



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 292

Toll Roads, Highways, and Bridges – County Government Consent Requirement – Expansion

DATE: FEBRUARY 13, 2020

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation supports House Bill 292, which strengthens coordination between the State and local governments on major transportation projects and protects local efforts to improve water quality. This bill expands the requirement that a State agency receive the express consent of a majority of the affected Eastern Shore county governments before it constructs a toll road, toll highway, or toll bridge in those counties. Under the bill, this requirement is expanded to apply to all counties in the State (including Baltimore City) if they are affected by any such toll road, toll highway, or toll bridge.

Highway expansion projects such as those under consideration for I-495, I-270, MD-295 and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge could have profound impacts on the health of the Chesapeake Bay and affected communities. As the State considers using a public-private partnership (P3) approach to transportation projects, robust local participation into the decision-making process is even more critical.

The existing consent provision in § 4-407 of the Transportation Article provides Eastern Shore jurisdictions with critical input that helps balance state and local goals for transportation, growth management and environmental protection. In 2006, the Maryland Transportation Authority convened a task force of stakeholders to evaluate issues associated with a new Bay Bridge crossing and provide guidance for future decision-making. The Task Force concluded that since “new capacity would negatively affect communities and other resources” across the study area, “coordination between State and local governments is integral to balancing construction of new roads to support existing population and new growth...” This analysis exemplifies the impacts that may be expected from any major transportation project in Maryland.

HB 292 would extend the local consent in Maryland’s established decision-making process to every local jurisdiction. Throughout Maryland, communities are investing in practices to stop pollution, and undertaking land use planning efforts to minimize new pollution. Existing law rightly provides Eastern Shore local governments with the consent needed to protect their investments and commitments. The remainder of Maryland’s local jurisdictions should be afforded the same consideration in transportation decisions affecting their communities.

For these reasons, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation recommends a favorable report on HB 292 from the Environment and Transportation Committee. For questions or more information, please contact Erik Fisher at 443-482-2096 or efisher@cbf.org.

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403
Phone (410) 268-8816 • Fax (410) 280-3513

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 107,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.