buses beginning in fiscal year 2022. The bill specifies several important measures to implement this change-over, including, notably, a requirement for development of a plan for transitioning any state workers adversely affected by the change-over to similar roles with commensurate seniority, pay, and benefits.

In addition, MTA would be required to annually report to the General Assembly an evaluation of the necessary charging infrastructure, an estimate of the reduction in CO2 emissions through the use of electric buses each year until the transit bus fleet is converted to all electric, and a financial analysis of the projected costs of the conversion to battery-powered electric buses.

The transportation sector is Maryland's number one generator of climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, over 80% of Marylanders live in counties that do not meet federal clean air standards for ozone, due in large part to tailpipe emissions. Each zero emission bus, over a 12-year period, can eliminate 1,690 tons of carbon dioxide, ten tons of nitrogen oxides, and 350 pounds of diesel particulate matter, compared to conventional diesel buses. Diesel buses, as well as compressed natural gas (CNG) and hybrid electric buses, are significant sources of pollutants. Diesel exhaust contains more than 40 toxic air contaminants that in some cases can cause and/or worsen diseases such as asthma and cancer. Communities of color and low-income neighborhoods face higher health risks due to poor air quality, specifically related to particulate matter emissions.

This year, Governor Hogan is proposing to extend the Clean Cars Act (as he has in recent years) to encourage purchases of electric passenger cars in Maryland. The state has a goal of having 300,000 electric cars (including plug-ins) on the road by 2025, and 600,000 EVs on the road by 2030. The environmental advantages of having more electric passenger cars on the road fully extends to electrifying MTA's fleet of approximately 700 buses. Consequently, when it comes time each year for MTA to replace a portion of its transit bus fleet, it makes eminent sense to require that all new buses to be battery-powered electric buses.

There are several electric bus manufacturing plants in the U.S., and studies have shown electric buses are more cost-efficient in the long term than diesel buses because of their lower operational costs. Electricity that must be generated to charge electric bus batteries increasingly is coming from renewable wind and solar power sources, and the percent of clean, renewable energy generated will continue to increase over time.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.

New York City and California, for example, have committed to fully electrifying their bus fleets by 2040. If this bill is approved and implemented as proposed, Maryland also would have an all-electric transit bus fleet by that date or close to it.

Lastly, there are two other important issues we want to highlight. First, protecting MTA's current workforce is an essential element of the change-over, as the bill recognizes. In developing the bill-mandated worker "transitioning" plan, MTA should, as needed, provide retraining to its workers. We believe that the term "transitioning" is broad enough to include retraining. However, if it would be helpful to spell this out, we would support an amendment to clarify this.

Second, in developing its bill-mandated "schedule for converting [MTA's] transit bus fleet to electric buses exclusively," MTA should not reduce its service levels based on the change-over. We think this is implicit in the bill, since it in no way authorizes MTA to reduce service levels specifically because of the change-over to electric buses. However, again, if it would be helpful to spell this out, we would support an amendment to clarify this.

In summary, this bill would take a critically important step forward for our state in combating the climate crisis, and we urge the Committee to issue a favorable report.

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