

Wednesday January 20, 2021

TO: Guy Guzzone, Chair of Budget and Taxation Committee and Committee Members
FROM: Caitlin Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation & Climate Policy Analyst
POSITION: Support SB 199 – Maryland Transit Administration – Funding (Transit Safety and Investment Act)

The Nature Conservancy (The Conservancy) supports SB 199 offered by Senators McCray and Zucker. SB 199 directs a set amount of revenues from the Transportation Trust Fund to address the current backlog of public transit maintenance, repairs, replacements, and upgrade projects as identified by the Maryland Transit Authority's Capital Needs Inventory. In the summer of 2019, the Capital Needs Inventory (CNI) identified a \$1.5 billion accumulated backlog of deferred maintenance projects and an additional \$4.2 billion of capital needs over the next ten years. The Maryland Department of Transportation's (MDOT) 2021-2026 Consolidated Transportation Program does not include sufficient funding for the Maryland Transit Authority (MTA) to meet these high maintenance and repair demands. If funding continues only at the current level, the maintenance backlog will increase over the coming years.

The transportation sector is the largest contributor to climate change in Maryland and air pollution caused by increased congestion and reliance on personal vehicles harms respiratory health in heavily trafficked areas. These respiratory health problems, including asthma, disproportionately impact Black and brown communities and low-income neighborhoods. A safe, reliable, accessible, and well-connected transit system is crucial to promoting public health, equity, and jobs.

When compared to its peer agencies in other states across the nation, the MTA transit system, including subway, light rail, buses, and MARC commuter trains, each rank among the worst for breakdown rates. Our MTA buses break down approximately twice as frequently as buses in many major Northeast cities, which also poses an equity issue as the majority of riders who use our core and commuter bus services are Black or Asian according to the MTA's ridership demographics. Failures in our paratransit services leaves riders with disabilities late or stranded, potentially missing necessary healthcare and treatment appointments.

In addition to posing a safety risk to transit workers and riders, these maintenance and repair issues cause low reliability and restrict access for those riders who depend on our public transit system to commute to job centers, schools, healthcare facilities, childcare, grocery stores, and recreational activities. More than a third of transit riders in Maryland are essential workers. Lack of reliable transportation could put their jobs at risk and taking less frequent, more crowded buses and trains when breakdowns or emergency repairs occur put riders' health at risk.

We commend Senators McCray and Zucker on introducing this bill, which will raise MTA's capital budget to a level at which we can reverse the record of high breakdown rates, better ensure the safety of our transit workers and riders, promote equitable access to jobs and other necessities, and protect the health of our citizens.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 199.