



## **Testimony in Support of HB 778 With Amendment**

**House Appropriations Committee, February 17, 2022**

The Maryland Transit Opportunities Coalition, a state-wide coalition of transit riders, transit advocates, and transit workers, supports House Bill 778.

In today's economy, transit is the key to economic prosperity. This can be seen in the construction cranes that surround Metro stations in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. It can be seen in the ambitious plans to redevelop the Penn Station area in Baltimore and in city residents' demands for better bus access to jobs. It can be seen in the demand for light rail in Southern Maryland and for more MARC train service in far-flung areas of the state.

For the last hundred years Maryland and the United States have pursued an automobile-first transportation policy. The result is a severely imbalanced transport network that hobbles our economy and degrades the quality of life by leaving too many Marylanders with little choice but to drive on congested highways. Our economic future rests on our ability to free our citizens from this burden.

House Bill 778 will set our MARC rail system on a course to become a true regional rail network, connecting nine counties and Baltimore City. Our ultimate goal should be trains that run all day all the way from Elkton to Hagerstown, and on into nearby destinations in Virginia, West Virginia, and Delaware.

We request one minor amendment. In section 3.711(C)(5)(I), the words "or on or around the Barnesville hill" should be inserted after "between Rockville and Germantown." It is necessary for this section to identify specific areas for the initial section of new track, in order to ensure that planning focuses on improvements that are feasible and affordable. The 2007 MARC Growth and Investment Plan placed the first segment of Brunswick Line third track around Rockville. However, our members with knowledge of the route suggest that right-of-way will be easier to obtain on the Barnesville hill and that a passing track there will add more freight capacity. We recommend that the bill give MTA flexibility to choose either of these sections, after getting input from CSX.