

Bill: HB0916

Bill Title: Transportation — Regional
Transportation Authorities

Position: **Unfavorable**



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 oppose HB0916.

Baltimore's transit has long struggled with a fundamental governance mismatch: those affected by transportation policy are not the ones who have decisionmaking power. Decisions regarding Baltimore regional transportation are made by a state level agency, the Maryland Department of Transportation. As a result, *all* Maryland residents — whether or not they live in the Baltimore region — have a voice on the future direction of transportation in the Baltimore area.

Baltimore's situation is exceptional, in a negative way. In other metropolitan areas, this problem has been solved by creating a regional transportation authority, a regional body that has planning and funding powers for transportation across the entire metropolitan area. Among the fifty largest transit agencies in the United States, the Maryland Transit Administration is the *only one* that does not operate under a regional transportation authority [1]. Because of this, Baltimore's transportation network is not accountable to the residents of the Baltimore region, with potentially catastrophic results. This was demonstrated persuasively in 2015, when Governor Larry Hogan unilaterally cancelled the Baltimore Red Line transit project. The Maryland legislature has a duty to ensure that a similar disregard for the voices of the Baltimore region cannot be repeated in the future.

Unfortunately, the solution that HB916 provides to this governance problem is deeply flawed. The bill would multiply the amount of bureaucracy needed to administer transportation funding across the state. It would require a time-consuming overhaul of the Maryland Department of Transportation, likely forcing the government into an arduous process to re-negotiate labor contracts. Most importantly, HB0916 would likely encourage further road widening and road expansion throughout the Baltimore area.

Indeed, the bill's sponsors seem to have anticipated this danger by explicitly denoting that 30% of the fund in each transportation authority should be used for transit projects. Instead of revitalizing transit in the Baltimore region and improving transit governance across Maryland, the bill will supercharge road projects, perpetuating the historic gap between funding for road infrastructure and alternative transportation - and increasing our future maintenance backlog.

In this legislative session, we have received two potential answers to Baltimore's transit governance deficit: HB0916 and HB1081. HB1081 is the product of the Baltimore Regional Transit Commission, a workgroup created specifically to study solutions for transportation governance in Baltimore. While the Core Service Board suggested by HB1081 would not create a true regional transportation authority, it represents a practical step towards regional control that avoids unnecessary bureaucratic disruption.

Developing an independent regional authority should remain a goal of the legislature. HB1081, unlike HB0916, moves us toward this goal without repeating the investment mistakes of the past.

We hope the committee finds these points helpful and convincing and we urge its members to **vote against HB0916**. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.

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

[1] Eno Center for Transportation, *Transit Reform for Maryland: New Models for Accountability, Stability, and Equity* (November 2020), p. 2.