

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2004 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 483

(Senators Dyson and Middleton)

Finance

Environmental Matters

Commission to Study Southern Maryland Transportation Needs

This bill creates a Blue Ribbon Commission to Study Southern Maryland Transportation Needs and outlines seven tasks for the commission to accomplish, including: (1) reviewing plans prepared by State transportation agencies; (2) studying current and future impact of traffic congestion in Southern Maryland, including traffic levels at specified intersections; (3) assessing barriers to transportation improvements (roadway and mass transit); and (4) making recommendations for the amount of funding needed to reduce congestion and possible funding mechanisms. The commission may hold public hearings, conduct site visits, and request information from CSX Corporation regarding rail lines.

The bill directs the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland (TCC) to provide staffing and technical support for the commission and for State agencies represented on the commission to also provide staffing. It requires the commission to coordinate with TCC Regional Advisory Committee.

The commission must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by November 1, 2005. The bill takes effect July 1, 2004 and terminates June 30, 2006.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential increase in Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) expenditures in FY 2005 to support the commission's requirements for analyses. The increase will be significant if several traffic counts are necessary. Any expense reimbursements for commission members are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing resources.

Local Effect: TCC's expenditures would increase by at least \$100,000 to \$200,000 for technical support. Local governments in Southern Maryland will benefit to the extent that the commission provides analyses for local transportation that would otherwise be conducted by local jurisdictions.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: None applicable.

Background: TCC for Southern Maryland is responsible for the regional transportation planning, regional transit service coordination, the regional transportation plan development and implementation, commuter assistance, and air quality planning for Charles, St. Mary's, and Calvert counties. The Southern Maryland Transportation Strategy is the region's transportation plan, which provides a vision and general direction through 2010. The proposed fiscal 2005 budget provides \$55,000 for TCC from the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT).

Southern Maryland is experiencing tremendous growth due to population and commuter patterns, as well as the expansion of the Patuxent River Naval Air Station in St. Mary's County. As a result, major arterials are clogged during rush hour. Vehicular traffic in the region also grows steadily, especially in Charles County, due to commercial truck drivers who wish to avoid the Capital Beltway and congested interstates by using U.S. 301.

Several projects aimed at alleviating congestion in all three counties are in the State capital program, including a study of the U.S. 301 Corridor, engineering to support improvements on Route 4 in Prince Frederick, and construction of a Hughesville bypass.

State Expenditures: The bill calls for the Departments of Budget and Management and MDOT, which are represented on the commission, to provide staffing; however, TCC must offer technical support. It is assumed that TCC would have primary responsibility to provide the analyses of the subjects to be studied by the commission.

It is unclear what data or analyses will be required from State agencies. TTF expenditures could increase in fiscal 2005 only to help provide the analysis required by the bill. The State Highway Administration advises that it costs \$5,000 to \$10,000 for traffic counts for each intersection. If other intersections beyond the ones specified by the bill will require counts and analysis, the costs could as high as \$1 million.

The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) advises that some of the tasks required by the bill, particularly review of current and future traffic levels, overlap with existing projects such as the U.S. 301 Corridor study and a study of improvement scenarios for the Route 4 and 235 intersection in St. Mary's County. Presumably, the cost of the analyses would be lower as a result. However, it is unclear how much previous or current analyses conducted by the State or TCC can be used to reduce the cost of the bill. MDOT advises that it can be as expensive to update earlier data as it is to collect it.

Local Expenditures: TCC estimates that it would cost \$100,000 for contractual and administrative expenses associated with the commission's tasks. It advises that the actual cost will vary according to the scope of work required by the commission. DLS notes that the six-year average for Southern Maryland transportation studies was \$196,400 (\$982,000 total) and that MDOT estimates a consultant to cost \$200,000 to \$250,000. Accordingly, it is likely that TCC's costs will be somewhat higher.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Transportation, Tri County Council of Maryland, Department of Budget and Management, Department of Legislative Services

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