



Mayor and Council of Rockville
HB 116 Transportation – I-270 Commuter Bus Route Study
House Environment and Transportation Committee – January 19, 2021
SUPPORT with AMENDMENT

The Mayor and Council are thankful to Chair Barve and members of the Committee for the opportunity to share our perspective on HB 116 – Transportation – I-270 Commuter Bus Route Study. We are grateful to Delegate Palakovich Carr and Senator Young for their leadership in sponsoring the legislation.

Rockville supports this bill, as amended, which would require the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), by October 1, 2022, to establish a commuter bus route between the Shady Grove Metro in Montgomery County and Tysons, Virginia during peak service hours. A December 2020 study jointly conducted by the states of Maryland and Virginia identified eight viable commuter bus routes to serve Frederick and Montgomery Counties and northern Virginia. We strongly support the proposed route. It would provide enhanced transit options for Rockville and other central county residents, regional commuters, and visitors.

Rockville is adamantly opposed to the plans to widen I-270. The project will abut 9 city neighborhoods, severely impact others, and traverse the heart of our great city. Two Rockville bridges over I-270, that have no current access to I-270, are proposed to provide ramps to the toll lanes. This will increase traffic in Rockville, disrupt existing commuting patterns, and significantly increase the noise and environmental pollution already impacting our neighborhoods. Our bridges will likely also require more maintenance as a result of the increased traffic. Further, the DEIS does not address expected impacts to Rockville's waterways and stormwater management. The proposed roadway changes and increased runoff added to already undersized and deteriorated SHA pipes may overwhelm our storm drain system, increase our stream erosion, and cause other issues for the City. For all these reasons, we believe that it is imperative to pursue mass transit alternatives.

According to the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments (COG), 2020 was the best year on record for regional ozone levels. COG concluded there were several contributing factors, including COVID-19 restrictions, which resulted in reduced emissions, due to lower traffic, fuel and electricity consumption. While the region is still not in compliance with Federal ozone standards, increased mass transit opportunities would encourage further reductions in gas consumption and help to continue this positive environmental trend. The traffic on I-270 contributes to the region's greenhouse gas emissions. HB 116 would also help to support regional climate action efforts.

We recommend that MDOT review the times of availability for these commuter bus schedules, so that they can provide viable options for those who need consistent and reliable access. We also support requiring MDOT to consult with local governments, such as Rockville, and other stakeholders, in the development of the timeline and implementation of the commuter bus route.

This bill helps to fill the gaps in existing plans for traffic congestion relief in Maryland, supports economic development, creates the opportunity for more direct mass transit, and gets people out of cars and traffic, which is also good for the environment. We look forward to collaborating with you, and we strongly encourage you to support HB 116, as amended, and to move the bill to the full House.