



January 28, 2021

**Testimony on SB 137 –  
Zero-Emission Bus Transition Act**

**Position: Favorable**

Dear Chairperson Pinsky and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 137, the Zero-Emission Bus Transition Act. The Labor Network for Sustainability (LNS) supports this bill as a necessary step in the transition to a clean transportation system and one that strikes the right balance between fiscal responsibility and addressing the urgent climate and public health crises.

Emissions from transportation account for 40% of greenhouse gas emissions in the State and on-road vehicles are responsible for the greatest share of these emissions. Additionally, other toxic emissions from fossil fuel powered vehicles pollute our air and are associated with significant pulmonary and cardiovascular risk, including asthma. Preliminary research suggests that people living in communities with significant exposure to air pollutants have increased risk of hospitalization or even death if exposed to COVID-19. A Harvard study found that long-term exposure to an additional microgram per cubic meter of fine particulate matter was associated with an 8% increase in death rates from COVID. Transitioning to zero emissions buses is a public health imperative.

Senate Bill 137 would require that starting in 2023, MTA would be prohibited from entering into contracts for the procurement of buses that are not zero emissions. This allows MTA to transition away from diesel buses in a planned, orderly way. MTA would have ample time to invest in necessary charging infrastructure and to appropriately train bus operators and maintenance employees on the new technology. Zero emissions bus technology has already been shown to meet the demands of transit systems and is improving daily. By delaying the requirement to purchase zero emissions vehicles, MTA can take advantage of these improvements while planning for the transition.

We also applaud the bill's recognition that technological changes can negatively impact workers and the protections it incorporates to address potential disruptions. The bill ensures that workers will not suffer displacement or lose wages or benefits as a result of the transition. Again, by delaying the start of the procurement requirement to 2023, MTA can study and implement any necessary worker transition measures. That said, we support clarifying the "transition" plan language in the bill to ensure that it includes necessary retraining of workers who operate and maintain MTA buses. MTA can learn lessons from other jurisdictions who are already making the transition away from diesel buses about how best to train workers and avoid any potential problems.

Delaying the bill's start date to 2023 also delays the benefits associated with zero emissions vehicles, but it does address any immediate fiscal impact that such purchases may have. The purchase price of electric buses is currently greater than that of diesel buses but that cost differential is decreasing almost daily and at a faster rate than experts had projected. Moreover, savings from gasoline and maintenance make zero emissions buses cheaper over the vehicle life span. Based on the experience of other jurisdictions, MTA can recoup its initial investment in approximately 5 years. And, by delaying the start of procurement contracts until 2023, the State will have no immediate fiscal impact while we weather the economic consequences associated with COVID.

Finally, transitioning to zero emissions buses must be seen as part of the overall necessary transition to a clean renewable economy. Maryland must make that transition as quickly as possible to address public health and climate crises. But, Maryland should also see the transition as an economic opportunity. Cities like Los Angeles and Chicago have used transit procurement to secure new bus and rail manufacturing facilities that create new quality jobs. Maryland can and should do the same.