

TESTIMONY OF
Reuben B. Collins, Esq., President
County Commissioners of Charles County
BEFORE
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Senate Bill 81 – “Southern Maryland Rapid Transit Project – Requirements and
Funding”
Tuesday, January 26, 2021
1:00 p.m.

On behalf of the Commissioners of Charles County, I am pleased to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 81 entitled, “Southern Maryland Rapid Transit Project – Requirements and Funding.” Senate Bill 81 restores funding to the design, engineering, and National Environmental Policy Act Process for the Southern Maryland Rapid Transit Project.

Purpose of the Request

The Southern Maryland Rapid Transit Project is Charles County’s HIGHEST Transportation Priority and the most critical component of our future mobility in the Branch Avenue Corridor. This Bill creates the funding to move this project into the “Project Planning” and NEPA Phases now, and will conclude with a “Record of Decision” on the Transit Mode and final alignment. After decades of false starts over partial studies, the residents of Charles County are pleading with the State relieve one of the worst commutes in the Country. We are limited to two major arterial roadways connecting us with the Washington DC Metropolitan Region, and numerous studies have shown that highway expansion alone, will only provide temporary relief. These roads can only carry so many cars, and we need to be forward-thinking in taking the next step to lay the foundation for Fixed-Route High-Capacity Transit now.

The Data

The 2017 SMRT Alternatives Report overwhelmingly demonstrates support for the need of this transit project for our region of Maryland. According to the Report: As of 2015, the Commute-shed area encompassing this corridor contains more than 439,000 people. The Report predicted in its operational year of 2040,

the SMRT will have 24,000 to 28,000 daily riders. To put this in perspective, a light-rail train will hold 150 passengers. To keep pace with the estimated demand during peak hours, it will require trains servicing the stations every 6 minutes. So, there's no question there is a significant demand for this transit service.

Roads Cannot Solve Congestion

Charles County is limited to two major arterial roadways to connect us to the Washington Metropolitan area, and those highways have limited capacity. You may also be aware that the Governor Harry Nice-Thomas "Mac" Middleton Bridge replacement project is now under construction. Once the bridge opens in 2022 with an additional lane in each direction, the number of vehicle trips crossing the bridge is projected to double. This corridor needs to be prepared to move people and freight in an efficient and expedited manner. Without this high-capacity transit service, gridlock will ensue under the increased traffic in the US 301 corridor.

Economic Benefits

The transit system is projected to significantly encourage economic growth, vastly increasing job growth, and adding an estimated "\$20 Billion to income, and \$30 Billion to property development and values. The increased employment and property values resulting from rapid transit are projected to expand the tax base by \$5 Billion to \$6 Billion, which in itself would cover the cost of the project."

Coordination and Support

Two-thirds of this 19-mile transit corridor lies within Prince George's County and we have been in "lock-step" with them all along the way. The Prince George's County Council passed a resolution in 2011 to partner with Charles County and promote the preservation of the transit corridor for this project and focus transit-oriented development along the planned alignment and station areas. Charles County has held this transit project as it's highest transportation for a decade, and has rezoned 300 acres as high-density, transit oriented development. Both Counties hold SMRT as high priority in their respective Transportation Priority Letters, and have been partners at the table with the Maryland Department of Transportation's past efforts on this critical project. This was further cemented this past year when both Counties and MDOT applied for the most recent round of US DOT BUILD Grants to help fund this project.

Land Use & Transit

Both Counties have done their part to lay the groundwork for future land use and development that supports this project and creating “walkable communities” and “transportation choices” for all our generations, young and old.

The local governments have been taking the necessary action to support and facilitate transit-oriented development. The missing link is the transit connection to the metropolitan transit system. The Project Planning Phase for this project is a small investment in the view of the State’s Transportation Trust Fund, but reaps immeasurable benefits for the mobility of residents, as well as business development in the Maryland Economy.

For all these reasons, I respectfully urge the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to act favorably on Senate Bill 81, and move it to the Senate Floor.
