



## Testimony in Support of HB 1367 Western Maryland Rail Transit - Study

Presented by Benjamin Ross, Chair

March 3, 2020

Western Maryland could benefit enormously from MARC trains. Commuters now traveling to Montgomery County and D.C. would be spared long, expensive and tiring commutes. And in today's economy, rail transit is a key to local prosperity. The construction cranes around Metro stations and future Purple Line stations in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties show the effect.

We believe MARC can be extended to Hagerstown at surprisingly low cost. A route was outlined in 2009 by Ed Tennyson, the now-deceased former Pennsylvania Deputy Secretary of Transportation who led the construction of light rail lines in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and the passenger rail tunnel through downtown Philadelphia. This route follows a mostly abandoned B&O branch from Hagerstown to Weverton. From Hagerstown, the trains could potentially continue on existing tracks westward.



Approximate route of rail right of way. Existing tracks blue; abandoned section red.

The obstacles that drive up the costs of rail construction elsewhere appear to be largely absent here:

- A freight track in good condition already runs from downtown Hagerstown past I-70. Thus there will be little or no construction work in built-up areas.
- The right of way is largely intact; major regrading will not be needed.
- Existing bridges on I-70, MD 67, and US 340 pass over the right of way. The only significant bridge needed is a trestle over Antietam Creek.
- Most of the right of way is reportedly owned by the Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources.

As a first step, rush-hour MARC trains that currently terminate in Brunswick could continue to Hagerstown. Implementation of the 2007 MARC Growth and Investment Plan would make possible all-day service running on both weekdays and weekends.

Before any definite commitments are made, study is needed to clarify the status of land ownership, provide a preliminary cost estimate, and identify potential ridership. That is the purpose of HB 1367. We urge you to give it a favorable report.