



Statement of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689

HB 198– Maryland Metro Funding Act of 2024

January 23rd, 2024

TO: The Honorable Ben Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee
FROM: Matthew Girardi, Political & Communications Director, ATU Local 689

ATU Local 689 strongly supports HB 198 and urges the House Appropriations Committee to issue a favorable report. This bill is a necessary measure for ensuring the stability of the State of Maryland and the whole Washington DC metropolitan region by allowing for necessary funds to flow to WMATA.

At Local 689, we represent over 15,000 transit workers and retirees throughout the Washington DC Metro Area performing many skilled transportation crafts for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), MetroAccess, DASH, and DC Streetcar among others. Our union helped turn low-wage, exploitative transit jobs into transit careers. We became an engine for the middle-class of this region.

Likewise, 9,000 of our members are hardworking WMATA employees. Even as our region has faced unprecedented challenges over the past few years, transit workers have faithfully stayed on the job and kept our region afloat. They showed up every day during the worst pandemic in a century, with some developing long COVID or even dying from COVID related complications. Additionally, they have endured increases in violence both towards themselves and their riders. They are friends, neighbors, and pillars of the community around this region. However, these frontline heroes are today in danger.

Going into Fiscal Year 2025, Metro states that it faces an estimated \$750 million gap. Should that need go unmet, proposals have been floated where 108 of the 135 Metrobus routes would be eliminated or cut; where Metrorail would run less frequently and less often with entire stations being shuttered; where fares would increase 25%; and where over 2,300 full time jobs would be cut, including highly demanded CDL drivers.

Local 689 supports HB 198 because it would be beyond cruel to have our members repaid for all their hard work with pink slips, worse healthcare, and stolen retirements. Metro's stated budget gap has developed because the model that it had run pre-Covid 19 is not working. Since early 2020, ridership has decreased across all mass transit not only here but across the country. Although the numbers are trending in the right direction, fare revenues have not returned to the levels they were at in 2019. Moreover, historic inflation pushed up costs and emergency federal funding infusions that had papered over the structural deficit are set to run out.

This bill is a commonsense adjustment to lift the 3% cap in growth in operating expenditures to allow for the \$150 million wisely requested by Governor Moore to flow to Metro. The 3% cap has not worked for a variety of reasons. A transit agency must be able to meet operating expenses at or above the rate of inflation to maintain the same level of service year over year. Covid-related inflation meant that effectively, Maryland is indexed to a world and a rate that no longer exists. Now, we ask all of you to rebaseline, fully fund Metro, and not allow this budget to be balanced on the backs of working class people, whether they be Metro workers or the riding public.

We thank Delegates Korman and Lewis for introducing this necessary measure and urge the committee to issue a favorable report.