



The Climate Reality Project[®]

GREATER MARYLAND CHAPTER

Committees: Finance
Testimony on SB681 Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024
Organization: Climate Reality Greater Maryland
Submitting: Frances Stewart, MD, Chapter Chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 28, 2024

Dear Chairs and Committee Members:

Climate Reality Greater Maryland is the Maryland chapter of the [Climate Reality Project](#), a global network of 3.5 million people working to build a net zero future where all of us can thrive. We urge you to vote favorably on SB681.

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to our health. The health effects include more vector-borne diseases, more heat-related illnesses such as heat stroke, injuries from wildfires and extreme weather events such as hurricanes and floods, and mental health problems. These issues threaten the lives and health of all Maryland residents, particularly children and people who live in overburdened communities.

One thing that is less often recognized is the close tie between air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. 88% of Maryland residents live in areas that do not meet EPA air quality standards. Air pollution is a major contributor to absences from work and school, increased healthcare costs, and premature deaths. This can be seen clearly in the high rates of hospitalization for asthma in Maryland, especially in Baltimore. Research shows that decreases in air pollution lead to significant and rapid decreases in asthma hospitalizations. Improvements in health, especially in children and people living in overburdened communities, will be the first benefit we see from decreasing the use of fossil fuels.

Transportation is Maryland's #1 source of climate pollution and must be addressed to meet the state's goal of reducing emissions 60% by 2031. The **Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024** will ensure that future transportation projects align with Maryland's goals of reducing climate pollution by expanding transportation options.

SB681 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 (VMT: “Vehicle Miles Traveled”) caused by planned highway expansion projects over \$10 million. Mitigation options would include improving and expanding public transportation, creating bike and pedestrian infrastructure, expanding broadband access, or other smart growth strategies. As [Maryland’s Climate Pollution Reduction Plan](#) made clear, a 20% per-capita reduction in VMT by 2050 is needed to meet the state’s climate goals. The measures spelled out in SB681 are essential steps toward those goals.

The bill would also reduce traffic congestion, save consumers money - [an average of \\$3,271 per household each year on vehicle costs](#) - and make wise use of limited infrastructure dollars. 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 reduce climate pollution, advance equity, and expand transportation choices.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this vital bill We strongly urge a **FAVORABLE** report for SB681 in committee and passage by the Senate