

January 31, 2014

Mr. Rushern L. Baker, III
County Executive, Prince George's County
County Administration Building
14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772 - 3070

RE: State Transportation Priorities Letter - Establishing a new transportation projects priority list to meet local and state goals

Dear Executive Baker:

We the undersigned smart growth, environmental, transportation and civic organizations working in Prince George's County urge you to make the most of the new opportunity offered by the Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013 to invest in a County that is truly smart, green and growing.

In sum we urge you to:

1. Conduct a transparent project selection process.
2. Clearly tie each project to established county and state TOD and smart growth goals.
3. Urge the state to follow through on the commitment to adequately fund major transit needs over the next six years as top priorities for the county by fully funding: WMATA Momentum capital program (\$50 million for FY15 CTP), the Purple Line (\$1.1 billion), and MARC Growth Plan (\$1.3 billion).
4. Defer costly highway capacity expansion projects that undermine county and state goals and drain billions from the Transportation Trust Fund, specifically: MD 4 at Suitland Parkway interchange, 7 interchanges along MD 210.
5. Expand funding for projects that build complete and green streets, greater safety for all travelers, and offer effective alternatives to highway capacity expansion projects, such as the US 1 Baltimore Avenue project, pedestrian/bicycle improvements and enhanced community revitalization along state roadways, bicycle infrastructure to support Capital Bikeshare, increased funding for local and commuter bus services, and dedicated transit lanes.

The Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013 funds offer a new opportunity to rethink the county's urgent needs, such as infrastructure maintenance and support for smart growth and water quality improvements. Long term demographic and lifestyle trends show declining rates of driving and increased use of transit in coming years; fewer young adults are choosing to own cars, while an increasing number of seniors are less willing or able to drive. The shift in these long term trends, along with growing challenges from climate change call for a complete rethinking of our way of doing business that guides us to sustainable growth supported by better transportation choices. Simply putting more money towards the existing list of state transportation projects will not achieve these goals, nor will we ever have unlimited money to maintain our existing transportation system and build new facilities to support our community and economic development objectives.

In the current county priority letter and the state CTP, a large share of the Prince George’s transportation projects are highway capacity expansion projects and will undermine efforts to build more sustainable, walkable, bike-able, transit-friendly communities. The long list of highway capacity expansions through road widening, interchanges, and new highway projects will not alleviate eliminate traffic congestion, and will offer only costly, temporary relief for some commuters at best, while inducing increased driving and sprawl development. Each project must be evaluated to ensure our limited dollars fulfill the county and state’s goals to increase transportation choices, foster community revitalization, affordability, energy savings, greenhouse gas reductions and reduced air and water pollution.

While the county’s stated policies embrace the goals of revitalization and TOD, the current transportation plans and funding priorities fall short in prioritizing these investments. Given this reality, we offer a critique of current transportation funding priorities and an alternative set of priorities.

Top regional/county investment priorities

The following projects should be the top priority to receive funding. They offer the best chance for providing county residents with greater safety, relief to congested roadways, economic growth through TOD, and to meet the goals and criteria set out by Prince George’s County and the state:

<p>WMATA Momentum – We urge full funding for Maryland’s portion of WMATA’s long range Momentum capital plan to guarantee increased capacity via 100% 8 car trains, core station improvements, the build out of the Bus Priority Corridors Network, bus fleet expansion, among other improvements. WMATA’s capital renewal is fundamental to the county’s transportation network.</p>	<p>\$50 million <i>(for FY2015 CTP; unfunded)</i></p>
<p>Purple Line – In addition to the final design and ROW acquisition funding offered by the Governor at his May 16, 2013 announcement for \$280 million, we urge commitment to the full funding of \$1.1 billion needed. Without this commitment construction will not be completed by 2020 as planned.</p>	<p>\$1.1 billion <i>(of which MDOT has committed \$280M)</i></p>
<p>MARC Growth and Investment Plan – MARC ridership is booming, and provides a much-needed alternative to traffic in the busy corridors between Baltimore and Washington. We ask for full funding for the 2013-2019 Growth and Investment plan: systemwide improvements of \$254 million, along with the planned improvements to the Penn (\$133m) and Camden (\$35m) Lines for a total of \$422 million.</p>	<p>\$422 million in capital costs <i>(of which MDOT has committed \$100M)</i></p>

Top local investment priorities to advance

The following are projects that should be funded or receive additional funding. They are also examples of the types of investments in complete streets, walkability, bikability, and transit that should be considered as the most effective alternatives to highway capacity expansion projects.

