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Transportation Alliance

January 29, 2018

Honorable Allan Kittleman
County Executive
Howard County
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043

RE: Fiscal Year 2019 Transportation Priority Letter

Dear County Executive Kittleman,

Thank you very much for this opportunity to provide comments on the Fiscal Year 2019 Priority Letter from Howard County. As a transportation advocacy organization, the Central Maryland Transportation Alliance unites business, philanthropic and institutional sectors around a common agenda: improving and expanding transportation options for the citizens and businesses of Central Maryland. Our singular focus is to be a catalyst for improving the region's transportation. We consider the Central Maryland region to be roughly those counties that fall within the boundaries of the Baltimore Regional Transportation Board and Baltimore Metropolitan Council, which includes Howard County.

First, we would like to you and your administration for publicizing the projects you propose for inclusion in the priority letter, holding a public hearing to collect comments, and soliciting additional input through an online survey. According to the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), priority letters play an important role in the creation of the state's Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP). Despite that critical role, our experience as advocates who sit outside of local and state government is that the creation of a priority letter is not an open and transparent process. Generally, there is no formal way for a county's residents to weigh in on the jurisdiction's letter. We applaud your efforts to give Howard County residents more of a voice in the transportation planning process.

In addition to weighing in on the process of creating the priority letter, we respectfully offer the following comments on the projects being proposed for inclusion in the letter.

The County has put forward 17 projects it has asked residents to comment on as part of the development of the priority letter. Two of the projects (backup generators and noise walls) do not expand capacity, leaving 15 major capital expansion or improvement projects. Of those 15, ten are primarily related to highway or road capacity expansions, three are primarily related to bicycle and pedestrian projects, and two are for transit. The mix of projects reveals a clear emphasis on road and highway projects over active transportation (walking, biking) and public transportation.

Additionally, according to MDOT, the ordering of the projects in the priority letter is critically important. In the introductory language to the CTP, MDOT identifies the criteria it uses to identify which projects to include. One of the criteria is that a project “is the single top priority within a local priority letter”. If MDOT is strictly enforcing this then the multi-modal and active transportation projects that do not come first are unlikely to be included in the CTP. The resulting advantage for road and highway projects leads to those projects being the most likely funded. Meanwhile, the underinvestment in active transportation will continue until those projects are elevated to be a top priority. Making those projects top priorities would demonstrate that the county is serious about advancing the goals and strategies laid out in the county’s general plan for “enhancing the existing transit system via new service and increased regional cooperation, and for reducing personal vehicle miles traveled to improve air quality.”

Thank you very much for the opportunity to comment on the Fiscal Year 2019 Priority Letter for Howard County. We will encourage other jurisdictions to look at the example Howard County is setting by opening up this process and we hope they will follow your lead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian O'Malley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Brian O'Malley
President & CEO

CC: David Cookson, Comprehensive and Regional Planner, Office of Transportation
Clive Graham, Administrator, Office of Transportation