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Testimony in Support of HB 114; Transit Safety and Investment Act
Testimony of Delegate Brooke Lierman
February 3, 2021 * Appropriations Committee

What this bill does

The Transit Safety and Investment Act will prevent the Maryland Transit Administration from falling off an impending funding cliff by requiring additional funding for MTA's capital needs for the next 6 years. MDOT-MTA released its first ever Capital Needs Inventory in July 2019, revealing that MTA is \$2bn short of what MDOT believes it needs to maintain a state of good repair, and keep up with new safety and environmental compliance needs, over the next decade. This bill will provide an average annual increase of \$90 million for MTA capital needs for the next six years (down from \$123 million in this bill from last year). In total, MDOT must redirect \$540.5 million in capital spending from fiscal 2023 through 2028, which includes a redirection of \$197.1 million from fiscal 2023 through 2026.

The legislation will provide funding for MTA's backlog of state of good repair needs, such as maintaining light rail and subway tracks, maintaining park and ride lots used by the MTA Commuter Bus system, MARC safety and security systems, as well as bus and bus shelter maintenance. It will also provide funding for electronic enhancements, routine updates to software, positive train control, and needed upgrades that will allow MTA to comply with Clean Water Act requirements. Further, it would allow MTA to improve access to MARC and bus stations, bus shelter examination, EV charging stations, and solar rooftops at bus depots.

Why this bill matters

MTA operates local buses, commuter buses, light rail, MARC, and paratransit, and provides funding to locally operated transit systems in every Maryland county, Baltimore City, Annapolis, and Ocean City. MTA provides more than 300,000 rides on the average workday. It is the 13th largest transit system in the U.S. Recently released federal data indicates that for the second year our buses and rail system — MARC trains, subway and light rail — have a higher breakdown rate than any other comparable region in the nation.

Because the MTA system is not working properly, thousands of Marylanders who rely on public transit around the state - and employers - face additional barriers to success. For example, in 2018, the Baltimore Metro Subway, which 40,000 people rely on daily, was shut down for a month for emergency track repairs because the tracks were too worn to operate safely. The light

rail had similar emergency shutdowns in 2019 from heavy rain, erosion and a sinkhole. MTA buses are unreliable and break down twice as often as other major Northeast cities.

This bill is critical to job creation and retention in Maryland - just ask any major employer. Only 60% to 70% of buses arrive on time - meaning that employers cannot rely on their employee base that uses transit. Issues with our transit system end up making Marylanders late to work, health appointments, school and other obligations. This disproportionately impacts communities of color, persons with disabilities, and low-income communities who have less access to transportation to reach their critical destinations each day.

How did we get here? By MDOT's own analysis, MTA has been sorely neglected in the past six years. Yet, the Maryland Department of Transportation keeps proposing capital budgets for MTA that fall further and further below the minimum \$2bn required to maintain essential maintenance and enhancements. Since Governor Hogan took office, MTA's share of the transportation capital program has fallen from 31% to 19%.

At a time when public transit is more critical than ever to people's lives and to restoring the economy, we continue to kick the can down the road. The pandemic makes the need for a better transit system even more urgent. In Maryland, 35% of public transit commuters have essential jobs, with health care workers making up the largest share — commuting to Johns Hopkins Hospital, University of Maryland Medical System, MedStar Health, LifeBridge Health, St. Agnes Hospital and others. These jobs cannot be done from home. One in three Baltimore residents doesn't own a car, and many simply cannot afford one.

The transportation sector is also the biggest contributor to climate pollution in the state, and reliable and connected transit is necessary to reduce climate congestion and pollution by providing riders an alternative to single-occupancy-vehicles. Governor Hogan's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act plan, released in 2019, relies on additional funding to meet its goals for reducing greenhouse gases. Reliable transit is essential for connecting Marylanders to employment opportunities and investing in the sustainability of our state.

Why should you vote for this bill

Your constituents and mine - transit riders and drivers alike - need Maryland to have a fully functioning transit system: it reduces greenhouse gasses, it supports our state economy, allows businesses to grow, and ensures that Marylanders have the means to live, work, and thrive around the state. It is our responsibility as lawmakers to ensure we maintain a safe and efficient transit system for this generation and those to come. It's time to act to fund transit in Maryland.