



Testimony on SB 59
Transportation and Climate Alignment Act of 2026
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Date: February 25, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility (CPSR) is a statewide evidence-based organization of over 800 physicians and other health professionals and supporters that addresses existential public health threats: nuclear weapons, the climate crisis, and toxic chemicals, as seen through the intersectional lens of environmental, racial and social justice.

CPSR strongly supports SB 59, which would address the damaging effects of expanding Maryland’s highway system by investing in public transit, walking, and biking.

Any discussion about the health impacts of highway expansion is a discussion about the health impacts of fossil fuels. Too often, debates about the energy transition focus on economics, security, or consumer choice. But we must not ignore the devastating health burden of fossil fuels, especially when cleaner, more affordable alternatives are available.

Each stage of the fossil fuel life cycle – extraction, processing, transportation of the fuel, combustion, and waste - creates significant health harms. When we burn gasoline and diesel fuel in our cars and trucks we are contributing to the health harms at every one of those stages.

Everyone in the U.S. is exposed to many toxic pollutants from fossil fuels. These exposures accumulate in our bodies over time and cause long-term health harms. They affect every stage of human life, from before birth through old age. There is no safe threshold for fossil fuel pollution exposure – even very low levels of exposure may be harmful.¹

While national and state air quality standards have led to significant improvements in air quality over several decades, air pollution remains a leading environmental health risk in the U.S. Globally, studies estimate that fossil fuel pollution is responsible for between 5 and 8 million deaths each year - including an estimated 350,000 premature deaths in the U.S. alone.²³

Beyond deaths, fossil fuel pollution is making people sick, including through heart and lung disease, cancer, adverse reproductive outcomes, neurological disorders and other chronic conditions. The healthcare, economic and societal costs of illness and deaths attributable to fossil fuel pollution are immense. These illnesses and deaths are preventable, which is why strong, evidence-based policy action like the TCA is essential.

¹ Harvard Health Publishing. Harvard Medical School. Even low-level air pollution may harm health. February 2022. [Even low-level air pollution may harm health - Harvard Health](#)

² Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Fossil fuel air pollution responsible for 1 in 5 deaths worldwide. February 2021. [Fossil fuel air pollution responsible for 1 in 5 deaths worldwide | Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#)

³ Lelieveld, J., Evans, J. S., Fnais, M., Giannadaki, D., & Pozzer, A. (2019). Effects of fossil fuel and total anthropogenic emission removal on public health and climate. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(15), 7192–7197. [Effects of fossil fuel and total anthropogenic emission removal on public health and climate | PNAS](#)

And **who** is most likely to suffer these consequences of burning fossil fuels ? In general, children, the elderly, people with pre-existing chronic illnesses. But especially those who live near the sources of this pollution – the poor and people of color, reflecting a combination of environmental, social, and physiological inequities that place greater health burdens on already at-risk groups. And this is true through every step in the fossil fuel life cycle – extraction, processing, transportation, combustion, and waste.⁴

Perhaps more significant – in the long term - than all of the above are the powerful effects of Greenhouse Gas Emissions [GHG] on the climate crisis threatening us. On behalf of CPSR I would like to place special emphasis on this. The hurricanes and massive fires in our country are only a part of the picture. Droughts, heat emergencies, desertification, floods, sea level rise – all these lead to terrible human suffering, destabilize societies, and lead to mass migration, destabilizing other societies and triggering wars. As these impacts multiply, there is a real risk of catastrophic changes to our civilization. These are very real dangers, but as a society we are just not taking them seriously. You, however, have an opportunity to take action to address this and make Maryland a leader against climate chaos.

So how does this relate to the Transit and Climate Alignment Act ? According to the Maryland Department of Transportation, the current statewide emissions inventory “shows that on-road transportation is the single largest GHG emissions generator in Maryland, representing 36% of total GHG emissions.”⁵ The TCA requires that MDOT offset greenhouse gas emissions from highway expansion projects over \$100 million by providing clean transportation alternatives to affected residents. Those alternatives include public transit, bicycle infrastructure, and walking infrastructure. A vibrant public transit system removes cars from the road, and those cars do not contribute to all the damages I described above. Making it safe to walk and cycle enables citizens to run short errands or commute without a car and encourages exercise. It is hardly necessary to explain why that is good for public health.

Making this mitigation mandatory helps change the mindset of planners and citizens alike, which is important because what we really need is a change in culture – from car-centric planning to human-centric planning. Not only is highway expansion bad for our health, it also does not solve congestion. More highway miles just bring more traffic. It is called induced demand and it is a real thing.

We cannot continue to approach transportation the way we have up to now. It is truly killing us. As stated in the 2025 report “Climate Change Costs” from the Office of the Comptroller of Maryland, “The costs of inaction are severe, encompassing economic disruption, worsening health disparities, and long-term, irreversible environmental damage.”⁶

Our motto at CPSR, and a principle of public health, is **WE MUST PREVENT WHAT WE CANNOT CURE**. That is why we support the Transit and Climate Alignment Act and urge you to give a **favorable report on SB 59**.

Terrence T. Fitzgerald, MD

⁴ Karn Vohra et al., The health burden and racial-ethnic disparities of air pollution from the major oil and gas lifecycle stages in the United States. *Sci. Adv.* 11, eadu2241 (2025). DOI: [10.1126/sciadv.adu2241](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adu2241)

⁵ [https://www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=88#:~:text=The%20current%20statewide%20emissions%20inventory,rail\)%20represents%20another%204%20percent](https://www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=88#:~:text=The%20current%20statewide%20emissions%20inventory,rail)%20represents%20another%204%20percent)

⁶ Comptroller of Maryland, April 2025 • State Spending Series: Climate Change Costs