



Maryland Chapter

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Committee: Appropriations
Testimony on: HB 1367 “Transportation – Western Maryland MARC Rail Extension – Study”
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 3, 2020

The Maryland Sierra Club supports HB 1367. The bill would require the Department of Transportation to study and develop recommendations on the feasibility and cost of extending Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) rail service to western Maryland. The study findings and recommendations would need to be reported to the Governor and General Assembly by December 1, 2021.

Why This Study is Needed

There are numerous reasons why extending MARC to western Maryland should be studied. Our state needs additional, fast, reliable regional mass transit to improve mobility choices for commuters and regional travelers. Commuter rail is efficient, would reduce traffic on existing roads and highways, and would greatly reduce the need to expand highways. Also, extending MARC to western Maryland would encourage economic development along its path, especially transit-oriented development at its stops.

Another major benefit of extending MARC rail service to western Maryland is that it would enable more people to take MARC and leave their cars at home, which would reduce the amount of air pollution emitted from car and truck tailpipes. The transportation sector is Maryland’s number one generator of greenhouse gases as well as other health-damaging toxic emissions, so the more that people use transit and not their cars, the better it is for the environment and our health.

Potential Amendment

We believe it is particularly important that the study include a review of the agreements the State of Virginia has entered into with CSX railroad to make expanded train service across that state possible. Governor Hogan and DOT have consistently said for years that MARC expansion is virtually impossible in Maryland because CSX, on whose tracks MARC service runs, is unwilling to negotiate expansion of MARC service. However, what has happened in Virginia suggests that CSX is willing to negotiate commuter train service expansion, so we need to understand what approaches have worked in Virginia.

It would seem that the bill, as written, is broad enough to encompass this review. However, we urge the sponsor and the Committee to nonetheless consider whether it would be helpful to amend the bill to specifically require this review given DOT’s prior views on the CSX issue.

In summary, a study to determine the feasibility and cost of extending MARC rail service to western Maryland is warranted because of the many benefits such a project would bring. We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on this bill, and to consider whether to amend the bill as indicated.

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