



Statement of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689

SB 681– Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024

February 28th, 2024

TO: The Honorable Pamela Beidle and Members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Matthew Girardi, Political & Communications Director, ATU Local 689

ATU Local 689 supports SB 681 and urges the Senate Finance Committee to issue a favorable report. This bill would be a transformative measure both for Maryland’s transportation system and for its environment.

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, Fairfax Connector, DASH, and DC Circulator 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.

As such, we know that climate pollution often affects working class people first, including Black and brown communities, immigrants, and frontline workers. It hurts our members and our riders alike. Unfortunately, transportation is Maryland’s primary source of climate pollution, and that pollution must be addressed if the state is serious about meeting its goal of reducing emissions by 60% by 2031. The Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024 (TCA) is the vehicle to do just that: aligning expanded transportation with lower emissions options, like extensive, reliable, and accessible mass transit.

Specifically, SB 681 would require the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and regional transportation planning agencies to measure and mitigate any increases in climate pollution and vehicle travel caused by planned highway expansion projects over \$10 million. The Union knows that major highway expansion is not a way to mitigate traffic, increase accessibility, or meet the climate goals this state needs to hit.

Instead, under the TCA, mitigation options include better ideas, like improving and expanding public transportation, creating bike and pedestrian infrastructure, expanding broadband access, or other smart growth strategies. This legislation supports the Maryland Climate Pollution Reduction Plan’s finding that a 20% per-capita reduction in VMT by 2050 is necessary for meeting the state’s climate goals.

Transit workers effectively serve as the frontline workers to the frontline workers. Likewise, many of our members are blue-collar people, Black or brown, and immigrants. Unfortunately, we have seen time and time again that the places where climate pollution hits the worst are the places where we live. It is time to change that and build a better, healthier, more equitable, and more sustainable transportation system.

In sum, passage of SB 681 would protect our health, reduce traffic congestion, and put our strained transportation dollars where they matter most. With Maryland facing a transportation budget crisis, it’s critical to prioritize spending the state’s scarce dollars on projects that align with its goals to working class people. That means reducing pollution, increasing equity, and expanding transportation choices.

Local 689 thanks Senators Lam and Gile for introducing this worthy measure and urges the committee to issue a favorable report.