

HB1419_MDSierraClub_fwa - 11March2022.pdf

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Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 1419 – “Highways – Proposed Expressway Expansion – Rail Expansion”

Position: Favorable with amendment

Hearing Date: March 11, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB 1419 with the addition of one amendment. The bill would require the Maryland Department of Transportation to evaluate the use of adjacent State rights-of-way for rail transit of any kind during the initial project planning phase for a proposed expansion of an expressway to add capacity.

We support greater use of rail transit in our state for a number of reasons and believe locating it on State rights-of-way adjacent to expressways makes sense because doing so would eliminate a number of obstacles that often are encountered when looking to expand infrastructure to better serve the public. Rail transit is a very cost-effective way for people to travel because it can carry so many people at one time compared to people driving on expressways, often one person per vehicle. Traveling by rail avoids getting caught in traffic congestion on expressways that is not decreased for long when expressways are expanded. Rail transit better serves lower-income individuals and many young people today who do not own a car but need reliable transportation to access jobs, housing, medical services, shopping, recreation, and entertainment.

Rail transit is also far more environmentally-friendly than driving. Transportation is now the largest contributor to climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions in Maryland, with most of that pollution coming from the tailpipes of gas and diesel-fueled cars and trucks on the road today. Vehicle tailpipes are also a major source of toxic emissions that are damaging to human health.

For the reasons stated above and others, we believe adding rail transit on State rights-of-way adjacent to expressways would be a far superior way to add capacity than actually expanding expressways. Consequently, we propose adding language to the proposed bill to specify that when an evaluation of adding rail transit on a State rights-of-way adjacent to an expressway determines that rail is feasible and, when federal grants, subsidies, loans and other financial considerations are taken into account, rail transit would have comparable or lower long term cost per traveler than expanding the expressway, rail transit shall be pursued as the preferred alternative to expanding the expressway.

Passage of HB 1419 containing the amendment described above would be good for public health and our environment. We urge a favorable report on this bill with the amendment we propose.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.