



**Testimony to the House Appropriations Committee
HB794: Baltimore Regional Transit Commission - Establishment
Position: Favorable**

February 21, 2023

The Honorable Ben Barnes, Chair
Appropriations Committee
Room 121, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Appropriations Committee

Honorable Chair Barnes and Members of the Committee:

Economic Action Maryland (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances financial justice and economic 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 HB794. The bill seeks to establish a commission 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 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.

HB794 creates a governance and funding commission composed of regional and state stakeholders to oversee and approve administration and budgets, exercise oversight of and engage in advocacy for the

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



Baltimore Region public transit systems maintained by the MVA, and engage the public and other nonprofit and civic foundations in the process. We believe that reforming the current system and creating the commission 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 HB794 and urge a favorable report.

Best,
Isadora Stern
Policy Manager