



TESTIMONY FOR HB0491

Transportation – Commission to Study Establishing a Baltimore Regional Transit Authority

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Bridges

Committee: Appropriations

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB0491 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Baltimore needs its own Transportation Authority. The transportation challenges in our largest city do not mirror any of the challenges that we have with the rest of the state. Additionally, Baltimore has been given few resources and little support in trying to resolve its transportation problems. Baltimore has been left with an underfunded, 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.

Moreover, 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.

HB0491 establishes a commission to study the creation of a Baltimore Regional Transportation Authority. The report from the study is due October 31, 2024. Informed by the commission's findings, the General Assembly will then be able to draft authorizing legislation to make that Regional Authority a reality. We believe that reforming the current system and creating that Regional Authority 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.

We strongly support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.

