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**Committee:** Finance  
**Testimony on:** SB869 - “Statewide Transit Plan - Western Maryland MARC Rail Extension Study”  
**Position:** Support  
**Hearing Date:** March 10, 2021

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports SB869, which would require the Department of Transportation (DOT) to conduct a study on the feasibility, including the cost, of extending Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) rail service to western Maryland. The study findings and recommendations would need to be reported to the Governor and General Assembly by July 1, 2023, and the Maryland Transit Administration would need to incorporate the recommendations of the study into the Statewide Transit Plan.

The bill specifies the study would: examine existing commuter rail facilities in the state and current transportation options in western Maryland; explore up to three potential routes for expanding rail service to Western Maryland; identify the possibilities and challenges to establishing and operating MARC service in western Maryland; and determine the public transportation needs of Allegany and Washington Counties. The study also would: perform a cost analysis of the capital and operating costs to extend MARC rail service to western Maryland; study and compare potential ridership for all-day service and rush-hour only service; and explore the potential effect that extending MARC rail service to western Maryland would have on CSX.

There are numerous reasons why extending MARC to western Maryland should be studied. Our state needs new, fast, reliable regional mass transit to improve mobility choices for commuters and regional travelers. Commuter rail is efficient, would reduce traffic on existing roads and highways, and would greatly lessen the need to expand highways. Also, extending MARC to western Maryland would encourage economic development along its path, especially transit-oriented development at its stops.

Another major benefit of extending MARC rail service to western Maryland is that it would enable more people to take MARC and leave their cars at home, which would lessen the amount of air pollution emitted from tailpipes. The transportation sector is Maryland’s number one generator of greenhouse gas as well as other health-damaging toxic emissions, so the more people use transit and not their cars, the better it is for the environment and our health.

We commend the sponsor for agreeing to an amendment specifying the study would also examine the agreements between CSX and the Commonwealth of Virginia to expand rail service. Our Governor and DOT have consistently said for years that MARC expansion was virtually impossible in Maryland because CSX, on whose tracks MARC service runs, was unwilling to negotiate expansion of MARC service. However, what has happened in Virginia shows CSX is willing to negotiate commuter train service expansion, so we need to understand what approaches have worked in Virginia.

In summary, a study to determine the feasibility and cost of extending MARC rail service to western Maryland is warranted because of the many benefits such a project would bring. We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on this bill.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.