

Tuesday, February 21, 2023

TO: Ben Barnes, Chair of House Appropriations Committee; and Committee Members

FROM: Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations; and Caitlin Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation & Climate Policy Analyst

POSITION: Support HB 341 Transportation – Commission to Study Establishing a Baltimore Regional Transit Authority

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 341 offered by Delegate Lewis. This bill ensures that equity is prioritized in transportation planning by requiring analyses focused on the impacts that statewide improvement programs will have on minority and low-income communities in Maryland.

In Maryland, TNC's work focuses on delivering science-based, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water and healthy living environments for our communities, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate. TNC has an institutional goal to support reducing global emissions by avoiding or sequestering 3 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide per year by 2030. We are dedicated to creating a future where people and nature thrive together.

The transportation sector is the largest contributor to climate change in our country, our region, and in Maryland. It accounts for approximately 40% of greenhouse gas emissions statewide, predominately from on-road sources. Air pollution caused by increased congestion and reliance on personal vehicles harms respiratory health in heavily trafficked areas. These respiratory health problems, including asthma, disproportionately impact Black and brown communities and low-income neighborhoods. A safe, reliable, accessible, and well-connected transit system is crucial to promoting public health, equity, and jobs. The Climate Solutions Now Act of 2022 set state goals to reduce emissions by 60 percent by 2031 and reach net-zero by 2045. Maryland needs to take immediate actions to mitigate emissions in the state's highest producing sectors. Investments in public transportation, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure will allow Marylanders to reduce reliance on single use vehicles, reducing overall emission from the transportation sector and lending towards Maryland's ambitious emissions reductions goals.

HB 341 would require the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) to consider equity when as it works to upgrade our state transportation system through improvement projects at the state and regional level. The 2022 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) was approved in November of 2021. This plan offers guidance for maintaining, operating, and expanding the transportation system and includes funding for highway, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian projects throughout the State during the next four years.

Investments in these projects will improve access to mass-transit and zero-emissions transportation options for residents across the state, reducing reliance on personal vehicles for transportation.

TNC commends Delegate Lewis for introducing this bill, which will ensure that system-wide improvements to Maryland's transportation system are done in a way that prioritizes on equity.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 341.