



Montgomery County's Advocates for Better Transportation

Testimony on SB 229, Toll Roads, Highways, and Bridges County Government Consent Requirement - Expansion

Testimony to Maryland Senate Finance Committee, January 29, 2020

The Action Committee for Transit strongly supports SB 229 as a long-overdue extension to all Maryland counties of local approval over toll facilities. This authority was given to Eastern Shore counties more than 40 years ago, and it is both wise and fair to expand it statewide.

At the most basic level, the State will both be more attentive to local and regional concerns and better mitigate negative impacts if it is required to obtain approval from a majority of counties affected by the proposed toll facility.

The requirement will also help level the playing field in the choice of building/expanding toll road facilities or building/expanding transit facilities. The State has in the past required buy-in and substantial funding from counties for transit facilities such as the Purple Line – a high hurdle that jurisdictions cleared to make the project a reality. It is only fair that toll road facilities, such as those proposed for I-270, I-495, and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, win similar county political support, even if funding is not expected from the counties. Allowing State agencies to unilaterally impose a road solution on issues of such vital importance to the county communities and development is not acceptable.

In particular the State DOT's single-minded pursuit of toll facilities on I-495 and I-270 has crowded out review of transit alternatives on the highway rights of way and on parallel facilities serving much the same markets. The transit alternatives under review as presented to the Planning Board in October 2018 were described by the Montgomery County Planning Department as "vague and ill-defined by MDOT SHA, only identifying the mode of transportation rather than how [light or heavy] rail could be incorporated into any of the alternatives." Transit improvements are important to Montgomery County along with supportive changes to increase development around MARC stations, but the State does not appear to be taking them as seriously as adding toll lanes to I-270. Requiring formal county approval – as SB 229 would do – will encourage the State to formulate serious alternatives that can win county support.

Finally, the fear that toll facilities will not be able to be built is unfounded. Toll facilities can be built if they meet both State and county objectives. SB 229 would ensure that this occurs.