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February 28, 2024

SUPPORT: SB681 - Major Highway Capacity Expansion Projects - Impact Assessments and Mitigation Plans (Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024)

Chairs Beidle and Guzzone and Members of the Committees:

Maryland LCV supports SB681 - Major Highway Capacity Expansion Projects - Impact Assessments and Mitigation Plans (Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024), and we thank Senator Lam for his leadership on this issue.

Transportation remains the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in our state, and the associated pollution disproportionately impacts communities of color and low-wealth communities. The detrimental effects of tailpipe emissions, filled with carcinogens, particulate matter, and soot, significantly increases the lifetime risk of cancer, incidents of asthma, and heart disease.

On December 28, 2023, The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) released Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan, outlining a comprehensive framework to reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 60% by 2031, with a net-zero target by 2045. The plan emphasizes the need to transition a significant portion of the light-duty fleet to Zero Emission Vehicles by 2031. To achieve this goal, the Plan outlines a series of recommendations including reducing Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) per capita by 20% by 2050.

SB 681 would require that the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and regional transportation planning agencies measure and mitigate any increases in climate pollution and VMT stemming from highway expansion projects exceeding \$10 million. Potential mitigation measures might include enhancing public transportation, constructing bike and pedestrian infrastructure, expanding broadband access, and implementing smart growth strategies.

Emissions from the transportation sector have a devastating effect on our health, and the burden from this pollution is not evenly shared. In the most recent State of the Air report from the American Lung Association, counties representing 43% of Maryland's population received a failing grade for high ozone days and only one county representing less than half of 1% of Maryland's population received an A.

Neighborhoods located near major roads and highways face disproportionate burdens from traffic and transportation pollution. These neighborhoods are far more often communities of color due to decades of residential segregation and bear a burden of unsafe pedestrian conditions, higher rates of asthma and other health conditions, and unremitting noise pollution.

In the Mid-Atlantic region, the average concentrations of exposure to particulate matter for Latinos are 75 percent higher than for white residents. For African Americans, the concentrations are 61 percent higher.

SB681 is an important legislative proposal to protect the health of Marylanders while also supporting the goals of reducing traffic congestion, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and saving money for consumers. Given Maryland's transportation budget crisis, it's imperative to allocate the state's limited funds to projects that support its objectives of decreasing climate pollution, promoting equity, and broadening transportation options.

Maryland LCV urges a favorable report on this important bill.