

Transform MARYLAND

TRANSPORTATION

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2022–2026 Policy Agenda



2022–2026

Transform Maryland Transportation Policy Agenda

The Transform Maryland Transportation Coalition, composed of nearly 40 organizations with members throughout our state, is pleased to present the 2022–2026 Transform Maryland Transportation Policy Agenda. We believe meeting the needs identified in the agenda will ensure Maryland residents, workers, businesses and other stakeholders have reliable and equitable public transportation, access to jobs, and a clean transportation system that reduces the impact of our growing climate crisis.

Our current agenda items primarily focus on policies impacting Central Maryland and are:

- **Create a Baltimore Regional Transportation Authority**
- **Build the Planned Light Rail Red Line Across Baltimore City & County**
- **Increase the Frequency and Reliability of Bus, Light Rail and Paratransit Service**
- **Increase the Frequency and Reach of MARC Service**
- **Electrify Transportation Vehicles**
- **Initiate a Free or Reduced Fare Pilot for Low-Income and Youth Transit Riders**
- **Increase Safety for Transit Riders—Especially Youth & Students**
- **Implement Baltimore City Complete Streets Policies and Advance Vision Zero Policies Across the State**
- **Assure Transparency and Accountability for Transportation Spending**

Create a Baltimore Regional Transportation Authority

Regional leaders in Greater Baltimore are seeking to reform the way our public transportation system is governed and financed. Despite certain advantages to the current centralized governance structure of the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA), other structural flaws make maintaining and improving transit performance more difficult. Of the 50 largest transit agencies in the United States, MTA is the only one that is part of a state department of transportation without a board of directors and where decision-making lies solely with a governor. The lack of local participation in planning and funding decisions has been a contributing factor to the maintenance problems and lack of significant expansion or improvement in the last two decades.

Moreover, under the Maryland Transit Administration, the current system has disadvantaged many in our region, perpetuated racial discrimination against Black and Brown communities, and exacerbated many inequities. This has been made evident by cancellation of the Red Line in 2015 and the proposal to cut core bus service by 20% in September 2020.

Therefore, we request:

The Maryland General Assembly authorize creation of a Baltimore Regional Transportation Authority (BRTA) which includes:

- Baltimore City.
- At least the parts of jurisdictions adjacent to Baltimore City which MTA currently serves with bus, light rail or subway – including areas that contain job centers that are important to residents of the region.
- A voting board that represents transit users and other stakeholders in the region.
- Adequate guaranteed annual funding from the State of Maryland.
- Adequate annual funding from the local jurisdictions served by the RTA.
- Protecting the collective bargaining rights of its workers from predecessor systems and ensuring employees don't lose their hard-fought wages and working conditions.
- Consulting with all affected unions regarding decisions on labor-management relations for the future system.
- Opposing efforts to privatize public sector transit jobs and codifying that public transit should be run for public benefit and not private profit.
- A commitment to equity in transportation funding decisions and planning.
- A commitment to transparency in use of public funds and performance reporting.

Build the Planned Light Rail Red Line Across Baltimore City and County

After more than a decade of planning, the Red Line light rail project was canceled by Governor Hogan in 2015. With the federal infrastructure legislation passed by the U.S. Congress, Maryland's Senators inserted language that could reopen the door for the necessary federal funds. We believe building the Red Line is essential for the following reasons:

Reliable, frequent rail service is desperately needed in the Baltimore City/County east-west corridor. The only current east-west transit service is bus service, which is notoriously unreliable. Economic development follows rail lines (for a local example, see the DC Metro). The Red Line would also connect existing transit modes including the West Baltimore MARC station, Light Rail and Metro Subway, in addition to many bus lines and give residents of East and West Baltimore, as well as Eastern and Western Baltimore County, better access to jobs, schools, health care and shopping as well as recreation and social activities.

Therefore, we request:

- The Maryland General Assembly authorize and allocate funds for MTA to update the current Red Line plan and adjust the route in light of development since 2015 - particularly in East Baltimore.
- The Maryland General Assembly authorize and allocate funds for MTA to update the environmental impact statement.
- MTA carry out and complete this work within one year so that a new proposal can be submitted for federal funding in early 2023.
- The Maryland General Assembly update its public-private partnership laws for major construction projects.
- The Maryland General Assembly pass the Transportation Equity Act to ensure that cross-modal equity analyses are conducted before changes can be made in public transportation policy. The bill would enforce provisions of federal Title VI legislation so that projects like the Red Line could no longer be dismissed without fair review.

