

Testimony in Favor of HB 1515
Ben Ball
Chair, WMATA Riders' Advisory Council

My name is Ben Ball, and I am the Chair of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council. I'm here today on behalf of our Maryland delegation to support investment in public transportation options through the Maryland Transportation Infrastructure Act.

Since its conception in the 1960s, Metro's trains, buses, and paratransit options have served Maryland well. Hundreds of thousands of Maryland residents depend on Metro every day to get to their jobs, go to school, and run their errands. I am one of the many Metro riders who are taking the next step and leaving their cars behind. In many ways, we are living out the dream of Metro's founders – the system they built is an engine of Maryland's prosperity.

But I'm here today to tell you that we can't coast on that original dream forever. Metro is showing its age. Trains are at capacity, maintenance costs are rising, and the demand for service in Maryland is increasingly unable to keep pace with demand. We are fast approaching the time where Metro will be unable to accommodate the demands of a growing region. If we fail to invest now, we run the risk that an overburdened public transportation system will constrain Maryland's growth rather than driving it.

We need a new vision. Actually, it's fair to say that a new vision is overdue. Underinvestment in transportation infrastructure has consequences – consequences that we are already starting to see. We can't wait. We can't kick the can down the road. We can't squeeze any more capacity out of the transit options that we have.

Maryland needs its elected officials to make some concrete investments – not just in the future, but in the present. Metro needs funding to deal with long-deferred capital investment projects to keep the system safe and reliable. Metro needs funding to expand bus service in ever-expanding Maryland communities. Maryland residents need the Silver Line and future Purple Line to knit their communities together. Only a consistent, reliable funding source can make all these things happen.

The investments we make in public transportation today will pay immediate and lasting dividends for all Marylanders. This is why Maryland needs your support on HB 1515. I encourage you on behalf of all the Council's Maryland constituents to cast your vote in favor of this bill.