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Region's top transportation priorities lack cash to make them happen

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The **Maryland General Assembly** recently enacted more than \$400 million in annual increases to the Transportation Trust Fund, the state's mechanism for funding transportation operation and infrastructure. While this figure is not insignificant, it ultimately falls short of what is needed to address adequately the state's \$50 billion backlog of transportation projects.

This transportation funding shortage must be rectified in the near term for the sake of the health of our region and state, particularly in light of the anticipated growth associated with more than 40,000 jobs projected in Maryland as a result of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process.

When one considers this, along with the anticipated tightening of federal funding for transportation, there is a compelling motivation to identify and prioritize needed transportation projects in central Maryland and to find an achievable means for funding construction.

Here are some projects that should be on central Maryland's transportation priority list:

- Completion of the Red Line, the proposed 12-mile east-west rapid transit line from Woodlawn to Canton, and ultimately to the Johns Hopkins Bayview medical campus.
- Completion of the Green Line, the proposed rapid transit extension of the Metro from the Johns Hopkins University's Medical Campus in east Baltimore to the vicinity of Morgan State University and Good Samaritan Hospital in northeast Baltimore.
- MARC commuter rail improvements up and down the Baltimore region's northeast corridor, which would involve renovation and addition of stations, more cars to increase service frequency, and additional tracks to enable MARC to co-exist more easily with **Amtrak** and freight carriers.
- Addition of MARC service north into Wilmington, Del., and south into Northern Virginia. Such an extension is crucial to accommodating the expected surge of workers coming to Maryland as a result of BRAC.
- Additional BRAC-related transportation needs. Lt. Gov. Anthony Brown's BRAC subcommittee recently identified \$3.6 billion worth of transportation improvements within a five-mile radius of military units targeted for BRAC growth -- Aberdeen Proving Ground, Fort Meade, **Andrews Air Force Base**, Fort Detrick, and **Bethesda Naval Hospital**. Some of the transportation projects are not currently in the state's latest transportation plan.
- Bridge needs. The bridge collapse in Minnesota on Aug. 1 should be a wake-up call for Maryland. Our state's bridges need structural examination on a regular basis and some, such as the almost 70-year-old Hatem Bridge over the Susquehanna River, may even merit greater structural attention.
- Convenient transportation links between the region's bioparks. There is no direct means of transportation between the two biopark sites in Baltimore or to other facilities such as UMBC's research park in Baltimore County. Long-range planners should also consider improving transportation between the Greater Baltimore parks and the Shady Grove/I-270 research corridor in Montgomery County.

The transportation prioritizing process is, of course, complicated by the overall cost of these and many projects in other regions that are vital to enabling Maryland to be capable of accommodating its current population as well as those who will arrive in the near future.

As we struggle to find a way to expedite construction of new transportation infrastructure, it is critical to examine alternative means to fund projects at the local, state and federal levels of government. Already, Congress is considering a "design/bid/build" system to implement in the construction of our nation's mass transit projects. At the state and local levels, there is the prospect of public-private partnerships, as well as other creative financing methods.

Furthermore, we must consider establishing county or regional funding sources to supplement existing state and federal funding.

The first step toward a solution to the dilemma of our vast and growing transportation needs and inadequate funding is to clearly agree, statewide and within regions, on specifically what we need to build to address our mobility challenges and to enhance economic growth.

I'm confident that if Maryland's policy leaders achieve consensus on priorities and can manage to focus on solutions free of politics and hidden agendas, we will find a way to close the current yawning gap between transportation needs and our ability to pay for them.

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