
March 10, 2021

The Honorable Delores G. Kelley
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis Maryland 21401

RE: Letter of Information – Senate Bill 869 – State Transit Plan – Western Maryland MARC Rail Extension Study

Dear Chair Kelley and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on Senate Bill 869 but offers the following information for the Committee’s consideration.

Senate Bill 869 requires MDOT Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT MTA) to study and report the feasibility of the expansion of Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) rail service to Western Maryland. The feasibility study, in conjunction with various stakeholders, is required to be completed by July 1, 2023 and incorporated into the Statewide Transit Plan.

Senate Bill 869 mandates several in-depth aspects of a feasibility study including the following: a review of existing conditions and needs, exploring up to three potential routes to expand into Western Maryland, identifying potential stops and estimating ridership by stop, analyzing rush-hour and all-day service, developing recommendations for start and end points, and identifying possibilities and challenges to establish Western Maryland MARC service. Senate Bill 869 also requires extensive public outreach and a study of the public transit needs of Allegany and Washington County in the vicinity of interstates I-70 and I-81.

The requirements of Senate Bill 869, estimated to cost \$2 million over the course of two years, are duplicative of the Statewide Transit Plan and the State Rail Plan. The Statewide Transit Plan is underway by MDOT MTA and has included extensive outreach to local stakeholders around the State, looking at service needs and gaps in an effort to address long-term transit needs statewide over the next 50 years, and is addressing part of this legislation by examining existing transit in the State and in Western Maryland. In developing this, MDOT and MDOT MTA staff are engaging with riders, the general public, and key stakeholders.

Further, CSX Transportation (CSX) collects and retains their own data; MDOT MTA cannot estimate potential impacts Senate Bill 869 would have on them at this time, and it is possible that CSX would not be open to the service outlined in Senate Bill 869.

MDOT’s capital program currently includes: the submission of priority letters from all counties, the annual Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) tour (a practice that has been in place for over 100 years), and a prioritization of needs. Projects are prioritized based on the State’s goals, the availability of funding, and the scoring system established by Chapter 30 of 2017.

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Legislatively selecting a local project to receive funding does not take into consideration the collaborative process used to develop the CTP. Requiring funding of certain projects through legislative mandate without regard to total cost, constructability, or prioritization of Statewide needs sets a precedent that undermines the CTP development process.

Lastly, the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) was established to provide flexibility in funding projects across the entire State. Designating portions of the TTF for specific purposes restricts MDOT's flexibility to distribute funds between the transportation business units to fund the most pressing capital expansion and system preservation projects.

The TTF is a non-lapsing, special fund that provides funding for transportation and consists of tax and fee revenues, operating revenues, bond proceeds, and fund transfers. Any statutory diversion of funds will negatively impact the ability of MDOT to issue bonds backed by TTF revenues and diminish any investment income generated by the TTF fund balance. Redirecting these funds will require other studies and construction-ready projects already included in the CTP to go unfunded. MDOT and MDOT MTA are supportive of commuter rail expansion but cautions that recovery from commuter rail ridership declines due to COVID-19 will impact the proposed timeline and financial capacity for actions recommended in any plans or studies. Ensuring and prioritizing stability of existing core service will be key to achieving equitable outcomes for the state, and for future expansion to succeed.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee consider this information when deliberating Senate Bill 869.

Respectfully submitted,

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