



Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

Testimony to the House Appropriations Committee
HB1336: Greater Baltimore Transit Governance and Funding Commission
Position: Favorable

March 10, 2022

The Honorable Maggie McIntosh, Chair
Appropriations Committee
Room 121, HOB
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Appropriations Committee

Honorable Chair McIntosh and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition (MCRC) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances economic rights and financial inclusion for Maryland consumers through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 8,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

We are writing today in support of HB1336.

Leaders in the Greater Baltimore region are seeking to reform the way public transportation is governed and financed. Structural challenges in the current centralized governance structure of the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) make maintaining and improving transit performance difficult. The result is an unreliable public transportation system that further disadvantages many users already negatively impacted by poverty and structural racism, discourages ridership growth and puts the region at a competitive disadvantage compared to other metropolitan areas with robust, reliable public transit.

Baltimore City has the most expensive auto insurance of any county in Maryland. These high costs make it extremely difficult for low-income families to reach high paying jobs. Without a car and with a limited public transit system, it is nearly impossible to achieve economic mobility. In 2019, Maryland ranked among the bottom ten states for quality of state transportation infrastructure.¹ Even in regions with strong transit systems, many low-income families have trouble reaching jobs for which they are qualified. Some are forced to turn down good positions in favor of lower paying ones with transit access.

The lack of local participation in planning and funding decisions has been a contributing factor to ongoing maintenance problems (MTA buses and trains have some of the highest breakdown rates in the nation) and lack of significant expansion or improvement (last expansion of the system was in 1997). Of

¹ <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/infrastructure/transportation>



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the 50 largest transit agencies in the country, the MTA is the only one that is part of a state department of transportation without a board of directors and where decision-making lies solely with a governor.

HB1336 creates a governance and funding commission representative of key regional and state stakeholders to answer key questions on how to create a new Baltimore Regional Transportation Authority. Informed by the commission's findings, the General Assembly will then be able to draft authorizing legislation to make that authority a reality. We believe that reforming the current system and creating that authority is a critical step for improving and expanding transit service, increasing oversight and accountability, and bringing additional local and federal funds for transit to the region.

For these reasons, we support HB1336 and urge a favorable report.

Best,
Isadora Stern
Policy Associate