

Dear Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

I am a resident of District 46. I am a workforce development professional for the City of Baltimore and can personally testify to the importance of transportation equity to meeting our workforce needs. It is too hard for the working class to get to work in the City of Baltimore due to a history of white flight of both jobs and capital, followed by a failure of the state to provide access to these new richer whiter spaces by members of the working class of color. **I am testifying in support of House Bill 9, the Transportation Equity Act of 2023.**

There is an urgent need for greater transparency, accountability and community input at all levels of public transit planning and decision-making in Maryland. The Transportation Equity Act of 2023 will, at long last, bring the State into compliance with [Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act](#) by establishing a state-wide transportation equity analysis development, maintenance, review, and enforcement framework to ensure access to public transportation is statutorily guaranteed for *all* Marylanders, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or disability. In addition, HB 9 takes into account the DOT's [Order on Environmental Justice \(5610.2\)](#) that requires federally funded transportation projects to identify and address human health and environmental impacts within the minority and low-income communities that have historically been disproportionately adversely affected.

Although the Maryland legislature passed the Transit Equity Act in 2022 with resounding bipartisan support, the governor vetoed the bill. **This year, the Maryland legislature has the opportunity to reiterate its commitment to equity and basic civil rights in public transit by voting in favor of the Transit Equity Act of 2023.**

House Bill 9 will, among other things:

- Mandate equity be a primary consideration when any State transit plan, goal, or project is in development;
- Require MDOT-MTA conduct transit equity and cost-benefit analyses, community outreach, public hearings and reporting *before* any major service or project proposal, change, or cancellation;
- Alter the membership of the advisory committee to more accurately reflect impacted community members;
- Mandate the collection, analysis and annual reporting of data on racial disparities and disability access across all modes of public transit;

Maryland has a shamefully long history of racist transportation policies, from highways built through and dividing Black and Brown communities to the cancellation of the Red Line route – a proposed project that would have provided both urgently-needed access to jobs for residents in low-income, redlined communities in Baltimore, as well as extensive regional economy-transforming, transit-oriented-development (TOD). Another example demonstrating the need for decision-making oversight is the pandemic-era proposal by the MTA, in response to record low ridership, to eliminate 25 bus lines that primarily operated in mostly Black Baltimore neighborhoods. The MTA backed off its proposed cuts after widespread outcry, but HB 9 would establish more efficient, proactive decision-making by utilizing the results of the cost-benefit and equity analyses to identify and understand how such bus line cuts would have clearly, disproportionately impacted Black workers in Baltimore – *including Black essential workers* – who simply needed to get to their jobs.

Equitable transportation also plays a key role in dismantling systemic racism and building thriving communities by:

- Increasing access to good jobs, schools, education, health care, and healthy food;
- Providing incentives for community economic development;
- Reducing smog, air pollution, and heat islands, which disproportionately impact Black communities;
- Setting right years of disinvestment that have hurt all Baltimoreans and all Marylanders.

In effect, HB 9 mandates that MTA-MDOT use transparency, accountability, and public input at all stages of projects, policies, and decision-making in order to guarantee full and equitable access to public transit services for all Marylanders, *including* full and equitable access to this basic public service long denied to majority Black communities, low-income communities, and disabled folks.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote in support of House Bill 9.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

John Ford
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