

Maryland's Transportation Policy Should Deliberately Aim for Shared Opportunity

Position Statement in Support of Senate Bill 23

Given before the Senate Finance Committee

Modern, effective transportation networks are an essential part of our state's economic backbone as well as an important driver of economic opportunity. Smart, robust investments in a multimodal transportation system can support sustainable, widely shared prosperity. On the other hand, neglecting our transportation systems or choosing transportation investments poorly can weaken our economy and hamper opportunity. Policymakers' choices over the last several decades have often pulled us in the wrong direction, leading to long commutes and diminished opportunities for Marylanders of color. Equity analysis – a deliberate, data-informed examination of a policy's impacts across race, ethnicity, and other dimensions of dominance and marginalization – can be an effective tool to ensure our public policies create opportunities for all communities to succeed. **The Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports Senate Bill 23** because an intentional focus on equity will steer our state's transportation investments toward greater opportunity for Marylanders of color and Marylanders with disabilities.

Neighborhood segregation and racial income disparities—both the products of centuries of racist policy choices—make transportation policy in Maryland unavoidably racialized.ⁱ

- Decades of deliberate racial segregation continue to limit the options available to Marylanders of color when deciding where to live, including families with moderate or high incomes. For example, Black families with annual income between \$100,000 and \$125,000 on average live in neighborhoods with lower incomes and higher poverty rates than white families with income between \$60,000 and \$75,000.
- Along with other factors, neighborhood segregation limits the transportation options and ultimately the economic opportunities available to Marylanders of color, and Black Marylanders in particular.

Underinvesting in public transportation is one of the most important ways policymakers have tilted the scales and reduced opportunity through transportation policy.ⁱⁱ

- About one in six Black workers in Maryland take public transportation to get to work, compared to only one in 20 white workers. Workers in other racial and ethnic groups are about twice as likely to commute via transit as their white counterparts.
- On average, it takes transit commuters in Maryland just over 50 minutes to get to work each day, plus another 50 minutes to get back home. Average car commutes are a little over 30 minutes each way. Over the course of a year, this adds up to about a week of extra commuting time for a full-time worker.

- On average, workers in the Baltimore metro area can reach only 8% of jobs in the region by transit in one hour or less. In the year after the BaltimoreLink transit overhaul, the region saw the biggest drop in transit accessibility among the nation’s 50 largest metro areas.
- By car, 100% of jobs in the Baltimore region are accessible within an hour. In fact, there are more jobs within a 20-minute drive of an average Baltimore-area worker than within an hourlong transit ride.
- In the Washington, DC, metro area (including portions outside Maryland), workers can on average reach 10% of the region’s jobs in an hour via transit or 85% in an hour by car.

Senate Bill 23 would improve transportation equity – and ultimately economic opportunity – by requiring policymakers to consider equity in transportation planning:

- The bill requires the state’s periodic long-term transportation planning process (the Maryland Transportation Plan) to consider ways to improve equity, reduce racial disparities, and improve transportation access for Marylanders with disabilities.
- The bill creates a Commission on Transportation Equity with members representing the state’s executive and legislative branches, transit users, public health experts, labor, and racial, ethnic, and disability justice advocates. The commission’s purpose is to build expertise, gather public input, and advise the Department of Transportation on the equity impacts of policy choices.
- Beginning in fiscal year 2024, the bill requires equity analysis of any major proposal to change transit service or reduce or cancel a capital project. If the analysis finds that a proposal would harm communities of color or families with low incomes, the bill requires consideration of alternatives than would reduce this harm as well as a justification for any decision to proceed despite known harms. This analysis requires input from the Commission on Transportation Equity and from the public, and all findings must be published on the Department of Transportation website.

As legislators consider the implementation of equity analysis in our state, they do not have to look far for inspiration. Several states across the nation, including Connecticut, Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Oregon, have successfully instituted racial equity impact statements for various forms of legislation and policy proposals.

Maryland communities cannot thrive without effective transportation infrastructure, and *all* Maryland communities cannot thrive unless policymakers build and maintain that infrastructure with a focus on shared opportunity. Senate Bill 23 would ensure that this focus is built into our transportation planning processes.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Senate Finance Committee make a favorable report on Senate Bill 23.

See Page 3 for Equity Impact Analysis of Senate Bill 23.

Equity Impact Analysis: Senate Bill 23

Bill Summary

- The bill requires the state’s periodic long-term transportation planning process (the Maryland Transportation Plan) to consider ways to improve equity, reduce racial disparities, and improve transportation access for Marylanders with disabilities.
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Background

Multiple states, including Connecticut, Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Oregon, have successfully instituted racial equity impact statements for various forms of legislation and policy proposals.

Gov. Hogan in 2015 abruptly canceled the Red Line light rail project, which would have increased reliable transit access for east-west travel in Baltimore City, despite substantial evidence of disparate racial impacts. This action led to a complaint before the federal Department of Transportation, which the Trump administration dismissed without explanation, and scrutiny in the U.S. Senate.

Equity Implications

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Impact

Senate Bill 23 would likely **improve racial, ethnic, disability, and economic equity in Maryland.**

ⁱ See discussion in Christopher Meyer, *Budgeting for Opportunity* series, Maryland Center on Economic Policy, 2018, 2020, 2021, <https://www.mdeconomy.org/budgeting-for-opportunity/>

ⁱⁱ Statistics in bullet points discussed in detail in Christopher Meyer, “Budgeting for Opportunity: Maryland’s Workforce Development Policy Can Be a Tool to Remove Barriers and Expand Opportunity,” Maryland Center on Economic Policy, 2021, <http://www.mdeconomy.org/budgeting-for-opportunity-workforce/>