



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Sponsor Testimony in Support of HB1204**

Equity in Transportation Sector – Guidelines and Analyses  
(Transportation Equity Analyses and Assurances Act of 2021)

Delegate Sheila Ruth

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Transportation is an essential quality of life issue. It can connect people and communities and improve access to jobs, food, healthcare, and social activities. Unfortunately, all too often, transportation policy has served to reinforce and magnify systemic discrimination.

Sadly, Maryland was an innovator in racial exclusion laws, racially-based zoning, redlining, and racial covenants, with consequences still visible on maps and in people's lives. This history has received some attention in recent years, with books and articles published about it and activism around policies to end housing discrimination and correct the longstanding consequences

What has received less attention, however, is the role that transportation plays in reinforcing that segregation and magnifying its impact. Simply put, if you live in a redlined, disinvested neighborhood, you have no way out.

If you have no jobs, healthy food, good schools, or doctors in your neighborhood and you can't get to good jobs, healthy food, good schools, or doctors, how will anything ever change? If you have to spend four hours a day or more on a bus just to get to a job, how will you protect your health, spend time with your children, learn a new skill, or start a business?

Highways built through redlined neighborhoods for the convenience of commuters from wealthier suburbs spew smog and noise without benefit or off-ramp for the communities they divide. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Black neighborhoods in West Baltimore were demolished to build a planned extension to I-70. The highway was cancelled in 1981, leaving a deep scar permanently dividing Black communities, sometimes called "The Highway to Nowhere."

In June 2015, Governor Hogan cancelled the Red Line, crushing the dream of bringing more jobs within reach and attracting transit-oriented development. In September, 2020, just last year, MDOT MTA proposed cuts that would have heavily impacted the majority Black core LocalLink bus service.

According to MDOT MTA, they were working on outreach to communities and equity analysis on the cuts when the cuts were cancelled, but that would have been much too late in the process. We were days away from public hearings when the cuts were cancelled, and that type of information should be available to the public prior to any hearings.

If equity was a central part of MDOT planning, those cuts would never have been proposed, at least not in the form they were announced. If equity was truly central, the Red Line would never have been cancelled.

Transportation is also key for many people with disabilities. Many people with disabilities don't have the option of driving a car and depend on transit for access to employment, education, health care services, and social activities. People with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty in part due to difficulty accessing jobs, education and medical care. Nationally about 560,000 people with disabilities never leave home because of transportation difficulties.

MTA's Mobility Link service for people with disabilities is limited to the service area for LocalLink, Light RailLink and Metro SubwayLink. People with disabilities who live or work outside of those areas are excluded from opportunities outside the service area. Even for those in the service area, MobilityLink has scheduling and reliability issues. Anecdotally, we hear many stories about bus wheelchair lifts not working, leaving disabled commuters waiting for the next bus, hoping it won't pass them by as well.

Equity should not be an afterthought or a box to check. We will never eliminate the disparities or break down systemic racism until equity is central and intentional in all planning and decisions

HB1204 makes equity a central goal in Maryland Transportation Planning across all transportation modes, and creates a Commission on Transportation Equity as an independent body to ensure that equity is considered in all things.

Current transit equity analyses study each mode of transit separately, which does not accurately capture the racial and economic impacts of department-wide policy. For example, the core bus ridership (local bus system) is majority Black while the commuter rail ridership is majority white. If more cuts are made to core bus service than to commuter rail routes, a disparity is created that will not show in separate analyses. In a state where all transportation is funded and managed through one agency, cross-modal analyses of all transportation is needed to better assess and address systemic equity issues.

We can't solve a problem without data to better understand it. HB1204 requires MDOT to collect and analyze data on racial disparities and impact on people with disabilities and report on them in the annual attainment report.

Finally, HB1204 sets standards, led by the Commission on Transportation Equity, to perform equity analysis, cost-benefit analysis, and outreach to affected communities to ensure that any changes do not cause a disparate impact. These analyses improve on what's currently being done under federal Title VI requirements by requiring them earlier in the process and with greater transparency.

In crafting this bill, I worked hard to build on MDOT processes already in place, to avoid placing undue burden on MDOT. For example, the equity analyses section builds on existing FTA Title VI requirements, so it shouldn't be a completely new process that MDOT will have to create and staff.

All Marylanders should have access to a well-planned transportation system regardless of race, income, zip code, or disability. I request a favorable report for HB1204.