



Testimony Presented to the Senate Finance Committee

SB0876 - Transportation –Baltimore Regional Transit Commission – Establishment

Sponsor: Senator Washington

Position: Favorable

This testimony is submitted by the members of the Baltimore Metropolitan Council's Transit Governance and Funding Workgroup (TGFW). The TGFW was appointed by the Baltimore Metropolitan Council's Board of Directors to identify meaningful recommendations to develop a more effective and inclusive regional transit system in the Baltimore region. The TGFW met from August through December, 2022. We are pleased to support SB0876.

Please note that this legislation works in concert with SB0465, which authorizes a formal study of a standalone transit authority for the Baltimore region. SB0465 was heard by Appropriations. These bills mirror two of the recommendations from our report published in January 2023.

The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) is the nation's only large transit agency that is not governed by a board, commission or council. Over time, this structure has allowed for little accountability; fostered disinvestment in the system; and allowed for the cancellation of the Red Line with no input from the residents and local governments of the Baltimore region.

Further, the lack of coordination between state and local government plans regarding transit, land use, economic development - and even traffic operations - have resulted in a system that is not aligned with providing convenient and equitable connections for riders to regional job centers, schools, recreational activities and healthcare facilities.

These bills, intended to work in concert, will establish a working partnership between State and Local government and help our region develop a world-class system that best serves the needs of current and future transit riders. SB0876 establishes a regional transit commission to implement much needed public accountability for public transportation in our region. SB0465 brings appropriate State and Local government parties to the table to consider whether transit in Baltimore should remain a function of the State or move to an independent agency.

SB0876 would create an immediate partnership between State and Local government and provide much needed public accountability by creating a targeted and limited governing structure over MTA. The BRTC will have two limited, but specifically targeted powers. (1) Approval of the MTA's budget for Baltimore's core service area, to ensure necessary and appropriate funding. (2)



Approval of the Central Maryland Regional Transit Plan implementation and updates - to make sure we are maintaining the system and planning for the future. The BRTC gives local government a formal voice in transit, as a partner to MTA, for the first time in over 50 years.

SB0465 is the definitive study of whether the Baltimore region should have an independent transit authority. This question has been the subject of conversation since the cancellation of the Red Line. While an authority offers many benefits, there are complex questions that must be answered before undertaking such a substantial step. Issues such as financial considerations, current labor and service contracts, ownership of physical assets, board structure must be considered before determining whether any gained benefits are worth the potential risks and costs. Commencing this study now, within the term of the new administration, provides an opportunity to act on any recommendations and next steps resulting from this study.

Together, these bills would provide a transformational opportunity to include local voices, coordinate transit and land use decisions, and better meet the needs of current and future riders throughout the greater Baltimore region.

We strongly encourage **FAVORABLE** report for **SB0876**. Thank you for your consideration.

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