



P.O. Box 278
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Committee: Appropriations

Testimony on: HB 1125 – “Transit – Grant Funding for Local Service – Alterations”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 7, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of Sierra Club supports HB 1125 that would establish the Locally Operated Transit System Grant Program with grants totaling more than \$108 million beginning in fiscal year 2025 for Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties to come from federal and State public transportation programs. Total transit grants to Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties in fiscal year 2019 were almost \$108 million. The Department of Transportation (DOT) would administer the program and make grants each year that exceed the total grants for the previous fiscal year, adjusted for inflation.

The grants are intended to replace funds for the local bus service that previously was provided by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. Grants must be applied for by the two counties, and could be used for bus purchase, operations, planning and other expenses for local bus service. If the bus service costs for a county decreased in the prior fiscal year, the DOT Secretary may make a proportional reduction in the county’s grant for the next fiscal year.

The two counties are required to implement performance and farebox recovery indicators to track service efficiency for mass transit including operating expenses per vehicle mile and per passenger trip, and passenger trips per vehicle mile. Annual performance reports must be submitted to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, House Ways and Means Committee and House Appropriations Committee by December 1 of each year. The counties also are required to provide an independent management audit of the operational costs and revenues of mass transit in their respective jurisdictions every 4 years.

Transportation is the largest source of climate-disrupting greenhouse gases in Maryland and our nation today, so getting more people out of their gas and diesel-fueled vehicles and onto mass transit is critically important. Tailpipe emissions from fossil-fuel powered vehicles are also hazardous to human health, and are linked to cancers, heart disease, asthma, emphysema, other respiratory diseases, and premature death.

Transit serves residents of all income levels and especially those who don’t own a car. The more grants are given to locally operated transit systems, the more transit can be made more frequent and reliable, which will attract more ridership. The more people use transit, the better it would be for our environment and public health. Transit also can lessen traffic congestion by reducing the number of vehicles on the road.

In summary, HB1125 would increase transit in our state, which would have many benefits and bring about positive change. 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 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.