

RAIL PASSENGERS

MARYLAND

Testimony in Support of HB 1367 Western Maryland Rail Transit – Study

**Presented by
Harvard Morehead
Vice President
Rail Passengers Maryland**

March 3, 2020

Western Maryland has long been deprived of transportation options other than the automobile. Rail options in particular are lacking. Interstate highways I-70 and I-68 are the only significant options for residents to access the major employment, shopping, and entertainment centers of Baltimore, Montgomery County, and Washington. This, in turn, requires passage over South Mountain, between Hagerstown and Frederick. During good weather, this is not a problem, but can be fraught during inclement weather, with slow trucks, steep grades, slippery surfaces, limited visibilities, and variable winds all providing impediments to safe passage. In addition, growing population in Hagerstown and beyond will make this route much busier in the future, unless other options are available.

Western Maryland thus desperately needs, and would benefit hugely from a rail transportation option. Fortunately, a rail option can be made available fairly quickly, and at relatively low cost. An abandoned rail right-of-way exists between Brunswick and Hagerstown. A recent informal survey of the line showed it to be largely intact, with few if any significant encroachments. The property is believed to be largely in public hands, so land acquisition should not be a major obstacle (title searches would, of course have to be done to insure this is the case), but, after environmental reviews, construction could begin quickly. The only major bridge would be at the crossing of Antietam Creek. Some shoring up of the ROW, and minor crossings of ditches, etc. would need to be constructed, but this work could proceed quickly.

Once track is laid, the three daily MARC trains that currently terminate at Brunswick could be extended to Hagerstown. Since the extension would be mostly in public hands (a short, infrequently used stretch serving a small industrial park in Hagerstown is owned by CSX), negotiations with CSX should be relatively straightforward.

In the longer term, addition of a third track between Washington and Brunswick, as envisioned by MARC's 2007 Growth and Investment plan, would permit all-day bidirectional service, bringing shoppers and tourists to the area. This would also allow for extension on existing CSX track further west.

As a result of these considerations, Rail Passengers Maryland strongly recommends passage of HB1367, which would enable a study of the service outlined above.