



**Testimony Presented to the House Appropriations Committee
HB1081 – Maryland Transit Administration Reform Act**

Position: Favorable

Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HB1081 the Maryland Transit Administration Reform Act. I serve as Executive Director of the Baltimore Metropolitan Council, the federally designated metropolitan planning organization for central Maryland, and as a member of the Workgroup on the Reorganization of the Maryland Transit Administration charged with examining MTA governance. After five public meetings and months of work reviewing MTA's structure, national governance models, and operational challenges, the Workgroup reached a clear conclusion: creation of a Baltimore Core Services Board is in the interest of the State of Maryland.

The Baltimore region has not experienced a major expansion of its transit system in more than 30 years. The unilateral cancellation of the Red Line in 2015 demonstrated the structural vulnerability of the current governance framework. Regardless of one's position on that project, the underlying issue is that a generational transit investment can be halted without institutional guardrails or sustained regional input. Today, transit serving Baltimore – buses, light rail, metro, and MARC – is operated by MTA, a unit within MDOT, which must balance competing statewide priorities across highways, bridges, ports, and aviation. In that structure, Baltimore's core transit system lacks a dedicated governance body focused exclusively on its performance, capital planning, and long-term stability. Among the nation's largest transit systems, Baltimore stands alone in lacking its own board.

HB1081/SB947 implements the principal recommendation of the Workgroup on the Reorganization of the Maryland Transit Administration by establishing a Baltimore Core Services Board within MTA focused solely on bus, metro, and light rail services in the region. The Board would provide oversight of annual budgets and planning decisions and create guardrails to protect major capital investments from unilateral withdrawal.

The Governor would retain majority appointment authority and designate the Chair, while the Mayor of Baltimore City and surrounding county executives would appoint additional



members, including representation for riders and key stakeholders. For the first time, local elected executives in the Baltimore region would have an official voice in the operation of our major transit service. Further, our residents and the system's riders would have a public forum to track development, advocate for change and hear directly from MTA's leaders about the system that, for many, is a literal lifeline.

The proposal maintains MTA as a state agency within MDOT and preserves the Governor's ultimate budget authority. It does not create a new independent authority; rather, it is a measured reform that balances continued state control with meaningful local accountability and transparency.

Maryland's structure places transit under state control and land use under local control, making local/state coordination essential. A Baltimore Core Services Board would provide a formal governance bridge to improve transparency in resource allocation, strengthen alignment with transit-oriented development, and ensure greater continuity for long-term capital investments across administrations. The Workgroup on the Reorganization of the Maryland Transit Administration determined that this reform serves the State's interest and enhances accountability without disrupting MDOT's statewide responsibilities. Governance reform alone will not resolve every transit challenge, but it is the necessary first step.

Additionally, the Commuter Services Advisory Board established by HB1081 will establish a statewide body to guide and advise on the investments in our MARC and commuter bus system, which connects the Baltimore and Capital Regions and Western Maryland. Efficient commuter train service can harness the economies of our two largest metropolitan regions and allow suburban and rural jurisdictions to benefit from the economic development potential of transit-oriented development. The Commuter Services Advisory Board and proposed study of a Maryland rail authority will further our state's efforts to connect our residents and expand access to opportunity to all Marylanders.

I respectfully urge a favorable report and timely passage of this legislation so that Maryland can position the next gubernatorial term to deliver tangible improvements for Baltimore's transit riders and the regional economy.

Michael B. Kelly
Executive Director