



Senate Bill 908

Maryland Open Transportation Investment Decision Act of 2016

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Budget & Taxation Committee

Date: March 14, 2016

From: Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 908. The bill would subject major state transportation projects to a detailed scoring system during their consideration for inclusion in the state's Consolidated Transportation Plan. Counties are concerned that the bill's detailed provisions may marginalize local input, overlook regional or demographic variations in transportation needs, and under-value safety as a driving factor in project approval.

While the concept of SB 908 has been compared to one employed in Virginia, the comparison is not a precise one. In Virginia, the "scoresheet" for projects divides the state into multiple tiers - recognizing that the suitable framework for assessing projects is necessarily a function of different areas' needs, populations, and priorities. SB 908 instead includes a one-size-fits-all construct that will inherently be a mismatch for projects that simply do not match up with the statutorily prescribed benchmarks.

Additionally, the bill contains a provision to adjust the assessment of every affected project based on the population of its "project area." While this term is not clearly defined in the bill, a reasonable inference is that this results in any project from large jurisdictions receiving a magnified score, regardless of their merits on the various components (safety, system preservation, cost effectiveness and the like). The inclusion of a full category on "cost effectiveness" seems to target such a policy concern on its own – an additional magnifier effect may simply skew projects geographically, even further than the process would intend on its stand-alone merits.

Safety likely tops any public assessment of project importance. Citizens, motorists, and transit riders would all likely agree that remedying publicly dangerous circumstances merits high priority. Laudably, SB 908 includes a traditional measure of safety ("expected reduction in total fatalities and severe injuries") as one element listed in the bill's scoresheet. But, SB 908 awards only around 6% of its weight to that component.

Historically, the Department of Transportation has engaged in a "road show" of visiting each jurisdiction, evaluating input from local leaders, and ultimately receiving localized priority rankings for projects. While not binding, this process ensures that the project evaluation process is substantially grounded in community-based input. Counties fear that SB 908 could marginalize the importance of this local input, and at worst compel the Department to discontinue that valued process. MACo urges the Committee to consider structured local input as a valued part of a proper project assessment process at any level.

While MACo understands the interest in fostering greater transparency in the decision-making process, SB 908 potentially overrides many long-standing and valuable elements from current decision-making, and potentially marginalizes local input into project needs. For these reasons, MACo requests an **UNFAVORABLE** report on SB 908.