



Jon Laria Testimony for Senate Finance Committee Hearing Date – March 6, 2026

Senate Bill 947 – Maryland Transit Administration Reform Act Position – Support

Chair Beidle and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jon Laria, and I serve as Chair of the Baltimore Regional Transit Commission (BRTC).

The Commission strongly supports Senate Bill 947, the Maryland Transit Administration Reform Act. This bill represents the most significant modernization of Maryland transit governance in decades and faithfully implements the consensus recommendations of the Workgroup on the Reorganization of the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) established by Chapter 402 of 2025 (the “Workgroup”). It advances reforms in governance, oversight, organizational capacity, management structure, legal authority, procurement, and long-range planning, each aligned with the Workgroup’s findings and designed to create increased accountability. As the Workgroup concluded, “MTA governance reform would enhance transparency and collaboration for local governments and the public in transit decision-making.”

The BRTC itself was created in 2023 in recognition of the Baltimore region’s local stakeholders’ lack of a meaningful voice in how the region’s transit system in the region operates and serves its residents. In fact, the Workgroup identified this as its first problem statement: “The Baltimore region has lacked direct or shared control over transit and governance decisions... Enabling more local representation and authority is essential.”

SB 947 addresses this directly by establishing a strong, locally-informed governing board for MTA’s Baltimore Core Transit Service. Unlike the current BRTC, which that Board would replace, the Core Transit Service Board would be required to approve MTA’s operating and capital budget requests, as well as major service plans, policies, and initiatives. Also, withdrawal of a federal New Starts Capital Investment Grant project would require a two-thirds supermajority, an essential safeguard to preserve long-term capital commitments and avoid pre-emptive cancellation of critical projects such as the Baltimore-area Red Line, which was cancelled by a previous Governor absent any input or consensus.

The Workgroup also recognized that commuter rail and bus services operate under different conditions than Baltimore’s core transit network. To address these distinct needs, the Workgroup recommended a separate advisory body. SB 947 implements this by establishing a Commuter Services Advisory Board with a mandate to advise on service plans, policies, and budget submissions.

The Workgroup also identified inconsistencies in how senior MTA management positions were treated relative to other MDOT leadership roles. To promote coherence and accountability, it recommended aligning MTA’s personnel practices with broader departmental standards. SB 947 accomplishes this by granting the Maryland Transportation Commission authority over qualifications, appointments, compensation, and leave policies for up to twelve key MTA

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management positions. This reform reduces the risk of politicized or ad hoc personnel decisions and ensures that MTA's leadership structure is consistent with statewide norms.

Beyond governance and personnel, the Workgroup highlighted several legal and procedural barriers that have long hindered MTA's ability to deliver major projects efficiently, which are included in the bill:

1. By capping MTA's tort liability at \$400,000 per claimant, the bill aligns the agency with other state entities and reduces fiscal uncertainty;
2. By granting quick-take authority through a constitutional amendment, the bill equips MTA with a critical tool for timely property acquisition, an area where delays have historically slowed major projects; and
3. By aligning MTA's procurement requirements with those of other MDOT modes, the bill allows MTA to adopt procurement practices better suited to the scale and complexity of transit infrastructure and deliver these to the public faster.

Together, these reforms remove longstanding structural impediments and directly implement the Workgroup's findings.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Regional Transit Commission strongly supports SB 947. It delivers the accountability, transparency, and regional responsiveness that Baltimore's transit system requires and deserves.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.
