

Testimony on SB 412 – Maryland Rail Investment Act of 2023

Senate Finance Committee

Position: Favorable with Amendments

February 21, 2023

Cheryl Cort, Policy Director

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 412, the Maryland Rail Investment Act of 2023. Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization advocating for walkable, bikeable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for the Washington, DC region to grow and provide opportunities for all.

We support the Maryland Rail Investment Act of 2023, which would establish the Maryland Rail Authority (MRA) to fund and implement rail and transit projects through the use of revenue from Maryland's existing toll facilities, in excess of road maintenance needs.

Importantly, the new Authority would be able to issue its own bonds, and could be responsible for financing, construction, or operation of new rail and transit projects. Marylanders have been waiting many years for a more extensive and improved rail system, but so far the state has failed to deliver on its plans for extending MARC service; replacing the B&P tunnel; extending rapid transit to Southern Maryland; and providing more frequent, reliable service on existing commuter rail lines. Investments in rail and other transit are also investments in economic growth, transit equity, and green infrastructure.

Optimal tolling — an approach adopted by New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania — is key to realize the full costs of driving and combating climate change through more efficient transportation modes. We have seen the limitations of heavily relying on a private partner through the Purple Line process, and it is time to try a different approach.

We recommend amending SB 412 to state that the MRA could participate in the financing of the Baltimore Red Line, but that the authority to supervise its planning, design, engineering, construction, operation, and maintenance should remain with the Maryland Transit Administration. Should there be legislation to reform the governance of the MTA's core services it can address the authority over the Red Line project.

Overall, we support this legislation and urge the committee to support a robust, reliable transportation system by giving SB 412 a favorable report.

Thank you for your consideration.