



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Sponsor Testimony in Support of HB141
Equity in Transportation Sector - Guidelines and Analyses
Delegate Sheila Ruth

January 27, 2022

Transportation is not only a means to get from place to place: it plays a key role in economic development, health, and the environment. But as with so many things, the benefits and consequences of the state's transportation decisions do not fall equally on everyone. Maryland has a long history of making transportation decisions that disparately impact the health, safety, and economic security of people who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color, low income, or disabled. Some examples:

- In 2015, Governor Hogan canceled Baltimore's planned Red Line, calling it a "wasteful boondoggle." If transit equity and cost-benefit analyses had been done, they would have revealed that far from being a "boondoggle," the Red Line would have been an investment that yielded a beneficial return on investment many times over, including an estimated 13,000 jobs and \$6.5 billion in economic development that would have been life changing for the Black communities in West and East Baltimore.
- Highways are often built through Black neighborhoods. These highways contribute to health disparities with smog, often divide communities, and create safety hazards for bicyclists and pedestrians.
- The recent decision to eliminate cash tolls combined with the higher cost for tolls billed by mail - which don't require an account - than the rates for EZ-Pass - which do - create a disproportionate burden on unbanked low-income drivers.
- Metered toll lanes create a disproportionate burden on drivers who cannot afford the higher tolls and thus have to sit in traffic, taking time away from jobs and family and increasing smog exposure.
- In September 2020, MDOT MTA proposed cuts that would have heavily impacted the majority Black core LocalLink bus service more than the majority white commuter rail. Thankfully, the cuts were canceled due to public outcry, but if equity was a central part of MDOT planning, those cuts would never have been proposed, at least not in the form they were announced.
- Disabled people who rely on the MobilityLink paratransit service for transportation have experienced long delays in the past year, often several hours or more. In some cases people have been left stranded. These delays have a major impact on people who rely on MobilityLink for access to work, school, or doctors' appointments.

The Federal Transit Administration Title VI requirements should prevent disparate impact in transit, but they're inconsistently enforced, don't cover other transportation like highways, and only require analysis after transportation decisions are made. We need to make sure that Maryland's transportation decisions are made with equity in the forefront, rather than as an afterthought.

HB141 makes equity a core part of all transportation planning statewide. It adds equity as a goal in the Maryland Transportation Plan, requires reporting on racial and ethnic disparities and impact on persons with disabilities in the annual Attainment Report, creates a Commission on Transportation Equity, and ensures a transit equity analysis, cost benefit analysis, and outreach to impacted communities are done before any major service change or reduction or cancellation of a capital expansion project exceeding certain thresholds.

This bill was introduced in 2021 as HB1204. Since then, I have worked extensively with MDOT and MDOT MTA to refine the bill in ways that will work within their current processes to reduce the burden on MDOT and bring down the fiscal impact. The current fiscal note is significantly reduced from 2021, and additional amendments that I'm submitting after further discussions with MDOT should bring it down even more.

Everyone deserves fair transportation, and the benefits it brings to communities, regardless of race, ethnicity, language, income, zip code, disability status, or age. MDOT MTA has been working on equity initiatives, and I appreciate their work. But more is needed to create a truly systematic, statewide approach to equity, and to codify it into state law where it's not subject to changes in leadership. I ask for a favorable report for HB141.