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January 27, 2021

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

***RE: Letter of Information – Senate Bill 97 – Purple Line Marketing Act***

Dear Chair Kelley and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on Senate Bill 97 but offers the following information for the Committee’s consideration.

Senate Bill 97 requires the MDOT Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT MTA), alongside Purple Line Transit Partners (PLTP), Amtrak, the Washington Area Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA), local governments, development agencies, and other stakeholders, to develop and implement a marketing plan that will “1) generate interest in the Purple Line before the start of operations and 2) promote the use of the Purple Line after the start of operations with the goal of maximizing ridership.” The bill prescribes several steps in the marketing plan, including the use of marketing media, identification of interconnectivity to other modes of transportation in the area as well as bicycle and pedestrian access, and provision of information to the public on the Purple Line and the various systems to which it is connected. Furthermore, the bill allocates \$500,000 in funding in fiscal years 2022 and 2023 for the development and implementation of the marketing plan. Finally, the bill requires MDOT MTA to report on the progress of the marketing plan in October of 2021.

The Purple Line is a 16-mile light rail line that will extend from Bethesda in Montgomery County to New Carrollton in Prince George's County. It will provide a direct connection to the Metrorail Red, Green, and Orange Lines at Bethesda, Silver Spring, College Park, and New Carrollton. The Purple Line will also connect to MARC, Amtrak, and local bus services.

With the recent Purple Line settlement agreement, PLTP will issue a solicitation for a new design-build contractor to complete the Purple Line project. This solicitation process is expected to take approximately nine months. A new, revised in-service date for the Purple Line cannot be established until the new design-build contractor is selected and a construction schedule is confirmed. Without an in-service date, appropriating funds as early as FY 2022 would be extremely premature. Additionally, it is too soon to know whether the \$1 million over two years allocated in the bill would be too much or too little for an adequate marketing plan of the Purple Line.

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Preparing and implementing an action plan too far in advance presents challenges to its effectiveness for a variety of reasons. These challenges include the risk that the plan could fail to take advantage of future events that might have a substantial impact on the success of the marketing of the Purple Line. In addition, promoting the many advantages of utilizing the Purple Line well in advance of its opening risks missing the opportunity to fully take advantage of the news cycle. In other words, marketing the advantages of utilizing the Purple Line too early can make it sound like “old news” once it has finally opened for revenue service.

As with any major project such as the Purple Line, MDOT MTA will develop a marketing and communications plan that works in concert with local partners, businesses, and other stakeholders and that builds on synergies between MDOT MTA and MDOT’s other Transportation Business Units. Timing is critical to ensure that partner and audience interest in the message does not peak prematurely.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests that the Committee consider this information while deliberating Senate Bill 97.

Respectfully submitted,

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