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**As COVID-19 Proves the Vital Importance of Public Transit,
A New Plan for Transit's Future is Open for Comment In Metropolitan Baltimore**

*Advocates Encourage Riders and Employers to Weigh In on
Draft Central Maryland Regional Transit Plan by June 18th*

Baltimore, MD – As the COVID-19 crisis shines a light on the vital importance of public transit service in the Baltimore region, a newly released regional transit plan provides an historic opportunity to make much needed improvements that have long been identified by riders, advocates, employers, and other regional stakeholders. The draft plan advances the process of building consensus around a bold vision for Baltimore's transit system and advocates are preparing public comments to strengthen it further.

The Central Maryland Regional Transit Plan is the first comprehensive transit plan for the region in a generation. Advocates are pushing for a plan that provides meaningful changes in people's lives and hope to see implementation of a strong plan begin as early as this fall, starting with feasibility studies planned by MTA and BMC for several priority transit corridors. Implementing a well-designed plan will mean better connections to jobs, medical care, and other essential destinations, as well as improving Baltimore's poor air quality that contributes to respiratory illness, and climate change emissions.

Developed by the MTA in consultation with regional stakeholders, the plan lays out a 25-year vision for improving the system. It includes objectives, goals, and initiatives, such as increasing systemwide on-time performance to 85%, electrifying the vehicle fleet, and identifies 30 specific regional transit corridors where upgrades ranging from bus service to heavy rail subway could one day be made.

"We've seen in the DC region how important our extensive, well-funded rail and bus transit network has been for access to jobs and the region's economic success. The Baltimore region and State of Maryland need to make a similar commitment," said Jane Lyons with the Coalition for Smarter Growth.

"It's great that we will soon have a plan. It is important that Federal stimulus funds for responding to and recovering from the COVID-19 crisis are used for strategic improvements of our lacking

infrastructure. They could be applied to some of the strategies and projects in the Plan. It's important to have a vision," said Klaus Philipsen of ArchPlan Inc.

Transit agencies across the country are scrambling to keep riders and operators safe while providing essential trips to hospitals, grocery stores, and other destinations. The draft plan includes a strategy to use transit to "respond and recover from emergencies (security threats and natural disasters)" which advocates say must be elevated and fleshed out as a priority.

"The coronavirus pandemic has drawn into focus the vital role that public transportation plays in greater Baltimore. While some parts of the country have seen transit ridership fall by 90 percent or more, the ridership on MTA's core service is only down 50 or 60 percent. That's partly because nearly 4 in 10 transit riders in Baltimore are essential workers in sectors like healthcare, grocery stores and food distribution," said Brian O'Malley of the Central Maryland Transportation Alliance.

"The pandemic has exacerbated challenges faced by the region's most distressed neighborhoods," said Tafadzwa Gwitira with Tele Farm. "A third of Baltimore households lack access to a car, but in some neighborhoods more than half do. Many people rely on the bus, train, or paratransit to get to the grocery store, or to medical appointments."

"The vehicles we drive on our roads pollute the air we breathe, particularly in communities of color and other marginalized communities. Health experts warn that this particulate matter pollution can exacerbate the severity of respiratory diseases like COVID 19. We must heavily invest in transit to give us more healthy choices to move around so that we can protect public health and combat climate change."- Josh Tulkin of the Maryland Sierra Club.

"Advocates are currently digesting the plan and hope that it can deliver a more reliable, accessible system for all," said Jimmy Rouse of Transit Choices. "The Central Maryland region currently lacks a plan for the future of public transportation. As a result we are in a weak position to compete for private investment, state investment and federal investment. The sooner we can produce a plan the stronger position we will be in to bring resources for economic recovery here."

The draft plan, titled 'Connecting Our Future, a Regional Transit Plan for Central Maryland' is available for public comment until June 18th. The MTA has set up a project web site, <https://rtp.mta.maryland.gov/>, that allows for online commenting and plans to announce virtual office hours when MTA staff will be available to answer questions. A final version of the plan will be published in October of 2020. Advocates say the plan is more urgent now than ever.

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