

## Policy Foundation of Maryland

**Committee:** Finance/Budget and Taxation

**Testimony on:** SB0681-Major Highway Capacity Expansion Projects - Impact Assessments and Mitigation Plans (Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024)

**SPONSOR:** Senator Lam, Senator Gile

**Organization:** Policy Foundation of Maryland, TMT Coalition

**Person Submitting:** Sarahia Benn (CEO/Executive Dir.)

**Position:** Favorable

**Hearing Date:** February 27, 2024 1:00PM

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee, .

I express gratitude for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB0681. As representatives of the Policy Foundation of Maryland, our focus lies on advocating for legislation and policies at both the State and County levels that directly impacts Black, Brown, marginalized, low-income communities, and veterans affairs. Environmental legislation holds immense significance for these communities, given their historical and ongoing vulnerabilities.

In essence, the Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024 represents a crucial step forward in our pursuit of a more equitable transportation system. Building upon the precedent set by Colorado and Minnesota in 2021 and 2023, respectively, Maryland now stands poised to join this progressive movement. Embracing this legislation is not just a matter of foresight; it's a practical investment in our collective future.

The stark disparities faced by Black and Brown Marylanders, as well as military veterans, underscore the systemic inequities ingrained within our transportation infrastructure, particularly evident in Southern Harford and across the state. It's imperative that we confront this reality head-on, advocating for transformative change that not only addresses present challenges but also lays the groundwork for a future where every community can flourish, free from the shackles of environmental injustice.

### **Four reasons the Transportation and Climate Alignment Act (TCA) would positively impact marginalized communities:**

1. **Equitable Access to Transportation Choices:** The TCA requires mitigation of increases in climate pollution and Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) caused by proposed highway expansion



projects. By expanding public transit, creating protected bike infrastructure, and locating jobs and amenities near where people live and transit, the legislation ensures marginalized communities have more affordable and convenient transportation options, reducing transportation barriers that disproportionately affect them.

2. [Health Benefits for Marginalized Communities](#): Marginalized communities, including African American and Latino populations, often bear a disproportionate burden of air pollution from transportation. By reducing climate pollution and VMT, the TCA would lead to improved air quality, thereby reducing respiratory illnesses and other health disparities prevalent in these communities.
3. **Job Creation and Economic Opportunities**: The TCA's emphasis on investing in public transportation and sustainable infrastructure creates job opportunities, particularly in sectors like public transit and bike infrastructure. As these jobs are created, marginalized communities can benefit from increased employment opportunities and economic empowerment.
4. **Equity in Policy Implementation**: Maryland's demographic makeup has shifted, with a majority of residents now identifying as part of marginalized communities. The TCA ensures equity in policy implementation by addressing the transportation needs and challenges faced by these communities, reflecting their voices and priorities in decision-making processes.

#### **Four financial benefits of the legislation:**

1. **Job Creation**: Investments in public transportation and sustainable infrastructure, as mandated by the TCA, create employment opportunities. Every \$1 billion invested in public transportation supports and creates approximately 50,000 jobs, contributing to economic growth and stability.
2. **Cost Savings from Health Benefits**: By reducing air pollution and associated health problems, such as respiratory illnesses, the TCA leads to cost savings in healthcare expenditures. Healthier communities require fewer medical interventions and experience fewer missed workdays, resulting in overall financial savings.
3. **Efficiency in Transportation Spending**: The TCA ensures that transportation projects over \$10 million undergo rigorous assessment and mitigation measures to address climate pollution and VMT. This targeted approach to infrastructure investment maximizes the efficiency and effectiveness of transportation spending, optimizing the allocation of financial resources.
4. **Increased Property Values and Economic Development**: Investments in sustainable transportation infrastructure often lead to increased property values and economic development in surrounding areas. By expanding public transit and improving connectivity, the TCA stimulates economic activity, attracting businesses and investment to communities across Maryland.



Consider the plight of expanding highways without commensurate alternatives. New York serves as a beacon of this principle, having invested in a plethora of public transit options, solidifying its status as a hub for finance, tourism, transit, and coveted residence despite its high cost of living. Maryland, too, faces the grim reality of a climate crisis, evidenced by decades of impactful climate events that imperil our environment, our residents, and the legacy we leave for future generations.

This underscores the paramount importance of passing the Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2024. We can no longer espouse values of diversity, inclusion, and equity while disproportionately burdening Black, Brown, & Veteran communities, as exemplified by highway expansion projects that neglect marginalized populations. Our youth, our future, are confined indoors, deprived of the simple joys of outdoor play due to the very air they struggle to breathe.

I could list many more reasons to support this bill and more transit legislation in general but I will stop here.

It is with this conviction that I implore a **FAVORABLE REPORT** on **SB0681**.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarahia Benn  
(Policy Foundation of Maryland, Transform Maryland Transportation)

**(Dedicated to Black History month)**

““I had reasoned this out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to: liberty, or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other; for no man should take me alive.””

—[Harriet Tubman](#), abolitionist, African American and American Heroine, 1868