



Maryland Conservation Council
Protecting Maryland's Natural Heritage Since 1969



January 26, 2021

Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 137: Maryland Transit Administration – Conversion to Zero-Emission Buses (Zero-Emission Bus Transition Act)

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee:

The undersigned organizations thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 137, the Zero-Emission Bus Transition Act. This bill is an important step in Maryland’s transition toward clean transportation. Additionally, it will reduce greenhouse gas pollution, save taxpayers’ dollars, and improve public health.

Senate Bill 137 would transition the Maryland Transit Administration’s (MTA) bus fleet to Zero-Emission buses over time. Starting in FY 2023, the bill prohibits MTA from entering into new contracts to purchase buses that are not Zero-Emission. The bill specifies several important measures to implement this change-over, including a requirement for development of a plan for transitioning any state workers adversely affected by the change-over to similar roles with commensurate seniority, pay, and benefits. This bill will not disrupt any existing procurement contracts and will give MTA significant time to develop the infrastructure necessary to deploy Zero-Emission buses without disrupting existing service.

Greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector are the largest source of climate pollution in Maryland, accounting for approximately 40% of total greenhouse gas emissions in the state. And the vast majority of these emissions come from on-road sources. In order to meet our pollution reduction goals and flourish in today's economy, Maryland must transform its transportation sector into a sustainable system. Zero-Emission buses are an important step in this transformation. Every Zero-Emission bus can eliminate 1,690 tons of carbon dioxide over its 12-year plus lifespan. This is equivalent to taking 27 cars off the road.

Diesel emissions are the most harmful type of transportation emissions. Between 80% and 95% of the particulate matter in diesel soot is of "ultrafine" size, giving it the ability to penetrate deep into human lungs and enter the circulation system. Particulate matter is strongly associated with pulmonary and cardiovascular risk, and long-term mortality. Nitrogen oxides from fossil fuel combustion, including diesel exhaust, are the major precursors of ground level ozone, which is an important trigger of asthma attacks. By eliminating diesel emissions from buses in our neighborhoods and cities, we will benefit our communities by reducing health risks from air pollution and significantly reducing health care costs.

Zero-Emission buses can also deliver financial benefits over the life of a bus in fuel and maintenance savings. The Chicago Transit Authority's (CTA) rollout of two electric buses in 2014 was one of the first major tests of electric bus technology in a cold winter climate. The vehicles have performed well, even under extreme temperatures, while saving the CTA more than \$24,000 each year in fuel costs and \$30,000 each year in maintenance costs. In Maryland, Frederick County has found similar results, with reported savings of more than \$50,000 per year per bus over the diesel models. By switching to electric buses, the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) can recoup its initial investment in approximately 5 years and continue saving throughout the remaining years the buses will be in operation (buses usually run at least 12 years).

Lastly, there are two other important issues we want to highlight. First, protecting MTA's current workforce is an essential element of the change-over, as the bill recognizes. In developing the bill-mandated worker "transitioning" plan, MTA should, as needed, provide retraining to its workers. We believe that the term "transitioning" is broad enough to include retraining. However, if it would be helpful to spell this out, we would support an amendment to clarify this.

Second, in developing its bill-mandated "schedule for converting [MTA's] transit bus fleet to Zero-emission buses exclusively," MTA should not reduce its service levels based on the change-over. We think this is implicit in the bill, since it in no way authorizes MTA to reduce service levels specifically because of the change-over to Zero-emission buses. However, again, if it would be helpful to spell this out, we would support an amendment to clarify this.

Now is the time to start transitioning MTA's diesel bus transit fleet to Zero-Emission buses to meet our carbon emissions goals, save safe taxpayers' dollars, and improve public health. We strongly urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 137.

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