

Transportation Association of Maryland *2024 Legislative Agenda*

4 PRIORITY ISSUES

1. Restoration of COVID-19 Budget Cuts to Local Transit

In FY 21, MDOT reduced operating grants to locally operated transit systems by 20% (\$12,000,000) with the explicit proviso that this would be offset by the availability of CARES act funding. Three years later, CARES act funding has been fully allocated but MDOT support for local transit operating funds has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. ***This funding is critical to maintaining paratransit service.*** Local transit systems are being squeezed with higher costs for fuel, labor, and greatly increased capital expenses for vehicles. The return of this funding is critical to ensuring the viability of local transit in Maryland.

2. Driver Assault Legislation

Assaults on public transit operators has increased significantly, especially during the pandemic. The Federal Transit Administration data shows that operator assaults per trip have increased fourfold from 2009 to 2020. In 2023, SB 693 / HB 1049 passed, requiring MDOT MTA to submit an annual report on assaults on Maryland public transit operators by December 1 each year. We look forward to this report and taking additional steps to protect operators and their passengers.

3. Increase Funding to Senior Rides

This program, which relies on volunteer drivers to transport over 26,000 low and moderate-income seniors per year, was funded at a flat level (\$187,000) since FY 2014 until TAM secured a \$50,000 increase for the FY 24 year. We request that this funding be set at a level sufficient to fully fund all current grantees, **\$500,000**. The cost-per-trip of this program is far lower than any other form of publicly supported transportation, including public transportation, taxi vouchers, and other programs (under \$20 per trip in FY 23). TAM requests this funding be further enhanced. ***The increased funding already gained will result in over 8,000 additional trips in FY 24.*** Increased funding will also allow additional participants in this program, as 23 of our 50 non-profit members expressed interest in participating but did not think the program was sufficiently funded for them to receive a grant. Senior Rides fills the gaps and provides services to under-served communities that cannot rely on traditional public transit.

4. Unrealistic Transition Plans:

TAM recognizes the importance of sustainable and efficient public transportation systems. While we share the goal of reducing emissions, we oppose state mandates that require local transit agencies to purchase zero-emission vehicles as a one-size-fits-all solution on a strict deadline. The transition to zero-emission vehicles is a commendable long-term objective, but it must be carried out with careful consideration for the unique circumstances and challenges faced by agencies across our state. Mandates will place an undue financial burden on already cash-strapped agencies and compromise the quality and accessibility of public transportation services for communities. We advocate for a more flexible and realistic approach, allowing transit agencies to flexibly transition to zero-emission vehicles as part of a well-thought-out, adequately resourced, and locally tailored strategy.



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The Transportation Association of Maryland (TAM) is a statewide nonprofit organization with over 100 community transportation, human service, and vendor members. We represent community transportation in every county and jurisdiction in the State of Maryland. As a whole, we are dedicated to improving mobility for all of Maryland's citizens.

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