

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 281

(Senators Dyson and Middleton)

Finance

Environmental Matters

Commission to Study Southern Maryland Transportation Needs

This bill creates a Commission to study Southern Maryland transportation needs and outlines seven tasks for the commission to accomplish, including: (1) reviewing studies and plans prepared by State transportation agencies; (2) studying the 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 existing rail lines.

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

The commission must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by November 1, 2006.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2005 and terminates June 30, 2007.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential increase in Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) expenditures in FY 2006 to support the commission's requirements for analyses. The increase would 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 would benefit to the extent 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 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 2006 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, continued studies and monitoring of MD 5 and MD 4, and studies involving the Southern Maryland Mass Transportation Analysis.

State Expenditures: The bill calls for the Department of Budget and Management and MDOT, which are represented on the commission, to provide staffing; however, TCC must offer technical support. Although it is unclear how costs would be shared, 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 would be required from State agencies. TTF expenditures could increase in fiscal 2006 only to help provide the analysis required by

the bill. The State Highway Administration advises that it costs \$2,000 for traffic counts for each intersection. If other intersections beyond the ones specified in the bill require counts and analysis, the costs could be as high as \$200,000.

MDOT advises that some of the tasks required by the bill duplicate or overlap with existing or future studies. 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 could 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 would vary according to the scope of work required by the commission. Legislative Services notes that the six-year average for Southern Maryland transportation studies was \$196,400 (\$982,000 total) and that MDOT estimates a project of this magnitude to cost \$200,000. Accordingly, it is likely that TCC's costs could be somewhat higher.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: As amended, SB 483 of 2004 was almost identical. That bill passed the Senate but received an unfavorable report from the House Environmental Matters Committee.

Cross File: None.

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

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ncs/ljm

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