



## Testimony Presented to the House Appropriations Committee

### HB0341 - Transportation - Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs and Transportation Improvement Programs - Equity Impacts

**Sponsor: Delegate Lewis**

**Position: Informational**

This testimony is submitted in as information related to HB0341.

The Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC) is the council of governments serving the Baltimore region and the host of our region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Baltimore Regional Transportation Board (BRTB). MPO's are a creation of federal law and their main role is to help local governments in urbanized areas program their share of federal transportation dollars.

Our agency agrees with and understands the spirit of the legislation and we respectfully offer this informational testimony to provide context regarding the operational function of MPOs.

The rules governing MPOs are written by Congress and by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) at the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT). When state law contradicts these requirements, FHWA's typical guidance is to follow the federal regulations. These conflicts, while rare, can cause significant disruptions to the planning process when they occur. The Biden administration has proposed and introduced new rules about equity and transportation planning. The BRTB and MPOs around the country are working with our federal partners to implement these rules and incorporate them into our work.

The BRTB is currently in the midst of a project to "*develop a definition of transportation equity as related to disadvantaged communities, to identify best equity practices in transportation policies, programs and projects, and to make recommendations on policies and programs in the context of the Baltimore region to improve our current efforts and better promote transportation equity.*" This project was approved as part of our FY23 work program and it will conclude in the summer of 2023. The work product should prove useful to our shared interest in accurately measuring equity and using the data to improve



our program. We are happy to share the findings with our partners in State government and the legislature when the tool is complete.

The BRTB has also developed and utilizes a tool called the Vulnerable Population Index (VPI). The VPI is a nationally recognized tool that allows us to study how projects might impact populations ranging from people living in poverty, people without automobiles and minority populations. Initially developed as part of our duty to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the VPI will not be used to meet the new requirements being developed by USDOT. A public facing version of the VPI is found on our website – <https://www.baltometro.org/transportation/data-maps/vulnerable-populations-index>. Our technical staff uses a more sophisticated version of the tool to perform analysis of our entire plan and larger individual projects within it.

Equity analysis is an evolving and critical tool in transportation planning. The overall analysis of the TIP described in this legislation is consistent with work we currently do. The individual project analysis would need consistent definition throughout Maryland's MPO's. Multi-state MPOs will need to work through how this Maryland law might apply to their non-Maryland members. Additionally, new funding would be required to do the work. Currently, our TIP has 133 projects. An analysis of each project would, at a minimum, require 133 hours of staff time that is not currently budgeted for.