Increase the Frequency and Reliability of Bus, Light Rail and Paratransit Service

Two of the most frequent complaints of current, former, and prospective transit riders in Maryland are that bus, light rail, and paratransit services are unreliable and infrequent. MTA buses and light rail often do not conform to their published schedules.

It is essential that MTA buses and light rail run on-time. Moreover, MTA must include the percentage of buses and light rail runs that are not made at all in its “on-time” reporting.

Therefore, we request:

- MTA follow-through their commitment to "communicate percentage of missed trips" as outlined in the MDOT Plan 'Rebuilding Better: Committed to an Equitable Transit Future.' This will give more accurate on-time performance data, which will highlight problem areas to be addressed.
- MTA increase evening/weekend service on the 18 high frequency lines to every 15 minutes and increase local link service frequency to 30 minutes or better.
- As consistent with the Regional Transit Plan for Central Maryland, MTA should increase the on-time performance of paratransit service to at least 95% by 2025 and strive for 100%. It should also develop an emergency response plan for riders in at-risk situations.
- MTA initiate a pilot program that expands current commuter bus service to non-traditional commuting times, including mid-day, evenings & weekends.
- MTA explore transit solutions to improve access to state government during the Maryland Legislative Session.
- The General Assembly allocate the necessary funds for MTA to hire the additional personnel and purchase the additional equipment necessary to provide increased service.
- MTA work with Baltimore City & County DOTs to implement transit signal priority for Light Rail and major bus corridors.
- MTA improve the quality of real-time data provided to the transit app.
- The General Assembly increase appropriations for Locally Operated Transit Systems (LOTS) so that local systems across the state can improve service.

Increase the Frequency and Reach of MARC Service

The MARC Commuter Rail System serves the Baltimore/Washington corridor on existing rights-of-way that could benefit from increased service levels. More frequent and efficient MARC service would provide improved job access, as well as economic development opportunities in the form of transit-oriented development (TOD). The success of weekend service introduced in 2014 on the Penn Line demonstrated a latent demand for MARC service beyond the typical peak hour weekday commuting periods.

Therefore, we request that MTA:

- Add weekend & weekday/evening non-commuting time service to the Camden & Brunswick Lines.
- Add more express trains in addition to the single express run piloted in Fall 2021.
- Support construction of a new Frederick Douglass Tunnel on the MARC Penn Line and replace the West Baltimore MARC Station on the new realignment.
- Construct a fourth track between Odenton and Halethorpe on the MARC Penn Line.
- Construct the transit-oriented development (TOD) plans for MARC stations with TOD potential as identified in the MARC Cornerstone Plan.
- Ensure all MARC stations are ADA compliant and accessible for people with disabilities.

Electrify Transportation Vehicles

Transportation is the #1 source of climate pollution in Maryland. Electrifying our vehicles - passenger cars, transit and school buses, and trucks - is a critical strategy to reduce climate and air pollution and must be accompanied by a strong public transit system which encourages smart growth.

In the transition from internal combustion engines to electric-powered vehicles, it will be critical to include complementary policies needed to ensure an equitable, cost-effective, and maximally beneficial transition. These investments should provide incentives for quality local jobs, incorporate workforce development and job security programs, provide a just transition for workers and communities, and prioritize communities most impacted by transportation pollution. In addition, businesses—particularly small companies—operating in impacted communities should receive support in the transition to zero-emission vehicles.

Therefore, we request the appropriate authorities:

- Create a school bus electrification pilot program in each utility service area to transition diesel school buses to zero emissions electric school buses which should be implemented and paid for by Maryland’s investor-owned electrical companies. Simultaneously, MD legislators should work to create pathways to fully electrify the school bus fleet and harness federal funds dedicated to school bus electrification.
- Mandate worker protections and retraining for bus operators and maintenance employees, requirements to retain maintenance “in house” and codify job security for any worker potentially harmed by the transition into MTA's bus contracts for zero emission buses starting in 2023.
- Starting in 2025, require the procurement of zero emission buses for locally operated transit systems (LOTS). The contracts for new buses should contain the same worker protections as the above-mentioned transition for MTA buses.
- Adopt the Zero Emission Trucks Act of 2022, which will require manufacturers to increase the sale of zero-emission trucks and school buses through 2035.
- Adopt the [Heavy-Duty Omnibus \(low NOx\) Regulation](#) that would dramatically reduce the pollutant nitrous oxide by comprehensively overhauling exhaust emission standards, test procedures and other emissions-related requirements.
- Adopt California’s [“Advanced Clean Cars I and II”](#) standards that establish requirements for cars to meet ozone standards.
- Install charging infrastructure for passenger cars and large vehicles across the state, especially in multi-family dwellings.

