



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF TRANSPORTATION

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To: Lonnie Robbins, Chief Administrative Officer

From: Bruce Gartner, Administrator, Howard County Office of Transportation

Subject: Staff Testimony for Council Bill X-2021, Modifications to Multimodal Transportation Board (MTB) membership and duties and elimination of Transit and Pedestrian Advisory Group (TPAG)

Council Bill ___-2021 is a modification in County Code regarding two advisory groups who provide input to Howard County Government on issues related to Public Transit and Pedestrian Transportation. The legislation eliminates the Transit and Pedestrian Advisory Group which currently meets on a quarterly basis, and changes the qualifications, general powers, and duties of the Multimodal Transportation Board and its membership. These changes can be found in Section 6.408 of Title 6, *Department of County Administration, Office of Transportation*, and Sections 21.502 and 21.503, both of Title 21, *Traffic Control and Transportation*. The Administration is recommending these changes to streamline the stakeholder input process to the Office of Transportation and to update the language pertaining to the MTB to reflect recent trends in transportation policy since the adoption of the Complete Streets Policy adopted by County Council in late 2019.

The TPAG, along with the Bicycle Advisory Group (BAG), both serving the Office of Transportation, were officially brought into existence in 2017 by County legislation to advise and inform the Office on transportation matters, provide additional subject matter expertise to the Office, and provide feedback and technical assistance on the implementation of master plans and other initiatives and policy issues.

Over time, it has become clear that other groups, boards and commissions in Howard County address these same sets of concerns as those presented to the TPAG -- primarily, the MTB, which is able to address the concerns more immediately and is able to consider them within the broader context of the County's transportation network more effectively due to the diversity of the transportation expertise of its members. In addition, the Regional Transportation Agency of Central Maryland (RTA) has both a Board of Commissioners and a Rider Advisory Group that address issues concerning transit and pedestrian access to transit.

The Office now has several plans, policies, and guiding documents reflecting the priorities of our community, including our pedestrian master plan, *WalkHoward* (2020); bicycle master plan, *BikeHoward* (2016); Complete Streets policy (2019); Strategic Road Safety Plan (2020); and Transit Development Plan (2018). These plans and policies, along with input and feedback from County government, the County Council, the MTB, the RTA Commission, and the public, provide sufficient guidance to the Office moving forward.

Ending the TPAG has the understanding of the TPAG membership and the endorsement of its Chair. Two members of the TPAG will be considered for appointment to the MTB to help address any remaining issues or concerns.

The proposed changes to the County Code include:

- Elimination of all references to the Transit and Pedestrian Advisory Group.
- Providing language concerning our transportation network that is consistent with the County's Complete Streets policy emphasizing safety, connectivity, equity, and sustainability.
- Specific reference to active transportation, which includes bicycling and walking, to reflect the increased importance these modes have in our County and country and which promote healthy citizens and healthy communities. The importance of active transportation is also included in Complete Streets Resolution (CR120-2019).
- Inclusion of micromobility as a mode, which includes e-scooters, to be consistent with Council Bill 3-2020, Electric Scooter Sharing Permits.
- Requesting a more active role of the MTB members, specifically to support and educate themselves on transportation issues related to Howard County and underserved populations, reflecting the County's priorities demonstrated in the adoption of our Complete Streets policy and ongoing implementation.
- Addressing the fact that our transportation network serves visitors, as well as residents and businesses.
- Redressing language focused explicitly on transit from previous Code amendments and clarifying the MTB's focus on helping to provide a network that includes multiple transportation options. Additionally, the requirements concerning the steps needed for transit modifications are already more appropriately addressed by the RTA, its Commission, its Ridership Advisory Council, and the RTA's public outreach process.

Financially, there are no budgetary obligations required to enact these changes; on the contrary, the elimination of a redundant advisory group will eliminate unnecessary demands on staff, improve efficiency, and assist staff to better support existing and future County transportation policies, projects, and initiatives.

The Office of Transportation affirms that the issues previously addressed by the TPAG in its quarterly meetings are being fully addressed in a more timely manner by the monthly meetings of the MTB, both at this time and moving forward.

These changes in legislation will better reflect the transportation priorities of the County and increase the capacity of the Office of Transportation and the MTB to address them. The Office of Transportation supports Council Bill ___-2021 and recommends adoption by the County Council.