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Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 950 Maryland Transit Administration - Locally Operated Transit Systems - Mandatory Funding

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 27, 2024

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB950. The bill requires that, starting in Fiscal Year 2026, the state budget includes an annual appropriation of at least \$80 million to fund the Locally Operated Transit Systems (LOTS). LOTS provide transit service in each of Maryland's 23 counties, Baltimore City, Annapolis and Ocean City. According to the Maryland Transit Administration, some jurisdictions have extensive fixed-route service, while other jurisdictions offer door-to-door transportation. The LOTS serve the needs of urban, rural, and suburban communities and provide Marylanders critical access to jobs, education, food, healthcare, and recreation.

Maryland's six year capital budget is facing a fiscal imbalance of over \$3.15 billion. The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) is proposing to cut the LOTS appropriation by 40% to help address that imbalance. While there is short term funding to cover the LOTS in FY 2025, the systems face the same risk of these cuts in FY 2026 and beyond.

To address the fiscal imbalance, Maryland should reevaluate its spending priorities and raise revenue. The capital program summary in the FY 2024-FY 2029 Consolidated Transportation Program indicates there are over a billion dollars in system expansion for major and minor capital projects in the State Highway Administration. MDOT and this committee should reevaluate funding for highway expansion projects in this category that would result in increased vehicle traffic. Instead, we urge focusing the transportation budget first on system preservation and then prioritize expansion projects that would help meet the state's climate, mobility, and equity goals.

Having a strong public transit system is a key pillar of Maryland's strategy to fight the climate crisis. MDOT's own 2023 Climate Pollution Reduction plan indicates that we need to expand public transit and active transportation strategies in order to meet the State's climate targets. Additionally, the Department set a goal to reduce per-capita Vehicle Miles Traveled 10% by 2030 and 20% by 2050. To meet these targets and improve mobility for everyone, we should expand and invest in these programs, not scale them back. For these reasons, we urge you to issue a favorable report on HB 950.

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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.