

Committees: Finance
Budget and Taxation
Testimony on: SB681 - Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024
Submitting: Deborah A. Cohn
Hearing Date: February 28, 2024
Position: Favorable

Chair Beidle and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for this ability to submit favorable testimony on SB681. As a Maryland resident I am concerned about climate and the environment to protect the health and well-being of my children and grandchildren. Part of my family lives close to I-495 and thus is exposed to the diesel exhaust, noise and carbon emissions of the transportation sector. For their sake and the sake of their peers, **I seek your support SB681.**

The transportation sector is Maryland's leading source of carbon emissions and a leading source of other pollutants that are deleterious to public health, increasing the risk of lung and cardiac disease and stress. To achieve Maryland's goal of reducing emissions 60% by 2031, and improve public health, a comprehensive approach to the transportation sector, one that takes into account the negative externalities of land use planning that emphasizes personal use driving, must be addressed. The Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024 will ensure that future transportation projects align with Maryland's goals of reducing and mitigating the impacts of climate pollution and that we use our limited transportation resources wisely.

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 (measured as VMT or vehicle miles traveled) induced by planned highway expansion projects over \$10 million. Mitigation options may include 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.

In addition to reducing climate pollution, SB681 would protect our health, reduce traffic congestion, save consumers money - an average of \$500 to \$800 per year on vehicle costs - and make smart use of limited infrastructure dollars. The health aspects deserve particular attention, as too often we focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions without recognizing that vehicles, even zero-emission vehicle, increase both morbidity and mortality. While electric vehicles emit no tailpipe GHG, they have been [found](#) to produce equal or greater amounts of particulate matter generated by brake, tire and road wear and re-suspended road dust. In other words, from a health perspective, reducing VMTs is important, particularly in communities located close to high-trafficked roads and highways.

I realize that Maryland faces a transportation budget crisis and that difficult choices must be made. With that in mind, we must ensure that Maryland spends the limited available funds on projects that align with its goals to reduce climate pollution, increase public health, and expand transportation choices, particularly for those who cannot afford to purchase personal vehicles. While many important projects emphasizing transit options are already being funded, the analysis required under the Transportation and Climate Alignment Act would allow Maryland to prioritize future transportation projects and difficult transportation budget decisions informed by better data and analysis.

For these reasons I urge a **FAVORABLE** report on SB681.

Thank you.

Deborah A. Cohn