



March 15, 2013

The Honorable Sheila Ellis Hixson
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
131 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Hixson:

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) has not taken a position on HB 1515, *Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013*. However, it would like to share the two attached documents to express MACo's views on transportation funding.

The first attachment is a broad transportation statement recently approved by MACo's Legislative Committee. The second attachment is a letter from MACo President and Wicomico County Executive Rick Pollitt that was published as a "letter to the editor."

Please contact me if MACo can provide additional information regarding the county perspective on transportation funding.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Sanderson".

Michael Sanderson
Executive Director

Attachments

CC: House Ways and Means Committee Members
Stanford Ward, Committee Staff



Counties Are Critical to Maryland Transportation

Maryland's citizens demand and deserve safe and effective infrastructure. This includes not just high visibility highways and mass transit, but also the locally maintained roads that represent nearly 5 of every 6 road miles. However, during the great recession, no area of State funding has been compromised more than local roads and bridges, where funding diversions now approach \$1.5 billion. Far too many community roads receive no funding at all.

Levying taxes and charges on motor vehicles to serve as a "user fee" to support transportation systems has historically rallied support from motorists, businesses, and governments alike. Maryland has strayed from this ideal, leaving locally managed roadways startlingly underfunded, and dependent on the still-dropping property tax for support.

Counties are encouraged that state policy makers are approaching these difficult financing issues. Many of the proposals will create different effects on each region of the state. For this reason, MACo, as a representative of all 24 subdivisions, is not taking a position on any specific proposal. The General Assembly's recognition of the problem is the first step toward finding workable solutions.

MACo reinforces its longstanding commitment to a broad-based and equitable system of transportation financing. The historic distribution of Highway User Revenues, with 30% dedicated to local purposes, accomplished this policy goal without creating cross-jurisdictional competition in taxes or distributions. The State's Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Funding reached the same conclusion: "The Commission recommends that Highway User Revenue (HUR) funding for localities, which includes counties, municipalities, and Baltimore City, be incrementally returned." (*Final Report, page 10*)

Remedying this imbalance should be a priority for the State, and county leaders are prepared to contribute toward solutions to better sustain local transportation.

Richard M. Pollitt: Counties ask state to maintain Main Street

*Written by Richard M. Pollitt
Mar. 14*

delmarvanow.com

Richard M. Pollitt: Counties ask state to maintain Main Street

Across Maryland, local road crews are plowing snow to clear community roadways — part and parcel of the business of local government. Our citizens demand and deserve good, safe, clear roads and bridges.

However, all too many of those local roads are covered with pock marks and potholes. State support for local roads has nearly evaporated in recent years. Counties have no local transportation revenue options, so they look to the property tax, already weakened by a real estate decline. Local roads are being left behind and every storm event requiring local funds to plow and clear these essential roads makes the problem worse.

Maryland's policy leaders are now focusing on transportation funding. If a new transportation investment is made, among the most important decisions is whether the plan should focus exclusively on major state highways and transit projects. Motorists deserve better than that. Five out of every six road miles in the state are maintained by local governments; these are the roads our kids take to school, that get us to our jobs and home safely.

A plan that ignores this high priority is not a fair plan for Maryland citizens, who may be asked to pay more at the pump and expect their familiar roadways to be supported.

In Annapolis, there's time to decide what the priorities are. Everyone now seems to believe a transportation "lockbox" is essential. The counties agree, particularly because the transportation funds that have been redirected to other purposes are local highway user revenues that formerly supported local roads and bridges. That share of the gas tax got slashed in 2009 during the depths of the great recession and was never scheduled to be repaid.

Counties recognized the unfortunate need for state budget-cutting during these toughest of times, but even today, still see only a nickel on the dollar of previous funding levels. The momentum for the lockbox idea underlies the importance of local roads and this contract with motorists that they will benefit from their gas taxes.

If a new financing plan comes together, leaders in Annapolis need to bring a fair share of those funds back to Main Street. Any plan without this is incomplete, and unfair to millions of Marylanders that count on quality county roadways.

Richard M. Pollitt is president of the Maryland Association of Counties and county executive of Wicomico County.