



Transportation Alliance

March 5, 2025

Testimony on SB 881 – *Transportation – Regional Transportation Authorities –* Budget & Taxation Committee

Position: Favorable With Amendments

For years leaders in the Greater Baltimore region have been seeking to reform the way its local public transportation is governed and financed. Structural challenges in the current centralized governance structure of the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) make maintaining and improving transit performance difficult. The result is an unreliable public transportation system that further disadvantages many users already negatively impacted by poverty and structural racism, discourages ridership growth, and puts the region at a competitive disadvantage compared to other metropolitan areas with robust, reliable public transit.

Moreover, the lack of local participation in planning and funding decisions has been a contributing factor to ongoing maintenance problems and lack of significant expansion or improvement. Of the 50 largest transit agencies in the country, the MTA is the only one that is part of a state department of transportation without a board of directors and where decision-making lies solely with a governor. In recent years the General Assembly has taken a step toward reform through legislation that established a Baltimore Regional Transit Commission (BRTC).

The BRTC has been a huge improvement in terms of having an official body that is providing some measure of transparency to MTA's operations, plans and budget. However, it is largely an advisory body that lacks the full power of a regional transportation authority. That's why we are encouraged that the General Assembly is considering bills such as SB 881 that seek to go beyond advisory commissions by establishing Baltimore Region, Capital Region, and Southern Maryland Region transportation authorities.

While we support the general intent of SB 881, we urge the committee to review and consider a [recent study](#) from the BRTC that outlines some potential models for how to structure a regional authority for the Baltimore region. Of the models outlined in the report, the Transportation Alliance supports a fully independent authority. We respectfully request that the committee amend SB 881 to create a new, independent agency responsible for operating and managing transit service in the Baltimore region. Because this model assumes the State would continue its commitment to Baltimore-area transit service, SB 881 should also be amended to dedicate state funding for the new authority based on current levels at a minimum.

We encourage a FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS report for Senate Bill 881.