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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB284

Vehicle Laws – Dedicated Bus Lanes – Enforcement

Dear Chair Barve and Members of the Environment & Transportation Committee:

HB 284 will make our buses run better. It is a city bill that lays the foundation for improved bus service quality throughout Maryland. This bill is the product of the 2019 Dedicated Bus Lane Workgroup - a year-long effort - and is supported by the Mayor of Baltimore and Baltimore City Department of Transportation, Baltimore Sustainability Commission, Central Maryland Transportation Alliance, Greater Baltimore Committee, Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus, nearly 80 transit-riding city residents from every district in Baltimore city, and even a Howard County Councilmember.

This bill was introduced in the 2020 legislative session as HB1492. The bill before you is, with minor revisions, in the same posture. This is a Baltimore City local bill. You have the Delegation letter of support as well as written support from the Office of Mayor Brandon Scott and other groups. This bill has no fiscal note and no opposition. There are three amendments offered by MDOT, and I consider these friendly and am happy to incorporate them.

Dedicated bus lanes (DBL) are specially marked to separate them from regular traffic. This separation improves the safety, reliability, speed and frequency of the entire network. Such lanes are used successfully in cities like San Francisco and New York. Combined with other improvements, such as signal prioritization, buses travelling on dedicated lanes offer higher quality service. Careful planning is needed to accommodate other activities, such as deliveries and drop offs. However, unless the lanes are enforced to prevent obstructions, they are nothing more than pretty paint on the pavement.

HB 284 will have immediate local impact in Baltimore City, because it is the only locality that has DBLs at this time. As part of the Baltimore Link system upgrade launched by the MTA in 2017 after the cancellation of the Baltimore Red Line light rail project, about five miles of dedicated lanes were installed. The majority of the dedicated lane system is currently located in my district, the 46th.

It is important to note that this bill will also make it easier for other jurisdictions, such as Howard county which already seems interested, to roll out their own Dedicated Bus Lane networks.

In 2019 I passed HB130 which required the MTA and Baltimore City Department of Transportation (BCDOT) to study methods for enforcing the city's dedicated bus lanes and report these findings to the General Assembly, which they did in December 2019.

The study report recommended the following:

- Enforcement: pilot test a well-coordinated DBL enforcement program, then expand to full implementation, with enforcement using stationary cameras.
- Education: launch a public education campaign and continue awareness-raising efforts.
- Engineering: Maintain red painted lanes in good repair and establish a curbside management working group.

HB284 enables implementation of the most urgent recommendation: enforcement of DBLs using existing stationary cameras to issue civil citations.

The quality of bus service is a matter of real consequence to thousands of essential and front-line workers, students and even tourists - over 20 million of whom visit Baltimore each year. Reliable, fast and frequent bus service is essential to equity, because quality transit is the bedrock for enabling access to opportunity and is a boon to our economy, environment and health. Lack of enforcement of the lanes is also dangerous for people riding bikes, who depend on them to move safely through the downtown area.

Baltimore's central business district is the region's largest employment center. Other areas, like Towson, Woodlawn, Linthicum and Sparrows Point are emerging job hubs as well. About 33% of Baltimore households do not own cars. For them, the most critical link to employment is the bus system. And when buses are slow, or infrequent, workers risk losing their jobs.

Thousands of middle school and high school students in Baltimore are dependent on Baltimore's bus system. Our city does not have a yellow school bus service; our kids ride MTA buses, which means that slow, unreliable service directly affects their education. As we are fighting hard to improve the quality of education for Maryland's children, we should also give as much attention to improving the transit system that helps them get to class every day. This bill will show how we can accomplish this important goal in a simple, cost effective way.

The MTA has offered amendments which I considered friendly and have submitted as a sponsor amendment.

I respectfully request a favorable report and thank you for your consideration.