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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Senator Shelly Hettleman Testimony in Support of SB 59
TRANSPORTATION - MAJOR HIGHWAY CAPACITY EXPANSION
PROJECTS AND IMPACT ASSESSMENTS (Transportation and Climate
Alignment Act of 2026)**

According to the US Bureau of Transportation Statistics, transportation is the second highest expense for most Americans after housing. From car purchases to gas prices to maintenance and repair costs, people across the country are struggling to economically navigate our car-dependent infrastructure.

Maryland is no different. A recent study found that 88% of Marylanders support the state expanding public transportation and multimodal transportation options, thereby giving people new ways to travel, whether by train, bus, biking, or walking. Additionally, of the respondents from rural Maryland communities, 83% supported investing in the expansion of transportation choices. In short, Marylanders want more transit options. They want options that save time and money, and that, in the cases of walking and biking, promote public health.

On top of transportation's costs, it is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, which are the driving force behind anthropocentric climate change. Avoiding the worst effects of climate change, from extreme weather to sea-level rise to crop failures and animal extinctions, requires swift and significant reductions of our carbon footprints.

Therefore, Senate Bill 59 has two aims. First, this bill encourages better state investment in multimodal transit so that Marylanders have more affordable and accessible transportation options and spend less time in traffic. Second, by encouraging low-emission public transportation, biking, and walking, the bill offers a meaningful step toward accomplishing our state's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan, which calls for a 60% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (from 2006 levels) by 2031, 100% clean energy by 2035, and "net-zero" emissions by 2045.

SB 59, which is prospective rather than retrospective, has two components respective to its aims. First, it increases accountability and transparency regarding the state's six-year capital transportation budget by requiring the Maryland Department of Transportation ("MDOT") to measure the climate pollution from all major capital projects in the

budget. These are projects with total costs exceeding \$100 million. However, projects that have received funding for construction, were funded in the Consolidated Transportation Program, or completed their environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act before June 30, 2026, are exempt from the bill's required greenhouse gas emission measurements.

Second, the bill requires MDOT to allocate available funding toward additional public transit, bike, and pedestrian infrastructure projects that support Maryland's climate targets. The people of Maryland want to achieve these climate goals. Indeed, the above study also found that 78% of Marylanders support our state investing in public transportation and multimodal transit infrastructure that offset the greenhouse pollution arising from increased driving.

To be clear, Senate Bill 59 is not about eliminating highway expansion projects. Rather, the bill endorses environmentally conscious planning of new highway projects. As such, the bill requires that emissions arising from new major highway projects (those exceeding \$100 million) are offset by concurrent developments in multimodal infrastructure, including bus and train lines, bikeways and walkways, and telecommuting infrastructure. Moreover, SB 59 mandates that MDOT prioritize multimodal developments in marginalized and underserved communities, especially those impacted by major highway projects.

The 2026 version of the Transportation and Climate Alignment Act represents important refinements based on input from MDOT and stakeholders. Key updates include focusing the bill on major projects over \$100 million, ensuring exemptions for projects already well into the planning process, and establishing both statewide and regional greenhouse gas reduction targets. The bill also specifies that offsetting activities will include innovative approaches like solar energy generation on Department property and accessible transportation improvements for people with disabilities. We want to thank MDOT for working with us and SB 59's advocates to update the bill's terms. SB 59 is a vital step toward increasing affordable transportation for all Marylanders while mitigating the worsening risks of climate change. Thank you for considering Senate Bill 59.