

Thursday, March 27, 2025

TO: Guy Guzzone, Chair of the Senate Budget & 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 HB 84 Transportation – Major Highway Capacity Expansion Projects and Impact Assessments (Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2025)

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 84 offered by Delegate Edelson. This bill requires the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) to measure the greenhouse gas emissions of all major capital transportation projects in the state's six-year capital transportation budget and determine if the overall budget aligns with the state's goals to cut air pollution as required by the Climate Solutions Now Act and consistent with Maryland's Pollution Reduction Plan. MDOT is tasked with achieving, to the maximum extent practicable, a Consolidated Transportation Program whose impact on greenhouse gas emissions and progress toward meeting emissions reduction targets align with our state goals and commitments. This bill further requires MDOT to identify greenhouse gas emission offsets from highway expansion projects costing over \$100 million, including providing clean transportation alternatives and/or land use changes to affected residents.

HB 84 calls on MDOT to ensure the state's transportation budget aligns with Maryland's climate goals by investing in new projects that have decreased overall impact in terms of emissions and vehicle miles traveled. These projects include public transit, bike and pedestrian infrastructure, development that reduces vehicle traffic, and solar projects on MDOT property. MDOT is tasked with prioritizing these investments in overburdened and underserved communities. Highway maintenance projects and highway projects funded for construction or that have a completed environmental review process prior to July 2025 would be exempt from this process.

Vehicles make up the largest source of climate pollution from the transportation sector in the state and are a major contributor to unhealthy ozone pollution, as well as emissions of methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, and sulfur hexafluoride. Maryland's 2023 Climate Pollution Reduction Plan indicated that reducing vehicle traffic, measured as vehicle miles traveled (VMT), is necessary for the state to meet our climate targets.

Maryland needs to invest in more affordable transportation choices, including public transit, walkable and bikeable communities, and development that brings jobs and amenities closer to where people live. Every Marylander should have affordable and reliable access to jobs, housing, education, food, healthcare, and recreation. It is critical that populations with less access to vehicles, especially overburdened and underserved communities, low-income communities, people with disabilities, students, and seniors have increased mobility options.

HB 84 aims to reduce emissions in order to meet our state's climate commitments, but also aims to protect our health by reducing air pollution and cutting traffic congestion. The bill saves consumers money by decreasing reliance on personal vehicles and makes smart use of our state's limited infrastructure dollars. With Maryland facing a transportation budget crisis, it's critical to prioritize investing the state's resources into projects that align with our goals to reduce climate pollution, advance equity, and expand access to transportation choices. TNC commends Delegate Edelson on introducing this bill.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 84.