



Written Testimony Presented to the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Transportation and the Environment

Hearing Date – February 17, 2025

MDOT Maryland Transit Administration Budget Hearing

Chair Watson and Committee members, I am Jon Laria, testifying today in my role as Chair of the Baltimore Regional Transit Commission (BRTC).

The BRTC was created by the Maryland General Assembly to provide oversight and advocacy for the Baltimore regional transit system, which is operated by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA), and to ensure that diverse stakeholder perspectives are represented in agency decisions. The BRTC includes representatives from local government, transportation, industry, business, transit riders, transit advocates, labor, and the Moore-Miller Administration.

In the fall, we welcomed MDOT and MTA as a part of their Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) tour meetings which solicit feedback on their \$19 billion capital program. To be blunt, the draft CTP presented to us would have represented a significant step back for the Baltimore region and the Marylanders that rely on transit to get to work, school, the grocery store, medical appointments, and more. The draft proposed over \$670 million in project deferrals for the MTA and would have failed to meet many legislatively-mandated requirements, including state-of-good-repair (SGR) funding for MTA under the Transit Safety and Investment Act (TSIA).

In partnership with the local jurisdictions and other stakeholders who serve on the BRTC, we worked with our state legislators to call attention to these cuts and the service impacts that would be experienced by those who rely on transit. And, fortunately, things changed dramatically.

On January 15, MDOT released its final \$21.2 billion CTP for Fiscal Years 2025-2030. Thanks to Governor Moore's leadership, the balanced plan includes an additional \$420 million in new state transportation funding annually, beginning in Fiscal Year (FY) 2026. This investment allows the Department to fully leverage all available federal funding and financing, turning a \$420 million annual state investment into \$695 million annually of new resources for the State's transportation network. This vital investment will allow the Department to make critical investments in safety and system preservation, grow our economy, and utilize all federal funding available to us under the historic Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

The Final CTP proposes transformative investments for transit in the Baltimore region. It demonstrates that the Moore-Miller Administration is committed to ending the long cycle of disinvestment in the MTA and getting our system back on track.

The Final CTP also fulfills Secretary Wiedefeld's earlier commitment to install 200 new positions at MTA. It fully meets the Transit Safety & Investment Act SGR investment thresholds, providing critical Light Rail system electrical substation replacements, station, platform, communications, mobility improvements to the Metro, and

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MARC improvements. As noted in our December Annual Report to you, BRTC members joined MTA and MDOT to tour the Light Rail system and were shocked at what we saw. **Let me be clear – today’s Light Rail system is at risk of total failure without funding for substation replacements, especially at the BWI spur, where loss of a substation could end service to BWI Airport, and the North Avenue main yard, where a substation failure could cripple the entire Light Rail system.** This investment is vital, timely, and long overdue.

The Final CTP fully funds the \$1.38 billion Light Rail Modernization program. This transformative investment will enable a reliable, accessible and frequent Light Rail system from BWI, to Camden Yards, to Hunt Valley. The funding enables MDOT and MTA to fully leverage the historic \$213 million federal grant to buy new Light Rail vehicles, fund important communications upgrades, overhaul vehicle maintenance facilities, and invest in all system stations to accommodate the new low-floor vehicles. **This represents the first significant new investment in our Light Rail system since its creation.** When complete, the system will provide frequent, reliable and affordable high-quality transit for everyday Baltimoreans and businesses, as well as visitors and tourists.

Critically, ensuring the current light rail system is in a state of good repair is important for positioning the Red Line for future federal investment, and the Final CTP maintains \$152 million in funds to continue to advance Red Line project development activities.

Of course, MTA is just one piece of the puzzle for transit and mobility in the greater Baltimore region. Local jurisdictions around our State and region also operate local transit services, known as Locally Operated Transit Systems (LOTS). The Final CTP provides additional support to LOTS in communities here in Baltimore and around the State. These investments include ~\$135 million in operating support and new capital projects like new ferries for the Harbor Connector service and bus fleet and facility investments around the region.

I do understand that the proposed Final CTP will delay MTA’s transition and requirement to reach a 50% zero-emission fleet by 2030. While the BRTC will not lose sight of this critical goal and its public health benefits to some of the most vulnerable communities in our State, we acknowledge the difficult choices, as well as market conditions, being faced by the Moore-Miller Administration and MDOT during these challenging fiscal times. But ensuring Baltimoreans and Marylanders have viable transit options and are not solely reliant on cars to get to work, shopping, school, and health care will itself lead to better climate outcomes.

On behalf of the BRTC, I deeply appreciate the opportunity to be here today, and strongly urge your support for the Final CTP, the proposed new revenue sources that enable it, and MDOT’s overall budget. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.
