



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB 292 – Toll Roads, Highways, and Bridges – County Government Consent Requirement – Expansion**

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chairman, and colleagues I am presenting HB 292, extending a county consent requirement on toll roads, highways and bridges enjoyed by Maryland's nine (9) Eastern Shore counties to the 15 jurisdictions West of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge.

This 31-word bill is straightforward and simple on its face but extremely consequential with respect to extending the opportunity of local government and citizens to weigh in on toll roads, bridges and highways.

The nine (9) Eastern Shore counties have had this consent authorization for more than 40 years. While this authority has never been exercised it is a critical and timely tool that will ensure meaningful dialogue and debate over a third span of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge for the counties where the bridge will terminate. This bill is in no way meant to weaken or otherwise compromise that consent authority. Rather, I believe there are three strong arguments in favor of extending this privilege to the rest of the state.

**FAIRNESS**

This is an issue of equity: for such an important review and consent tool to be available to only one-third of the state's counties while leaving out the remainder and significantly more populous counties is simply unfair. I do not agree – as some have suggested – that the consent provision for those nine counties is not good policy and should be repealed.

**LOCAL IMPACT/LOCAL INPUT**

The greatest impact of toll roads and bridges – indeed of all traffic – is local. The impact on neighborhoods, on land, air and water, on quality of life, will all be felt locally. That includes everything from the taking of homes by eminent domain, to the loss of parkland, open space and trees, to increased carbon emissions from vehicles, to the adverse health effects from those emissions. It is essential to have meaningful county level review and consent for such consequential projects. They have multi-billion dollar price tags and will be around for decades to come.

As a former two-term County Councilmember, I can tell you I had much more interaction day in and day out with residents than I have as a delegate on all manner of issues from personal and family matters to community challenges and quality of life concerns. The most common complaints my council office heard were related to roads, mostly the condition of roadways but also speeding and other problems. County government is where most citizens are the most engaged. If you live in an unincorporated area as many of us do, county government is your most local level of government. I believe it is there that lawmakers should be able to weigh the impact of a proposed toll bridge or road, including Gov. Hogan's proposed toll lanes on I-495 and I-270. Without this consent tool, these mammoth projects will be decided by the three members of Maryland's Board of Public Works. The impacts are too enormous and long-lasting to be put into the hands of just three people.

#### NO CONSENT/NO CONVERSATION

Last but certainly not least, I believe the strongest argument for extending county consent is not as some suggest a back door way of killing unpopular projects. Certainly that is a possible outcome. However, I submit that without the ability of all counties to consider a toll road or bridge and to take a vote on it, there will be no meaningful conversation at all. That means there can be no consideration of specific siting concerns, no requests for conditions, no modifications that may actually result in the improvement of and possible support for the road or bridge.

Thank you for your consideration. I urge a favorable report on HB 292.