



Maryland Chapter

7338 Baltimore Avenue, Suite 102
College Park, MD 20740-3211

Committee: Finance

Testimony on: SB548 - "Transportation – I-270 Commuter Bus Route Study"

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 12, 2020

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports SB548, which would require the Maryland Department of Transportation to study and make recommendations on the feasibility of establishing commuter bus routes along the I-270 corridor that would serve population and job centers from Frederick County through Montgomery County and into Northern Virginia.

There is no doubt that traffic congestion is a problem along the I-270 corridor now, especially during rush hour periods in the morning and late afternoon. Not only does congestion often result in traffic back-ups and delays on that corridor, but increased climate and health-damaging air pollution is coming from the tailpipes of vehicles stuck in slow-moving traffic versus vehicles not caught in traffic congestion.

The Governor's solution to the traffic congestion problem includes having a public-private partnership (P3) construct four "managed" toll lanes (two in each direction) on I-270 extending along I-495 and across a rebuilt American Legion Bridge into Northern Virginia. Whether or not his proposal or some version of it ultimately is approved, commuter buses traveling on HOV or toll lanes on I-270 (free to commuter buses) would provide a much needed service to residents who live in or commute through that corridor, would lessen congestion on that corridor, and would result in far less air pollution being generated because fewer people would be driving their cars.

Transportation is now the primary contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in our state, so getting individuals out of their cars and onto transit would be a positive development for our environment.

The bill calls for the study to include identifying the start and end point for the commuter bus routes, including potential bus stops in between. Those bus stops would be population and job centers, but also could be park and ride locations which would increase accessibility and ridership for the commuter buses.

A particularly good feature of the bill is that it calls for consultation with city and county governments along the I-270 corridor, as well as WMATA, residents of Frederick and Montgomery County, and representatives of the local business community. Consultation with these many groups and residents would provide invaluable insights into how a commuter bus service along the I-270 corridor could best address their needs.

In summary, commuter bus routes along the I-270 corridor from Frederick to Northern Virginia would seem to make a lot of sense for many reasons. Having MDOT study and make recommendations on the feasibility of creating these bus routes is a very deserving proposal. We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on this legislation.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has about 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has more than 800,000 members.