<p>US 1, Baltimore Avenue (College Avenue to I-95): The reconstruction project includes sidewalks and wide curb lanes to better accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists. This is the only truly multimodal project in the priority list. More projects should reflect this kind of multimodal approach to enhancing transportation choices around a major job center/destination (the University of Maryland), and existing city.</p>	<p>\$135 million <i>(of which \$20 million was announced for funding on 7/8/2013)</i></p>
<p>Construct pedestrian/bicycle safety improvements and enhance community revitalization along state roadways: We support this current priority from the 2013 letter. These smaller cost projects include sidewalk retrofits, bicycle accommodations, multi-use trails, and other pedestrian/bike improvements (see 12/13/13 BTAG letter for detailed project lists for bicycle and trail improvements). Investments should emphasize Metro stations, TNI areas, historic towns, and gaps in connectivity. The county should also ask the state to pay for both construction and maintenance costs for these facilities, especially sidewalks on state roads. The new funding of \$26 million announced in July 2013 is a great start. We ask that this category of projects be established as a program for funding pedestrian and bicycle facility priorities.</p>	

<p>Transit-oriented development transportation improvements: We ask the county to make this a priority and move up local road, pedestrian/bicycle, and streetscape projects focused on the draft General Plan designated priority investment districts – New Carrollton, Largo, and Prince George’s Plaza Metro stations. These projects should be expedited for design and construction, followed by project planning and development for the rest of the Metro station list: College Park/UM, Greenbelt, Suitland, and Branch Avenue.</p>	
<p>Increase commuter bus services and dedicated transit lanes to provide workers from outer jurisdictions with better transit options and congestion relief. Rather than costly travel lane and interchange additions in the MD 4, MD 5, MD 210 corridors, we recommend enhanced commuter bus services and bus priority treatments including dedicated transit lanes. The state should be requested to restore routes cut in 2008 and to experiment with all day and weekend service on major routes.</p>	
<p>Local bus service expansion: Expedite implementation of the Metrobus Priority Corridor Network routes by leading coordination with WMATA and SHA. Expand hours of service, and offer Saturday and Sunday service for high ridership The Bus routes.</p>	

Projects to be deferred & re-evaluated

The following projects requested in the 2013 County priority letter are a poor public investment for our region. These road capacity expansion projects will undermine efforts to support TOD and reinvestment in existing communities, while increasing greenhouse gas emissions and associated environmental impacts. Alternatives for these projects should be developed.

<p>MD 4 at Suitland Parkway Interchange and MD 4 Corridor Improvement Project. This project will replace the at-grade intersection at Suitland Parkway with a grade-separated interchange, and widen MD 4 to a 6 lane freeway. It is part of a series of highway capacity expansions to not only accommodate existing traffic but to support the massive 6,000-acre greenfield development scheme known as Westphalia. Providing close to half a billion dollars in public funds to support this plan contradicts state and county priorities. Fueling the Westphalia project will directly undermine transit-oriented development at the 15 largely underutilized Metro stations and inside the Beltway communities. We recommend deferring the initial \$150M promised to this project, as well as the full cost, and re-assessing smaller scale road improvements that do not expand capacity and refocus resources on fostering TOD, revitalization of existing communities and safety for all users.</p>	<p>\$460.7 million <i>(of which \$150M was announced for funding by MDOT on 7/8/2013)</i></p>
<p>MD 210, Indian Head Highway – 7 interchanges. We question this highway capacity expansion project as the county’s top priority, especially in light of the amount of public funds already poured into supporting the National Harbor project, a greenfield project, far from existing transit. We ask that MDOT re-evaluate the \$100M promised to the first interchange, as well as the full 7 interchange plan for Indian Head Highway which is another example of never-ending costly widening that fuel continued sprawl development. More compact development, local street connections, enhanced commuter bus services, and dedicated transit lanes for express bus service would better serve the region over the long term.</p>	<p>\$606 million <i>(of which \$100M was announced for funding on 5/16/2013)</i></p>

Projects to be revised

<p>Prince Georges County Projects</p>	
<p>Branch Avenue Metro (I-95/495 Access to MD 5) – This project, while valid in purpose may be oversized with a large scale roadway connecting to the Metro station. This oversized roadway will encourage high speeds for motorists, creating an unpleasant and potentially dangerous street environment for pedestrians and bicyclists. The oversized roads will be an impediment to TOD. We suggest redesigning the roadways around the Metro station to create complete streets which allow for low speed motorized vehicle travel, and comfortable crossings and parallel travel for walking and bicycling.</p>	<p>\$75 million <i>Of which \$50 million was announced by MDOT 7/8/13)</i></p>

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with your staff to ensure that every dollar invested in our transportation system builds a prosperous and more sustainable Prince George's and Maryland future.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Cort
Coalition for Smarter Growth

Karren Pope-Onwukwe
Prince George's Advocates for
Community-based Transit

Andrew Fellows
Clean Water Action

Carol Sillardoff
Bike Maryland

Shane Farthing
Washington Area Bicyclists
Association