

**Committee: Environment & Transportation**

**Testimony on: HB 695 “Transportation Climate Accountability Act of 2019”**

**Position: Support**

**Hearing Date: February 26, 2019**

The Coalition for Smarter Growth strongly supports HB 695.

This legislation would require the Department of the Environment to conduct a comprehensive study of the environmental impact of transportation projects which are proposed to be undertaken through a public-private partnership (P3). In addition, if the P3 project is one that requires an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) – i.e., a major project – the study required by this bill would need to be completed before submission of the P3 pre-solicitation report mandated by current law.

We support the bill for the important environmental reasons laid out by the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club in their testimony. But we also support the bill because it will ensure the state is objectively studying alternatives and identifying the best approaches to addressing transportation challenges.

There has been a tendency of state departments of transportation to jump to the conclusion that a P3, and specifically a P3 toll road approach, is the solution to highway problems. In their rush to put P3 deals first, we lose the objective consideration of non-highway alternatives and the community, fiscal, and environmental costs of toll road projects. Transportation P3s have become the tail wagging the dog -- a less than transparent process where too many state DOTs start with the conclusion to build a toll road, before fairly and objectively considering other alternatives.

While HOT lane projects (those where HOV travels free) might provide some peak hour relief, it is still the case that the general-purpose lanes and all approaching roads will rapidly fill up again. In contrast, creating walkable, mixed-use, transit-oriented centers and corridors connected by high-capacity transit, will significantly reduce vehicle trips and vehicle miles traveled, increase walking, biking and transit use, and reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. However, DOTs have not been studying this comprehensive, integrated land use, transit, and demand management alternative.

Requiring environmental and alternatives analysis up front, will ensure that P3 projects are fairly and objectively compared to other less environmentally costly, and long-term more effective approaches.

We urge the committee to favorably report the bill. Thank you.

Stewart Schwartz

Executive Director