February 2, 2026
House Appropriations and Environment & Transportation Committees
FAVORABLE HB 437 Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2026

Chair Edelson, Chair Solomon, Chair Watson, and Members of the Committee:

About 35% of Maryland's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are emitted from the transportation sector, making it the largest contributor to the state's carbon footprint.[1] 85% of the pollution in this sector originates from personal vehicles and long-haul transportation trucks. Not only is this important in addressing the overall climate crisis, but also, the numerous health issues that are associated with exposure to vehicle emissions, especially those living near heavy traffic areas and highways. We must reduce our transit sector emissions to ensure the health of all Marylanders.

A key tool to achieve a healthy environment for all Marylanders will be to develop smart, emissions-conscious planning for our infrastructure projects. The Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2026 promotes this planning, supporting public health and environmental justice. As health professionals, we understand how important the link between the environment and health is, and that is why we support the passage of HB 437.

A key mechanism in this bill is to require the Maryland Department of Transportation to evaluate the projected impact of infrastructure projects, specifically greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled (VMT). While highway widening is frequently touted as easing congestion and reducing emissions, these projects often result in induced demand and increased vehicle miles traveled following expansion of highway capacity.[2] With an increase in VMT, there are also increases in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and air pollution, including hazardous ultrafine particulate air pollution known as PM 2.5.[3]

Aside from acute concerns related to increased air pollution and GHG emissions, infrastructure projects that increase VMT can contribute to the development of chronic diseases, as well as pose a significant health risk to sensitive population groups. An expected increase in PM 2.5 is particularly concerning given it is known to increase the risk of stroke, heart disease, COPD, lung cancer, asthma, and other diseases.[4] This can most severely impact children, as they breathe faster than adults and their developing lungs are at a higher risk of damage and future lung disease. Moreover, increased air pollution negatively impacts brain health. Air pollution can affect developing children with prenatal pollution exposure associated with increased risk of impaired cognitive abilities, behavioral problems, anxiety, depression,

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[1] Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan. (2023). Maryland Department of Environment.
[2] Increasing highway capacity induces more auto travel | National Center for Sustainable Transportation. (2023, January 24). https://ncst.ucdavis.edu/research-product/increasing-highway-capacity-induces-more-auto-travel
[3] SHIFT Calculator. (n.d.). https://shift.rmi.org/
[4] Roth, G. A., et al. (2018). Global, regional, and national age-sex-specific mortality for 282 causes of death in 195 countries and territories, 1980–2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017. The Lancet, 392(10159), 1736–1788. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(18)32203-7

and autism.[5,6,7] Among older adults, air pollution is associated with increased risks of Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and dementia.[8,9]

Through the Transportation and Climate Alignment Act, we are investing in our built environment being more conducive to walking and biking. With fewer VMT, there could be a reduction in greenhouse gases. We would expect to then see a decrease in the rates of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression and anxiety.[10] Using our limited funding for capital projects to improve access to mass transit and improving pedestrian safety we can reduce social isolation for those unable to drive, improving some of our most vulnerable community members' health and well-being.

We applaud the work of the authors of HB 437 for its forward thinking approach to infrastructure, climate, and health. Knowing how important the link between our infrastructure, the environment, and health is, we encourage a favorable report on the Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2026.

Thank you for your consideration.

About Healthy Climate Maryland

United by a shared commitment to the health and well-being of all Marylanders, Healthy Climate Maryland is a coalition of dedicated public health and medical professionals that seeks to address climate change and environmental challenges by focusing on their impacts on public health. We are working to educate, advocate, and build strong partnerships towards a healthier, more sustainable future for Maryland.

About the Maryland Public Health Association

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is one of the oldest and most vibrant state affiliates of the American Public Health Association (APHA) and Maryland's leading professional organization for those working in the field of public health. MdPHA remains dedicated to increasing health equity for Marylanders through advocacy and community collaborations. We are committed to engaging the public health community in networking and educational events, advocacy activities and in emerging issues affecting the health of Marylanders.

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[5] Imbriani G,, et al. Early-Life Exposure to Environmental Air Pollution and Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Review of Available Evidence. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2021; 18(3):1204. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18031204

[6] Ellison, J. (2022, July 12). UW study strengthens evidence of link between air pollution and child brain development. https://www.washington.edu/news/2022/07/12/uw-study-strengthens-evidence-of-link-between-air-pollution-and-child-brain-development/

[7] Peterson BS, Rauh VA, Bansal R, et al. Effects of Prenatal Exposure to Air Pollutants (Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons) on the Development of Brain White Matter, Cognition, and Behavior in Later Childhood. JAMA Psychiatry. 2015;72(6):531–540. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2015.57

[8] Shi L, et al.. Long-term effects of PM2·5 on neurological disorders in the American Medicare population: a longitudinal cohort study. Lancet Planet Health. 2020 Dec;4(12):e557-e565.

[9] Livingston G, el al. Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2020 report of the Lancet Commission. Lancet. 2020 Aug 8;396(10248):413-446.

[10] Ding D, Gebel K, Phongsavan P, Bauman AE, Merom D. Driving: a road to unhealthy lifestyles and poor health outcomes. PLoS One. 2014 Jun 9;9(6):e94602. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0094602.