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Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Testimony on: HB284 – “Vehicle Laws – Dedicated Bus Lanes – Enforcement”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: April 1, 2021

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB284 as amended. The bill provides that only a transit vehicle owned, operated or contracted for by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) or a local department of transportation, a school bus, a bicycle, an emergency vehicle or a vehicle making a right turn at the next intersection may use a traffic lane designated as a dedicated bus lane by the MTA or a local department of transportation.

The bill also authorizes Baltimore City to use a bus lane monitoring system to enforce the prohibition on other vehicles using these lanes. The bill includes provisions relating to payment of fines not exceeding \$100, distribution of revenues collected, training of monitoring system operators, and handling of violation citations by the Baltimore City Police Department and District Court.

Bus lane monitoring systems are needed to allow dedicated bus lanes to work as intended. Buses traveling in dedicated lanes carry upward of four times more travelers per hour than a general traffic lane. Dedicated bus lanes also double or triple bus speeds by avoiding congestion caused largely by single-occupancy and ride-hailing vehicles. The biggest challenge to having dedicated bus lanes work as intended is finding effective enforcement mechanisms to keep unauthorized users out of those lanes.

Dedicated bus lanes encourage greater use of transit, which reduces environmental damage. Transportation is the largest source of climate-disrupting greenhouse gases in Maryland and our nation today, so reducing the number of single-occupancy gas and diesel-fueled vehicles on the roads, and increasing the use of mass transit, is critical. Tailpipe emissions from vehicles also are hazardous to human health, and are linked to cancers, heart disease, asthma, emphysema, and other respiratory diseases.

In summary, this proposal would enable dedicated bus lanes in our state to work as intended, which would allow buses to be faster and attract more ridership, and bicyclists and emergency vehicles to get where they need to go as quickly as possible. This would benefit dedicated bus lane users as well as our environment. We urge a favorable report on this bill

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.