WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY

PUBLIC TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 206

Vehicle Laws – Bus Obstruction Monitoring Systems & Bus Stop Zones

Before the House Environment & Transportation Committee

February 21, 2025

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Charlie Scott, and I am the Maryland Government Relations Officer for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). I am here to voice Metro's support for House Bill 206. This bill supplies one crucial missing piece that will allow Marylanders to realize greater benefits from technology investments that Metro has implemented to improve bus performance in the region. That missing piece is automatic traffic enforcement at bus lanes *and* bus stops.

At Metro, Metrobus customers account for over 40% of our daily ridership. These customers on average are more transit-dependent than our Metrorail customers, and improving the safety and experience of bus customers has been a major area of attention for Metro in recent years. In that time, we've learned that the essential prerequisites for reliable and fast bus operations are as follows:

1. Robust bus lane infrastructure, which clearly indicates bus-only lanes, and/or uses physical barriers to prevent vehicles from entering/blocking dedicated bus lanes;
2. Signal priority, a technology that enables buses to communicate with traffic signals such that buses can move without stopping at intersections; and
3. Automatic traffic enforcement (ATE), which utilizes street and bus-mounted cameras to ticket motorists illegally driving, idling, or parked in dedicated bus lanes, and at bus stops.

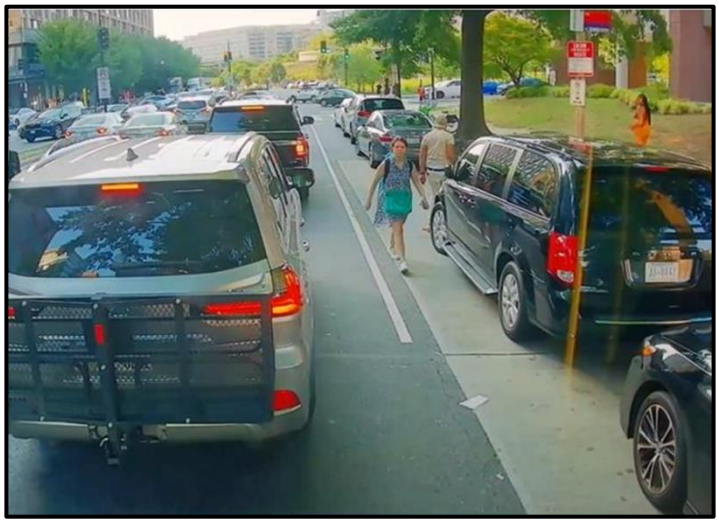
Together, these elements ensure that taking the bus – particularly during rush hour – is the easy choice for customers looking to get where they need to go. Maryland has made significant strides in its investments in the first two elements. This bill would unlock its capacity to fully invest in the third -- automatic traffic enforcement -- to maximize the benefits that all Marylanders gain when more people choose transit.

Automatic Traffic Enforcement in Maryland and DC

Clear Lanes is an automatic traffic enforcement program that is already in place just across the border in DC, where it has improved bus operations and safety for our bus riders. Crucially, the program tickets motorists in bus stops as well as bus lanes, utilizing the full

potential of the ATE technology. These tickets meaningfully change motorist behavior by penalizing them for blocking bus lanes and bus stops.

While bus lane enforcement improves bus operations and efficiency, bus stop enforcement is essential for safety and accessibility. Motorists who stop and park at bus stops prevent the bus from directly approaching the curb to allow passengers to board and alight. This forces passengers to walk into traffic to board the bus, or reach the curb. For people who rely on the bus for their daily trips – and particularly for those who are disabled, elderly, pushing strollers, or accompanied by children – ATE at bus stops is more than an added convenience. It is a potentially lifesaving safety measure.



Left: A vehicle stopped at a bus stop at Ellsworth Drive & Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring forces customers to walk into the street to board the bus. Image captured during the Montgomery County pilot of dedicated bus lanes, which ran from July 2024 to December 2024.

Right: A WMATA employee walks into traffic in Southwest DC to board a bus that was unable to reach the bus stop due to stopped and parked cars. Image captured by DC's active Clear Lanes program.

Data demonstrates that full ATE deployment including bus stops makes a real difference. In DC, bus stop violations fell from 22,500 in October 2023 down to 15,200 in October 2024. This is a 32 percent reduction in instances of bus stops being blocked by illegal stopping, standing, and parking. Ticketing at bus stops began in November 2024; the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) and Metro expect to see additional changes to driver behavior, reductions in bus stop obstructions, and improvements to bus operating speeds as time goes on.

For a pilot demonstration of the potential impact of Clear Lanes on bus corridors in Maryland, Metro collected data on dedicated bus lane and bus stop infractions along 7 lane miles of Georgia Avenue in Montgomery County. Over the course of the approximately 6-

month pilot, two buses with Clear Lanes cameras detected almost 800 events of non-permitted vehicles stopped at 45 Georgia Avenue bus stops. At a single stop, the northbound bus stop at Georgia Avenue and Ellsworth Drive in Silver Spring, Clear Lanes cameras detected 95 events – or 12 percent of the total events recorded during the Clear Lanes pilot. With the technology only on two Metrobuses, these numbers represent an undercount of the true reality faced by bus riders and bus operators on Georgia Avenue in Montgomery County. These events – each of them creating a hazardous environment for bus riders and motorists alike – are not inevitable. Full implementation of the Clear Lanes program in Maryland would reduce these events for Metrobus customers on all Metrobus routes.

Conclusion

Across the state, Maryland has already taken an important first step through the installation of dedicated bus infrastructure that reduces congestion, increases accessibility, supports economic development, and mitigates greenhouse gas emissions and local pollution. But data demonstrates that bus lanes and signal priority aren't enough. Automatic enforcement is key to ensuring that that the bus infrastructure operates as it should – continuously, uniformly, and without human bias. HB 206 will enable Marylanders to realize the bus operation improvements that bus riders in DC have already seen thanks to the full implementation of the Clear Lanes program. I urge your favorable report.