



Letter of Information to the House Environment & Transportation Committee

Hearing Date – February 14, 2025

House Bill 517: Maryland Area Rail Commuter Rail Authority – Establishment (MARC Rail Authority Act of 2025)

Chair Korman and members of the Committee, I am Jon Laria, Chair of the Baltimore Regional Transit Commission (BRTC), submitting this Letter of Information as to HB 517 on behalf of the BRTC.

The BRTC was created by the Maryland General Assembly to provide oversight and advocacy for the Baltimore regional transit system, 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.

I am writing today to draw your attention to a [study](#) recently conducted for the BRTC titled “**Alternative Transit Governance and Funding Structures for the Baltimore Region**”. The BRTC commissioned this study because of increasing statewide interest in the viability of regional transit authorities, including by the 2022 Baltimore Metropolitan Council’s Transit Governance and Funding Workgroup and the State’s Transportation Revenue and Infrastructure Needs (TRAIN) Commission. The study is intended to provide a resource to decision-makers, including the Governor and General Assembly, as the State continues to evaluate alternative structures for transit governance and funding.

The BRTC-commissioned study is focused on the Baltimore regional transit system, whose current structure is highly unusual nationally, with MTA’s status as a modal administration entirely within the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT). The MTA has no budget or operating independence, and also no governing board. Although the BRTC has been statutorily charged since 2023 with providing advocacy for MTA and limited oversight of the agency, it has no independent powers or direct authority over MTA’s budget.

The BRTC-commissioned study identifies three alternative models for a new Baltimore regional transit authority and assesses the basic advantages and potential disadvantages of each. The study is necessarily a first step and not the final word on the merits of a new structure. Much more detailed analysis is necessary. Therefore, the BRTC respectfully cautions against preempting such detailed analysis with individual and incremental steps towards reshaping MTA, as HB 517 would do by immediately removing MARC from MTA and creating a separate MARC Rail Authority solely to operate MARC, including the authority to operate and finance (including issue bonds for) MARC alone.

Additionally, I want to reiterate some of the points made by the Maryland Department of Transportation in its Letter of Information provided to the Committee, namely:

- Renegotiating contracts and access agreements could increase costs, impose new restrictions, and create uncertainty.

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- Redirecting MARC revenues threatens existing debt obligations, potentially limiting MDOT's future borrowing capacity.
- Separating MARC from MTA could disrupt scheduling, reduce connectivity, and harm the rider experience.

Nonetheless, the BRTTC certainly welcomes the broader and more comprehensive discussion of alternative structures that the bill is sure to provoke and provide, and hopes the BRTTC-commissioned study can contribute to that important discussion.

The BRTTC respectfully suggests that given the ongoing and intensifying interest in this topic, a "summer study" should be conducted to fully assess the merits of the bill, before making the type of changes it proposes.
