

**Wednesday, February 28, 2024**

**TO:** Pamela Beidle, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee; Guy Guzzone, Chair of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, and Committee Members

**FROM:** Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager; Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations

**POSITION:** Support SB 681 Major Highway Capacity Expansion Projects - Impact Assessments and Mitigation Plans (Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024)

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports SB 681 offered by Senators Lam and Gile. SB 681 will require all transportation projects costing greater than \$10 million to conduct an impact assessment to measure any increase in greenhouse gas emissions and Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) stemming from the project. Based on that measurement, the project will further be required to develop and implement mitigation plans to eliminate the net increases, focusing particularly on overburdened and underserved communities the project would impact.

Options to mitigate emissions or increased VMT 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.

Transportation is the largest carbon emissions source in our state and across our region. We must take action to address this sector in order to meet our state's Climate Solutions Now Act goals. The Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024 will ensure that future transportation projects align with Maryland's climate pollution reduction goals by expanding transportation options.

In addition to reducing emissions, SB 681 aims to protect our health by reducing air pollution, reduce traffic congestion, save consumers money by decreasing reliance on personal vehicles, and make smart 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 our goals to reduce climate pollution, advance equity, and expand access to transportation choices.

TNC commends Senators Lam and Gile on introducing this bill, which seeks to increase Marylanders' transportation options and protect public and environmental health through reducing air pollution.

**Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 681.**