

January 29, 2025

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Budget and Taxation
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

RE: Letter of Support – Senate Bill 198 – Transportation Investment Priorities Act of 2025

Dear Chair Guzzone and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports Senate Bill 198 as it moves MDOT toward greater transparency, accountability and data driven decision-making to ensure the best returns on Maryland's transportation investments.

Senate Bill 198 updates reporting elements in the Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP), alters the composition and responsibilities of the Maryland Transportation Commission, requires MDOT to adopt certain asset management practices, and, updates the Chapter 30 scoring process which is used to rank new capacity enhancing projects in the CTP.

The current Chapter 30 prioritization process was adopted by the legislature in 2017 but has come to be viewed by external stakeholders as unwieldy, relying on a large number of criteria which makes the scoring process unclear. In addition, once scores are assigned to projects, the relationship between a project's score and its funding in the CTP are not evident to stakeholders or the public. The current Chapter 30 process also presents certain challenges for the Department, principally the fact that the language in law makes it difficult for MDOT to update the process to reflect new or better evaluation criteria, eliminate subjective measures, or respond to certain stakeholder process concerns.

SB 198 addresses these issues by providing a clear framework of goals and processes for the prioritization system while allowing MDOT to determine the exact methods of carrying the scoring forward. Specifically, the bill identifies six overarching goals upon which projects should be rated: Safety, Access and Mobility, Climate and Environment, Equity, Economic Competitiveness, and Land use and Demand Management. The bill directs that MDOT develop data driven, analytical methods to rank new capacity projects against these goals and each other. This provides MDOT clear direction, goals, and parameters for developing the system but leaves MDOT with appropriate flexibility in execution, allowing the system to improve and evolve over time as experience with the system is gained and new data and tools are developed.

SB 198 includes measures to ensure that the prioritization process is as transparent as possible to stakeholders and the public, to instill confidence that transportation investments are going to the projects that do the most to advance state goals and help protect the integrity of the process as

circumstances and administrations change. Specifically, the bill requires that the details of the scoring system be published and that more information be made available about both major and minor projects. It requires that the Maryland Transportation Plan establish goal areas and that the Annual Achievement Report establishes targets and reports on progress towards their achievement. Further, Senate Bill 198 directs MDOT to supply guidance and develop an electronic portal for local priority letters. Each of these steps will help to improve the transparency and efficiency of the process.

Further, SB 198 reconstitutes the Maryland Transportation Commission to create a body that will act as a regular forum where the scores, funded projects, and scoring process will be announced, discussed and made explicit. This will include discussion of any changes to the scoring system that may be proposed as well as discussions of any instances where the projects that are included in the CTP for funding differ from the rankings the projects receive through the prioritization process. These differences are often perceived as a “black box”, and this will add tremendous transparency to the process.

The final portion of the bill continues the themes of transparency and data-driven decision-making by requiring MDOT to adopt certain asset management practices. These practices include developing prioritization systems for investment decision-making within MDOT’s asset management programs, forecasting asset conditions and performance targets and other measures that MDOT considers to be sound management practices. MDOT supports these provisions as many of them codify practices that MDOT has already implemented or aspires to implement in the near future.

Taken together, the measures proposed in Senate Bill 198 help to ensure that MDOT continues to move forward with data driven, transparent processes that will make it a leader among departments of transportation across the country and ensure that Marylanders are getting the greatest return on each transportation dollar spent. For these reasons, the Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee grant Senate Bill 198 a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

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