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HB 1081

February 26, 2026

TO: Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations
RE: House Bill 1081 – Maryland Transit Administration Reform Act
POSITION: FAVORABLE

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) enthusiastically **supports** House Bill (HB) 1081.

HB 1081 provides for governance and accountability at the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) by establishing separate core service and regional transit boards with oversight and approval powers over operational decisions and long-term investment. Furthermore, the legislation would put in place reasonable safeguards for the acquisition of property through condemnation.

In Fiscal Year 2025, MTA accounted for nearly 44% of the State's 162 million transit trips. MTA accounted for more transit trips than WMATA (61.3 million) or all Locally Operated Transit Systems combined (30 million). Baltimore core transit service alone accounted for nearly 65 million transit trips. ("Baltimore core transit service" is defined by HB 1081 as consisting of Baltimore-area bus, light rail, metro, and paratransit.) MTA's core transit service is a critical piece of Baltimore City's transportation network—of its roughly 570,000 residents, one out of three Baltimoreans lack access to a personal vehicle.

In light of these facts, the need for this legislation becomes apparent. HB 1081 would first and foremost insulate MTA's Baltimore-region operations and capital projects from the political climate by creating a layer of oversight at the local level. The Board of Directors for Baltimore Core Transit Service would act as a decision-making body supervising core transit service—light rail, metro, and bus. It would guide long-term investments and operating decisions (such as service adjustments), ensuring that the needs of Baltimore and its peer counties are met. More critically, the existence of this core service Board would ensure that MTA's decisions are informed by the region's best interests, not politics.

In addition, the legislation would establish the Commuter Services Advisory Board, a body tasked with informing the operations and long-term expansion of Maryland Area Rail Commuter (MARC) and commuter bus service. Expanding MARC service through legislation is a long-standing area of interest for transit advocates Statewide. The system served 4.7 million riders in Fiscal Year 2025 and continues to see rapid post-pandemic recovery, but expansion in the way of additional system miles has been

limited. Whereas previous legislation considered the creation of a standalone rail agency charged with the operation of MARC service, HB 1081 instead focuses on creating a forward-looking body intended to guide and advocate for the expansion of this critical rail service. This would allow MARC to remain within MTA's portfolio while providing for independent oversight which, similar to the core service Board, would be insulated from short-term political decision-making.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the creation of these independent boards would ensure that no single elected official can unilaterally decide which communities are worthy of transit investment. The 2015 cancellation of the Baltimore Red Line—a missing link in the region's transit network—was a devastating blow to the region's future. This unconscionable act of targeted disinvestment in tens of thousands of the Baltimore region's most vulnerable residents continues to be felt over ten years later. This shovel-ready project carried \$900,000,000 in federal investment, dollars which were returned to the Federal government as a result of its cancellation. While the Baltimore Red Line has since been revived, thousands of lifelong Marylanders were robbed of what was supposed to be a once-in-a-lifetime investment in the places they called home. Many of them would not live to see this vision realized. Safeguards must be put in place to guarantee that this kind of injustice is not allowed to repeat itself.

For the above stated reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on HB 1081.