

Thursday January 28, 2021

TO: Paul Pinsky, Chair of Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee and Committee Members

FROM: Caitlin Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation & Climate Policy Analyst

POSITION: Support SB 137 Maryland Transit Administration – Conversion to Zero-Emission Buses (Zero-Emission Bus Transition Act)

The Nature Conservancy (The Conservancy) supports SB 137 offered by Senator Zucker. SB 137 transitions the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) bus fleet to zero-emissions buses over time starting with the next procurement cycle in 2023. Beginning in FY 23, the MTA would be prohibited from entering into new procurement contracts for purchasing buses that are not zero-emission. It will not disrupt any currently existing procurement contracts and will allow significant time in order for MTA to develop the necessary infrastructure for deploying the zero-emission buses without disruptions in current bus service. The bill also lays out some additional key measures to ensure a smooth transition, including a requirement for the MTA to develop a plan for transitioning any state workers that are adversely impacted by the bus fleet conversion to similar or other positions of employment within the MTA or Maryland Department of Transportation that have commensurate seniority, pay, and benefits. It also requires reporting an estimate of expected carbon dioxide emissions reductions annually during the transition process, which will ensure that the intentions of this bill are realized.

The transportation sector is the largest contributor to climate change in our country, our region, and in Maryland. It accounts for approximately 40% of greenhouse gas emissions statewide, predominately from on-road sources. Gas-powered vehicles also emit air pollutants like particulate matter that harm pulmonary and cardiovascular health. Of the particulate matter that diesel-powered vehicles emit, 80%-95% is ‘ultrafine’ size, which has the ability to penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the circulation system. Nitrogen oxides from fossil fuel combustion, including diesel exhaust, are the major precursors of ground level ozone, which triggers asthma attacks. These dangerous health risks disproportionately impact Black and brown communities and low-income neighborhoods. Eliminating diesel emissions from MTA buses traversing our neighborhoods and cities will protect public health by reducing the health risks from air pollution and will also significantly reduce households’ healthcare costs.

Maryland has set ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change. Addressing the contributions our state transit system is currently making to the climate crisis is an important step toward achieving those goals. According to a 2018 article in *Mass Transit Magazine* titled “How Electric Vehicles Will Reshape Mass Transit,” a single zero-emission bus can eliminate 1,690 tons over carbon dioxide compared to a diesel-powered bus over a 12-year life span. We need to act now in order to meet our state climate goals and SB 137 moves us closer to reaching them.

We commend Senator Zucker on introducing this bill, which would improve environmental and public health in our state.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 137.