

Statement of Rail Passengers Maryland
In Support of SB 229 and HB 292

Annapolis, MD
Jan 28, 2020

Rail Passengers Maryland, the state-wide chapter of the national Rail Passengers Association, strongly supports the passage of SB 229 and its companion bill, HB 292, which would require positive consent from a majority of the counties affected before a toll road or toll bridge could be built.

The nine counties in the Eastern Shore have long had this right enshrined in law; these bills simply expand this right state-wide.

At its base, this is a simple matter of fairness; why should the Eastern Shore counties have rights denied to the others?

The reason these bills must pass this session, however, is Gov. Hogan's and former MTA head Rahn's push to give a third party the right to build toll lanes alongside both I-270 and I-95/495, in exchange for profits from the tolls. It has recently come to light that these profits will be guaranteed by the state; i.e. they have signed on to a scheme for privatizing profit, but putting any losses on the taxpayer. Not surprisingly, as the sordid details of this scheme have come to light, its public approval in Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties have plummeted.

The initial segment on I-270, for instance, from Shady Grove Rd. to the Beltway, simply does not address current delays, which we admit are real, since, if the delays were alleviated, no one would pay the toll. In other words, it is not designed to alleviate congestion, but to monetize it for private profit. Specifically, in the second segment, if it is ever built, between Frederick and I-370 (Metro), peak tolls have recently been estimated at \$40. Each way. Every day. For comparison, a monthly MARC ticket, good for unlimited travel between Frederick and Rockville (Metro) is \$162, about the same as two days in the toll lanes. This is not a project for working people, but those on expense accounts and the rich.

Our preferred solution (and it is a solution, not a short-term gimmick) for I-270 congestion is to build a third track on the CSX line, to accommodate all-day, bidirectional, hourly MARC service, with expanded service during rush hours. Each train can easily carry as many as 500 people, removing the equivalent of 1-2 lanes of cars from the road. Besides being much cheaper, and having a vastly smaller physical footprint, diesel-electric trains emit 40-60% less CO₂, and can be fully electrified to reduce this further. As demand increases, as it has repeatedly been shown elsewhere that it will, service can be readily, and rapidly, added, with no requirement for significant additional construction.

But stopping the misguided, ill-conceived, and utterly wasteful toll-lane non-solution to the area's traffic woes can only be achieved by passage of SB 229 and HB 292.