

GBC's Fry says transportation needs more cash

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According to a top regional transportation advocate, the \$400 million or so Gov. Martin O'Malley plans to put toward state road, rail and transit operations and projects each year is only two-thirds of what the system requires.

Greater Baltimore Committee CEO Donald Fry is pressing the O'Malley administration and state legislators to employ more attention — and state funds — to a \$40 billion backlog in transportation improvements, which need at least \$600 million a year to progress, he said.

As state leaders work to resolve a \$1.7 billion budget shortfall, either in a special session of the General Assembly or in its regular 2008 session, Fry said he is lobbying to bring the transportation funding need to the forefront. Lawmakers said it may be difficult to address

this year.

"I think it's going to be hard to get more than [\$400 million] with all the other things that are going on," said Sen. James E. DeGrange Sr., an Anne Arundel Democrat who chairs the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee's transportation subcommittee.

O'Malley unveiled his plans to address the budget shortfall to General Assembly leaders Sept. 18, and DeGrange said they included increases in car-titling taxes and corporate income taxes as possible sources of revenue for the state's Transportation Trust Fund, which holds money dedicated to transportation operations and capital projects. O'Malley hasn't advocated an increase in gasoline taxes, "but I don't think that's off the table," DeGrange said.

In testimony to a joint transportation committee of the legislature Sept. 18, Fry presented a plan to reach the \$600 million goal. The strategy included a gas tax increase of 10 cents per gallon, a titling tax increase from 5 percent to 6 percent and an increase in the proportion of sales and corporate income taxes dedicated to transportation.

O'Malley spokesman Rick Abbruzzese did not outline the details of the administration's plans but said more would be revealed during the week of Sept. 24.

