



Testimony Presented to the Senate Budget & Taxation Committee - Public Safety, Transportation, and Environment Subcommittee

MDOT – MTA Budget Hearing

March 1, 2024

Position: Informational

Chair Elfreth and members of the Subcommittee, I am **Jon Laria**, Chair of the Baltimore Regional Transit Commission (BRTC) and member of the Commission on Transportation Revenue and Infrastructure Needs (the TRAIN Commission). I'm testifying today in my role as Chair of the BRTC.

As you know, the BRTC was created by the Maryland General Assembly last year with the mission to engage state and local partners to pursue an ambitious vision of oversight and advocacy for the Baltimore region's transit system. The BRTC held its inaugural meeting on February 2, 2024. One of the tasks the BRTC is required to undertake is to review and make recommendations on the MTA budget, which we began in earnest at our first meeting.

I am very encouraged that the Administration has prioritized transit in the proposed CTP in that there are more funds available across the six-year program period than in the FY23-FY28 CTP. This change provides MDOT the opportunity to invest in critical transit projects and services, and that is surely welcome.

But, unfortunately, there remains intense competition, if not conflict, between improving and expanding the system and doing what is necessary to keep things running both functionally and safely.

I am well aware that many stakeholders and projects vie for these resources, and the balancing of priorities and allocating funds equitably has become the challenging task before us all. Many transit agencies across the county, including MTA and WMATA, are facing a fiscal cliff because of rising costs, inflation, and the drying up of federal relief funds for transit operating assistance.

(cont.)

That said, I would note that MDOT’s six-year Financial Forecast includes funding to address the operating budget funding shortfall at WMATA. The Forecast provides WMATA a "contingency" that is on top of its Operating Budget line. While WMATA needs and deserves our support, we are not seeing a similar commitment to MTA.

It is also important to note that MTA’s proposed budget includes the Purple Line, which is not in Baltimore, and that Purple Line cost increases comprise a significant portion of the total added to MTA’s capital line in the CTP.

Yet, as demonstrated by the \$512 million outlined in its last Capital Needs Inventory in 2022, there are enormous needs at the MTA, particularly within MTA’s core service area in the Baltimore region.

In short, inadequate resources prevent us from achieving the robust and efficient transit system deserved by the Baltimore region, and by extension the entire State of Maryland. There is just not enough revenue to keep the existing system in a state of good repair, let alone the resources to improve or expand it. I truly hope we can come together around a solution that equitably addresses immediate needs, and also creates a sustainable model for the long term.

On behalf of the BRTC, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today.
