



Testimony in Support of SB 869 Western Maryland Rail Transit - Study

Presented by Benjamin Ross, Chair

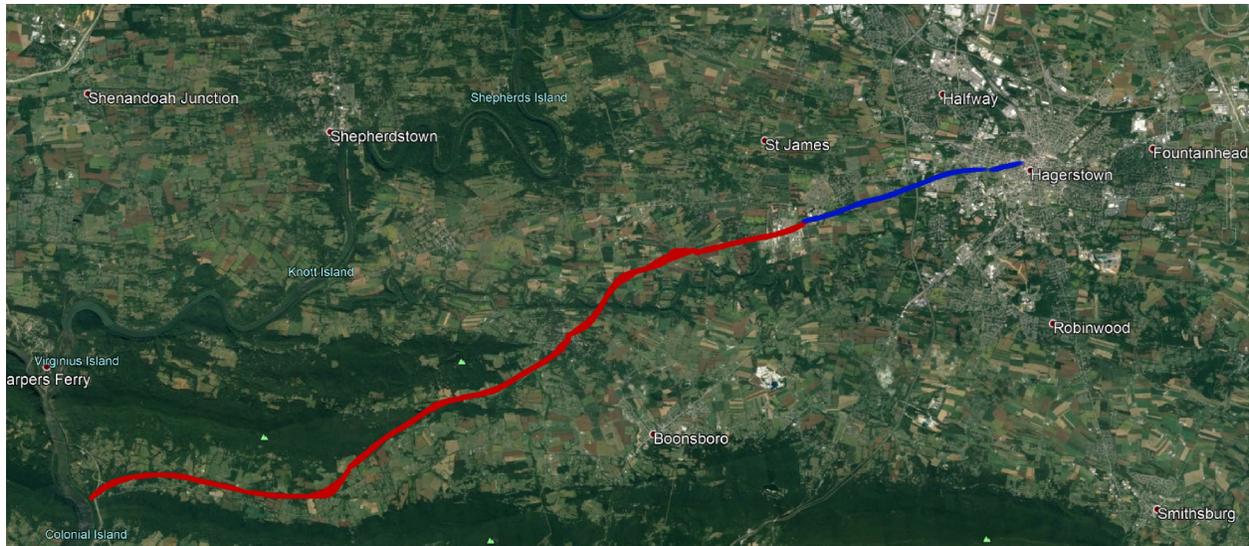
March 10, 2021

Western Maryland could benefit enormously from MARC trains. Commuters now traveling to Montgomery County and D.C. would be spared long, expensive and tiring commutes. And in today's economy, rail transit is a key to local prosperity. The construction cranes around Metro stations and future Purple Line stations in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties show the effect.

There is a growing likelihood of a large Federal infrastructure program, with a strong emphasis on rail transport. Western Maryland, where cities like Hagerstown and Brunswick grew up around the rail yards, is well poised to benefit from these investments. We need to position our state to take full advantage of this opportunity.

Senate Bill 869 would require the Department of Transportation to study alternative routes for MARC extension into Western Maryland and estimate their costs and ridership. This is a necessary first step to identify where investments will be most productive.

One promising alternative could potentially bring MARC to Hagerstown at a surprisingly low cost. This route was outlined in 2009 by Ed Tennyson, the now-deceased former Pennsylvania Deputy Secretary of Transportation who led the construction of light rail lines in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and the passenger rail tunnel through downtown Philadelphia. It follows a mostly abandoned B&O branch from Hagerstown to Weverton. From Hagerstown, the trains could potentially continue on existing tracks westward.



Approximate route of rail right of way. Existing tracks blue; abandoned section red.

The obstacles that drive up the costs of rail construction elsewhere appear to be largely absent here:

- A freight track in good condition already runs from downtown Hagerstown past I-70. Thus there will be little or no construction work in built-up areas.
- The right of way is largely intact; major regrading will not be needed.
- Existing bridges on I-70, MD 67, and US 340 pass over the right of way. The only significant bridge needed is a trestle over Antietam Creek.
- Most of the right of way is reportedly owned by the Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources.

As a first step, rush-hour MARC trains that currently terminate in Brunswick could continue to Hagerstown. Implementation of the 2007 MARC Growth and Investment Plan would make possible all-day service running on both weekdays and weekends.

Before any definite commitments are made, study is needed to compare this route with other alternatives and determine what is most feasible and cost-effective. That is what SB 869 would do. We urge you to give it a favorable report.