

# Transportation funding must rise now in Md.

BY ATWOOD COLLINS III

Maryland is at the threshold of a historic opportunity to grow and thrive. It is also teetering on the precipice of a crisis.

There are 60,000 jobs coming into the state through the military base realignment and closure (BRAC) process, the Baltimore region's GDP is growing to \$120 billion and our median household income is now among the highest in the nation. But with this tremendous surge in growth comes an increased strain on our overburdened transportation system. This is a challenge we must meet by increasing transportation funding by \$600 million per year to maintain and make improvements to our transportation system.

Our network of highways, transit, port and airport facilities is essential to our state's economic well-being. But in the Baltimore region, drivers spend 60 million hours annually sitting in traffic, which translates into 40 million gallons of gas wasted each year, according to the Texas Transportation Institute.

The Maryland Department of Transportation reports that since 1992:

- The volume of cars on our roads has increased 31 percent, while our highway capacity has increased only 3 percent.
- The MARC system is over its capacity, with 30,000 riders a day, up from 20,000.
- Harbor Tunnel traffic is up nearly 30,000 vehicles a day.
- Passengers at BWI Marshall Airport have doubled from 10 million to 21 million a year.
- The state's gas tax, a major source of funds for repair, maintenance and growth of our transportation network, has not increased one penny.

That's why the **Greater Baltimore Committee**, the Greater Washington Board of Trade and other business leaders across the state are calling for a \$600 million increase in transportation funding, including an increase in the gas tax. Of that amount, \$250 million is required simply to maintain our current infrastructure.

The fact that business leaders are supporting a gas tax increase demonstrates just how critical this issue is. If we fail to adequately fund the preservation and improvement of our transportation assets, our infrastructure will continue to deteriorate. This historic opportunity will slip through our fingers.

It's time for this region to act, before we tip into a crisis.

Gov. Martin O'Malley and Transportation Secretary John D. Porcari are to be commended for seeking to boost transportation funding. Their plan includes indexing the current gas tax to inflation, generating new titling tax revenue and channeling more funds from car rentals and corporate income taxes into transportation. But their proposed \$400 million increase falls short of what is needed.

The per-gallon gas tax in Maryland has not been increased in 15 years and has not kept up with rising costs of construction or inflation. Couple this with the fact that federal funding is tightening, and available money for new projects will decrease by as much as \$700 million annually in five years, according to state estimates.

This comes at a time when the state faces at least a \$40 billion backlog of transportation projects planned for the next six years.

We must not allow our state's transportation infrastructure to get lost amid the deficit debate. Increasing the gas tax to help boost transportation funding by \$600 million annually is a difficult but necessary decision.

Atwood Collins III, president of M&T Bank's Mid-Atlantic Division, is chairman of the **Greater Baltimore Committee**, an organization of business and civic leaders. His e-mail is [acollins@mtb.com](mailto:acollins@mtb.com).