

January 25, 2021

**Testimony on SB 199 –
Maryland Transit Safety & Investment Act
Budget & Taxation**

Position: Favorable

Jennifer Kessler Klump, Baltimore resident and small business owner, supports SB 199, the Transit Safety & Investment Act.

In July 2019, the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) released its first ever Capital Needs Inventory (CNI) to assess its ongoing, unconstrained capital needs. The CNI identified \$5.7 billion of capital needs over the next ten years, \$1.5 billion of which is an accumulated backlog of deferred maintenance. Unfortunately, MDOT's FY 2021–2026 Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) does not provide the MTA sufficient funding to address the annual maintenance and repairs identified in the CNI. In fact, at current funding levels the maintenance backlog will grow.

The result of the neglected maintenance is buses, light rail vehicles, subway trains and commuter trains that break down more often than the MTA's peer agencies, and in some cases, more often than any transit agency in the nation. Paratransit service also continues to malfunction. This leads to poor service which leads to drops in ridership, and a negative spiral.

I moved to Baltimore in 2014 after a decade of living and working in Cincinnati, Ohio. I was deeply involved in community organization and corraling citizen and corporate support for the Cincinnati Streetcar Project and the then-burgeoning neighborhood of Over-the-Rhine.

Despite fierce opposition to this fully funded project, including two ballot measures and a mayoral race, the citizens of Cincinnati came together to support this 3.5 mile infrastructure project. Supporters have tracked the development revenue in the blocks surrounding the streetcar line and found that over \$1B in development has occurred between 2007 (when the project was announced) to 2019 (three years after its completion.)

What was a neglected, bottomed out, dangerous neighborhood has transformed into the biggest tax revenue generator in the city and is a national example of how transit-oriented development can change the trajectory of an entire region.

Streetcar supporters' rallying cry was "Transit Drives Development". When I was preparing to move to Baltimore, I was excited to live in a city with "real" transit. From 500 miles away, Baltimore appeared to have everything - a light rail system, Amtrak access, AND a subway! Imagine my confusion and dismay when I took the light rail down Howard Street for the first time - a slow, complicated ride on old cars weaving through clearly neglected streets and running through a neighborhood that immediately conjured images of my beloved Cincinnati before

development came in. It was astounding - how could a large city like Baltimore abandon one of its most central, connected neighborhoods, brimming with breathtaking architecture and serving as the connection point for its subway, light rail, and bus systems?

Where was the development?

No matter - the Red Line project was coming. And in yet another blow, the newly elected governor erased over a decade of work, and a fully funded project through the stroke of his pen. Like Ohio Governor Kasich rerouted money intended for a high speed rail project connecting Columbus, Cincinnati, and Cleveland to a rural bus project in the northern part of the state, Governor Hogan inexplicably kneecapped what would've been a game-changing project for Baltimore and the rest of Maryland.

The Governor's transit plan that was presented after his inauguration left Baltimore City completely off the map. Literally. Over and over and over again, we've seen how little this administration values the powerhouse of Maryland's economy, holding the entire state back, and exacerbating the extreme inequality between Baltimore City and, literally, the rest of the State.

I have seen first-hand the power of investing in quality public transportation. It is a boon for small business, improves corporations' chances of recruiting new graduates, and lifts the tide of all its citizens. Unfortunately the scale of the existing infrastructure and the scattershot state investments into Baltimore and Maryland's transit systems means that only a significant government investment into repairing, restoring, and building up how the region connects to each other - WITHOUT relying on private cars.

Climate change is accelerating. Inequality is skyrocketing. The unfortunate trend of elected officials' tendency to push large scale (high cost) infrastructure investments off in favor of re-election has exacerbated the problem and made it exponentially more expensive. You had chances over and over and over again to make repairs and build out at a lower cost, potentially extending the life of these systems. But ignoring these necessary costs has pushed us to a tipping point - one that can no longer be overlooked.

I venture to say that your chances of being elected are MUCH higher if you take the chance on investing in your constituents and listening to our needs and pleas for assistance. No more excuses. No more hiding behind worries and arguments about cost - particularly from leaders who have held office for many years. You had the opportunity to make changes early. Now we all are paying the bill.

Baltimore is on the brink of change - but we can't do it alone. We need support and investment at the state level. Our incredible delegates have wrangled a coalition of supporters surpassing my wildest dreams. The diversity of locations, classes, races, and organizations throwing their support behind this bill is not something to be overlooked. You have the power to transform Maryland for the better.

The Transit Safety & Investment Act will mandate that MTA's capital budget be at a level that allows it to address all of the needs identified and get the system back into a state of good repair so that it can operate safely and reliably.

I encourage a FAVORABLE report for this important legislation.

Jennifer Kessler Klump
Baltimore City
