



SIERRA CLUB

MARYLAND CHAPTER

P.O. Box 278
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Committee: Environment and Transportation; Appropriations

Testimony on: HB 517, Transportation – Maryland Area Rail Commuter Rail Authority – Establishment (MARC Rail Authority Act of 2025)

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 14, 2025

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on the MARC Rail Authority Act of 2025. This bill would create an authority for Maryland's commuter rail system, MARC, which is currently operated by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA).

MARC has tremendous potential to unlock sustainable transportation and economic activity across the state. The three rail lines – Brunswick, Penn, and Camden lines – serve nine counties and cross into both West Virginia and Washington, D.C. There are plans to expand and better connect service to Virginia and Delaware. MDOT has plans to activate the area around underutilized stations to create renewed hubs of homes, jobs, and economic activity, oriented around sustainable transportation.

We applaud MDOT's forward-looking plans for MARC, although we would like to see those plans' implementation begin sooner than the department currently has the capacity to handle. MTA has a uniquely large portfolio of assets, including local bus, light rail, and subway service in the Baltimore region; MARC; and the upcoming Purple Line. The agency also oversees grants to locally operated transit systems and state-wide transit planning. Shifting MARC's structure to a dedicated authority would provide this critical function of the state's transportation system with more independence and autonomy to progress forward.

Transportation is the state's largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Reliable rail service is a far more cost-effective and environmentally friendly way for people to travel compared to driving on highways that get clogged with traffic and generate pollution. Rail transportation will also contribute to achieving MDOT's goal for reducing vehicle traffic (measured as vehicle miles traveled per capita) 20% by 2050 to help meet the state's targets to cut climate pollution and improve mobility.

In view of MARC's potential for making increased contributions to the state's transportation objectives, the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB 517.

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