



Hagerstown/Eastern Panhandle Metropolitan Planning Organization

33 W. Washington St., 4th Floor, Suite 402, Hagerstown, MD 21740

Phone: 240-313-2080, Fax: 240-313-2084

www.hepmo.net

January 24, 2025

Bill: Senate Bill 20: Maryland Transit Administration - Locally Operated Transit Systems - Mandatory Funding

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Committee:

I write on behalf of the Hagerstown/Eastern Panhandle Metropolitan Planning Organization (HEPMPO) in support of Senate Bill 20, which would increase funding for Locally Operated Transit Systems (LOTS) throughout our State. The proposed increase in funding is consistent with the goals and objectives of HEPMPO's 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan and can easily be incorporated into our FY2025-FY2028 Transportation Improvement Program.

Washington County Transit (WCT) provides approximately 500,000 trips per year. Their customers are transit dependent with 6% having the option to drive and over 75% having household income less than \$40,000 per year. State funding is essential to provide these services. Unfortunately, State operating funding has remained flat, and capital funding decreased while the cost to provide services has increased year after year. The State's inability to provide its traditional 25% operating match means that WCT has not been able to utilize all the federal grant funding available, limiting the services that they are able to provide to our citizens.

WCT makes mobility a reality for our customers. Unfortunately, funding for these programs has already been cut in the aftermath of COVID-19. As WCT recovers from the pandemic, they are being called upon to provide more responsive service to more people, while also needing to plan for the transition to low and zero emissions technology.

State support for local transit is critical to ensure WCT's goals of quality service, environmental protection, and equity are reached. As State funding has stagnated or decreased, local matches for State and Federal funding have taken on a greater and greater proportion of funding. Inflation has particularly hit the transit industry hard, with prices for vehicles increasing nearly 50% since 2020 and the need for increased driver salaries to remain competitive. We need predictability in State funding streams in order to plan how to best serve transit customers in our communities.

HEPMPO fully supports Senate Bill 20's efforts to increase support for the mobility of the citizens and communities we serve.

Sincerely,

Matthew T. Mullenax
Executive Director