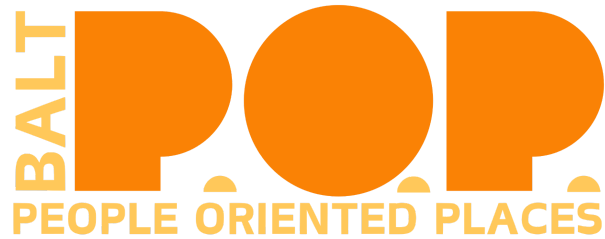


Bill: HB0733

Bill Title: Maryland Transit Administration -
Fixed-Route Transit Services - Announcements

Position: **Favorable**



Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

As a group, BaltPOP firmly believes that the residents of Baltimore and its surrounding counties should be able to navigate freely around their communities, no matter what mode they choose. As such, we support HB0733.

In particular, public transportation is a key ingredient in a comprehensive transportation system, Buses are open to those with a variety of physical abilities, offering a far higher level of flexibility than is available with the most common alternatives: paratransit (which often requires laborious planning) and getting ferried around by relatives.

It is easy to underestimate the power of announcements, but they are one of the crucial elements of a truly accessible transit system. Riders need to be able to navigate the system easily, and they need to know where they are at any given moment. Text and audio announcements are the primary way to provide this information.

At a basic level, announcements can communicate what the next stop is, of course, but their role is much broader than that. When a bus stops, for example, it can play an audio announcement of the route number and destination, to make it possible for visually-impaired users to get on the correct bus without needing to depend on the assistance of the operator. Announcements also indicate when riders have the opportunity to transfer to other lines; if there is a service disruption or a modified route; as well as any other information pertinent to rider safety and comfort. A bus without announcements is like a highway without road signs: illegible and hostile to the user.

Unfortunately, announcements on MTA buses are inconsistent at best, and completely absent at worst. The problem exists on many types of buses — including both those with dot matrix displays and those with LCD screens — and across different bus lines. This situation forces riders to rely on personal knowledge and navigation apps to know where the bus is located, which is inconvenient for *all* riders.

The effects are particularly severe for occasional users and for those with visual impairments. There are workarounds. Individuals can ask the operator where the bus is going, or ask other riders where the bus is at a given moment. But, these alternatives don't satisfactorily make up for the MTA's failure to provide basic information.

Certain changes would make announcements most effective for users. Announcements should be pre-recorded (instead of being said by the operator), to avoid placing an unnecessary burden on the operator and to ensure clear messaging for riders. Announcements should also be provided in multiple languages — in Spanish at a minimum, and in other languages where applicable, based on the communities that a given route serves.

This bill does place an unfunded mandate on the MTA, so legislators will need to continue to communicate with the agency to ensure that the capacity exists to implement these changes. That said, there are potential fiscal benefits for the agency as well. If the core bus system becomes more accessible, this may lighten the load on paratransit, a crucial but expensive-to-provide alternative. If announcements are put in place on all MTA buses, the result will be a more welcoming, less stressful experience for *all* riders.

We hope the committee finds these points helpful and convincing and we urge its members to **vote in favor of HB0733**. Thank you to Delegate Guyton for sponsoring this bill, and we appreciate the opportunity to testify on this legislation.

[BaltPOP - Baltimoreans for People-Oriented Places](#)