

Bill: House Bill 1125: Transit – Grant Funding for Local Service - Alterations

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice-Chair Chang, and Members of the Committee:

I write on behalf of the Transportation Association of Maryland in support of House Bill 1125, which would place funding for the Locally Operated Transit Systems (LOTS) on a more sustainable basis and provide protection from the continuing cost increases our members face in providing community transportation.

In addition to federal grants and local funding, LOTS rely on MDOT MTA operating grants to fund both capital investment and operations. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic funding for LOTS operating grants was cut by 20% (or \$12,000,000), which was the largest single area cut by MDOT. This cut was officially justified on the idea that it would be offset by the availability of CARES act emergency funding. This emergency funding was made available three years ago, and in many cases, it was exhausted in 2021.

Our members make mobility a reality for their customers. As ridership recovers from the pandemic they are being called upon to provide more responsive service to more people while also beginning the transition to low and zero emissions technology. As new challenges and new expectations arise, restoring state support is of the utmost importance.

State support for local transit is critical to ensure our goals of quality service, environmental protection, and equity are reached. Inflation has hit our industry hard, with prices for new vehicles increasing by as much as 25%. The ongoing shortage of drivers has further placed financial pressure on our members as they strive to remain competitive with private sector employers.

Indexing our funding to the rate of inflation is therefore an important element of HB 1125. Our members' costs always increase on a year to year basis, but historically, funding has often remained flat for many years at a time. They need the ability to match increased costs without having to compromise service reach, frequency, or quality.

About 45 percent of Americans have no access to public transit. Black households are three times as likely as white households to have no access to a vehicle. When mobility is accessible only for some, there are negative consequences for all. Public transportation is the greener alternative. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, transportation makes up 29 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, and 41 percent of these emissions come from cars. Maryland should join other states in making a sustained and sustainable reinvestment in our local transit.

We fully support House Bill 1125's efforts to increase support for the mobility of the citizens and communities we serve.

Sincerely,

John Duklewski
Executive Director, Transportation Association of Maryland