

GBC mulls ways to improve state's infrastructure

In annual meeting, group eyes transportation, energy

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Increasing traffic congestion and aging energy generation facilities — two issues the **Greater Baltimore Committee** knows could soon hamstring Baltimore's business community.

GBC officials on Wednesday night planned to call for Maryland lawmakers to develop long-term strategies to address the state's \$40 billion backlog of underfunded transportation projects and to build electricity

transmission and generation resources to meet increasing demand.

"The GBC was set up to be a problem-solving organization," Don Fry, the GBC's president and chief executive officer, said before the group's 53rd annual meeting Wednesday at the Hyatt Regency Baltimore. "We want to identify current and future problems affecting the business community and let our members know how we're going to address those problems."

The issue of transportation funding "took a positive step forward in the special session in November, only to take a step back during the regular session," Fry said. During November's special session, lawmakers increased annual transportation funding by \$400 million, but during this year's regular session, they took

back more than \$50 million per year to balance the general fund budget.

Fry said the state, with growing issues surrounding traffic congestion, is at the point where it's facing "a transportation crisis."

"It continues to be what I think is the most significant economic growth issue facing our state," Fry said.

Fry planned to announce the GBC would convene a private work group to examine potential alternative methods of funding transportation, study the feasibility of creating a regional transportation authority and host a June 16 summit on the state's transportation issues.

GBC Chairman Atwood "Woody" Collins linked the group's work on transportation infrastructure with efforts to improve the state's elec-

tricity transmission and distribution system.

The state imports 22 percent of its electricity needs, and 60 percent of its electricity infrastructure is at least 30 years old, Collins said.

"Not only do we as a business community need to have an uninterrupted source of energy, the regulatory authorities ... have mandated Maryland update our electricity facilities in the 2011-2012 time frame," said Collins, president of M&T Bank's Mid-Atlantic Division. "This is our state, our economy, our businesses — we better start rolling up our sleeves and doing something about it."

More than 850 regional business and civic leaders were expected to attend the GBC meeting.

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