

Bill: HB1344

Bill Title: Maryland Transit Administration -
Locally Operated Transit Systems - Study

Position: **Favorable**



Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

As a group which views public transit as being a preferred mode of transportation for maximizing the appeal and productivity of Baltimore and its closest-in suburbs, we support HB1344.

Many people assume that suburbs and small towns — especially low-density, sprawling ones — can't support good transit service. This could not be further from the truth. In 2023, the transit agency serving Brampton (a Toronto suburb) provided 63 million rides: more than agencies in Atlanta, Dallas, or Phoenix. Closer to home, Montgomery County's transit agency, Ride On, provided 17 million rides in the same year, close to double the ridership of big-city agencies in Richmond and Norfolk, VA [1].

Riders on these suburban systems use transit for a variety of purposes — commuting, going to the supermarket, getting to school or university, and accessing medical services. In other words, transit enables them to live their lives fully.

Unfortunately, most transit services in the Baltimore suburbs are lackluster and disappointing. Frequency is one of the most important elements of good transit service; if buses don't come often, then riders have to plan their lives around bus schedules rather than using the service when they like. But most buses in Howard County, Anne Arundel County, and Harford County come once an hour at best. For reference, the industry standard for high-frequency service is a bus every fifteen minutes [2]. It should come as no surprise that these systems get relatively low ridership, compared to peer systems elsewhere. In 2019, Ride On had five times more riders than every Locally-Operated Transit System (LOTS) in the Baltimore region *combined* [3]. Approximately 20,000 households of these three counties do not have access to a car, and this statistic does not include the much larger number of people in suburban Baltimore who *cannot* drive, do not have *consistent access* to a car, or do not *want* to drive. These individuals are faced with an impossible choice: reliance on an infrequent, inconvenient transit system, or immobility [4].

HB1344 charts a path to improve these suburban services. The bill promises a detailed study of LOTS systems across the state, determining how these services can be run more efficiently and effectively in their respective service areas. While funding is still needed to substantially improve these systems in the future, we need to analyze them first to decide how best this funding can be used: to improve coordination with MARC rail service, for example, or to decide on priority

routes. Some of this planning has already been completed for agencies in Central Maryland, in the form of the Maryland Transit Administration's *Regional Transit Plan*. Similar work has to be done for systems in Western Maryland, the Eastern Shore, and elsewhere in the state.

LOTS, at their best, offer flexibility and control for local jurisdictions. For example, Baltimore's Charm City Circulator offers services oriented towards residents and tourists in neighborhoods near downtown Baltimore. Since the system is locally controlled, Mayor Brandon Scott was able to create a new service (the Cherry Circulator) to Cherry Hill in order to improve access in the neighborhood. Other jurisdictions, like Baltimore County, have used LOTS to suit local priorities and to supplement other services. However, we have to ensure that these service expansions are done where they have the maximum effect. That is what this bill would help guarantee.

We hope the committee finds these points helpful and convincing and we urge its members to **vote for HB1344**. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.

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

[1] American Public Transportation Association (APTA), *Public Transportation Ridership Report: Fourth Quarter 2023*, July 2, 2024.

[2] TransitCenter, *Frequency + Transit*, 2018.

[3] Baltimore Regional Transit and Governance Workgroup, *Transit Governance and Funding*, October 7, 2022.

[4] 2024 American Community Survey.