



Transportation Alliance

February 14, 2025

Testimony on HB 517 – MARC Rail Authority Act of 2025 – Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: Favorable

The Central Maryland Transportation Alliance supports HB 517, which removes the MARC commuter rail system from the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) and establishes a new MARC Rail Authority with responsibility for the supervision, construction, operation, maintenance, and repair of MARC railroad facilities projects. The MARC Rail Authority would remain under the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) with similar standing as the Maryland Transit Administration, the Maryland Ports Administration, the State Highway Administration and the other MDOT business units. The bill also authorizes the MARC Rail Authority to issue revenue bonds.

We see HB 517 as a step in the right direction. Leaders in the Greater Baltimore region have been seeking to reform the way its local public transportation is governed and financed. The lack of local participation in planning and funding decisions has been a contributing factor to ongoing maintenance problems and the lack of significant expansion or improvement since 1997. 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. We seek reforms that balance the state government oversight with representation from local officials who are closer to the direct stakeholders in the viability of the bus, train and paratransit system.

The General Assembly has taken a step toward reform through legislation in 2023 that established a Baltimore Regional Transit Commission (BRTC). However, the BRTC is largely an advisory body that lacks the full power of a regional transportation authority. That's why we are encouraged that the BRTC recently published a report titled [Alternative Transit Governance and Funding Structures for the Baltimore Region](#).

HB 517 is a step toward better aligning the governance of Maryland's transit systems with the stakeholders of each. However, we do not see it as the final step. We encourage members of the Committee to review the BRTC's report and consider the alternatives it evaluates.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for House Bill 517.