Increase Safety for Transit Riders — Especially Youth and Students

Safety concerns can deter riders from taking mass transit and make the experience stressful and anxiety producing, especially for youth who rely on the MTA to get to and from school. Many students feel unsafe waiting for buses early in the morning and after dark. Sexual harassment on mass transit is getting more attention around the country, with many agencies launching/having launched campaigns at combatting these violations.

To address these concerns, we request that MTA:

- Conduct a comprehensive survey on harassment/safety conditions that riders are experiencing.
- Use the survey data to develop a campaign to combat harassment. It should include raising passengers' awareness of the issue, mechanisms for riders to report incidents of harassment and violence, bystander intervention resources, and trainings for transit employees.
- Involve local community groups, neighborhood residents and public safety advocates in decisions about where bus shelters are placed and double the current number of shelters by 2025.
- Increase and expand lighting in public areas with public input on where these should be located.

Initiate a Free or Reduced Fare Pilot for Low-Income and Youth Transit Riders

Low-income riders, including students, rely heavily on public transportation to get to and from work and school. Many transit systems—including those serving Boston, Kansas City, Albuquerque & Alexandria—are implementing or piloting free transit service. Initial data from Boston’s pilot free-fare bus through one of its lowest income neighborhoods shows significant increases in ridership and reliability and is being expanded to two other routes.

Moreover, Baltimore City and County currently have free transit service—the Charm City Circulator & Towson Circulator.

Therefore, we request that MTA reduce transit fares or pilot free-transit service no later than 2026 by:

- Piloting a free MTA bus and/or other transit service for youth up to age 18 & low-income riders and track/report ridership and reliability data.
- Depending on results of the pilot, securing long-term public and private funding to support free transit – including free, unlimited MTA access for youth up to age 18 & low-income riders.
- Encouraging elected officials to support the proposed federal Freedom to Move Act.

Implement Baltimore City Complete Streets Policies and Advance Vision Zero Policies Across the State

We must dramatically rethink the way our roads are designed and reimagine them as accessible spaces where people can walk, bike, use their mobility devices, ride public transit, and ultimately arrive at their destination safely. Baltimore City formally adopted the Complete Streets Manual in March 2021, instituting a new modal hierarchy that places pedestrians, cyclists, people using mobility devices, and transit riders above motorists. Without Complete Streets, many residents lack access to reliable, safe transportation while cyclists and pedestrians are vulnerable and unprotected. These issues considerably worsen in formerly redlined communities of color.

Vision Zero is the goal of no traffic fatalities or injuries on roadways and prioritizes Complete Streets design and engineering solutions to transform the safety of the transportation system.

Therefore, we request that:

- The Maryland General Assembly authorize Complete Streets-related enforcement, including allowing Baltimore City to set its own speed limits and auto-enforce illegal parking and blockage of rapid transit lanes.
- Baltimore City allocate lockboxed funds for design and construction of Complete Streets projects.
- MTA and Baltimore City DOT work together to reallocate right-of-way space towards public transit by constructing rapid transit lanes and implementing transit signal priority for light rail and major bus corridors.
- Other Maryland metro areas pursue Complete Streets treatments in their jurisdictions.
- Baltimore City and other local jurisdictions pursue the passage of land use policies promoting the vision of Complete Streets, such as eliminating parking minimums.
- ADA compliance be prioritized in the transition to more complete streets.
- MDOT officially adopt a Vision Zero policy.
- SHA create a program to fast-track approval of local road diet/Complete Streets proposals on state roads.

Assure Transparency and Accountability for Transportation Spending

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill and other federal legislation currently under consideration have the potential to bring unprecedented levels of transportation funding to Maryland. Investment in Maryland transportation projects must meet equity and climate goals, and result in greater accountability for how federal funds are spent in the state.

Therefore, we request the General Assembly and Maryland Department of Transportation use the following guidelines for transportation and transportation infrastructure spending:

- Money should be spent prioritizing communities with the greatest need and most impacted by traditional disinvestment and redlining, using environmental justice screening tools to identify these communities.
- Agencies should secure input from affected communities and provide public accounting of total project spending—including breakdowns of state and federal spending.
- Federal Money—whether earmarks or grants—should be additive and not used to replace state investments.
- Money should be spent to support local-hire, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and other training programs, incorporate prevailing wage, and protect labor and labor peace agreements to protect the state’s proprietary interest in the projects.
- Electric Vehicles should be supported over hydrogen and fuel cell technology.
- Public transit and existing roads and bridges should be prioritized over highway expansion.