



April 16, 2024

The Honorable Secretary Paul J. Wiedefeld
Secretary of Transportation
Maryland Department of Transportation
7201 Corporate Center Drive
Hanover, Maryland 21076

RE: 2024 MDOT Tour Meeting / Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP)
Board of County Commissioners Transportation Priorities

Dear Secretary Wiedefeld:

The Washington County Board of County Commissioners, County Administrator, and staff look forward to your 2024 MDOT CTP Tour Meeting with us and the City of Hagerstown. Please consider these priorities in the upcoming six-year CTP budget for transportation projects.

Interstate 81 Widening: Thank you for including I-81 Phase 2 in the State's Long Range Transportation Plan, "The Playbook", but please reinstate recently pulled construction funding as soon as possible. For more than 20 years, the I-81 widening project has been the number one transportation priority for Washington County. Safety is a major concern as traffic volumes increase, and truck-related crashes on I-81 continue to be significantly higher than statewide averages. Please allocate preliminary engineering funding for Phases 3/4 in the next CTP to finish widening I-81 to the Pennsylvania line, and we ask that MDOT staff plans for construction funding for the remainder of this 12-mile interstate highway. In the meantime, we ask MDOT to consider lowering the speed limit and expanding Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) until the roadway improvements can be completed.

Interstate 70 and Maryland 65 Interchange Improvements: Construction has been completed on the bridges, and the CTP only has planning funding for the future interchange improvement. Please consider including design/engineering of the proposed cloverleaf in the next CTP. The interchange currently serves the Premium Outlets to the north and several other new developments to the south. These interchange improvements, as well as coordination by MDOT for much-needed traffic signal synchronization along Maryland 65 in this area, continue to be important to local businesses, citizens, and commuters.

747 Northern Avenue | Hagerstown, MD 21742-2723 | P: 240.313.2460 | TDD: 711

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Highway User Revenue (HUR). The County was pleased that proposed cuts were restored with a one-time funding allocation in FY25. It seems, despite recent progress to restore some funding to the counties, this vital funding source is consistently targeted for reduction, and the County's HUR revenue share continues to remain well below historical rates. This funding supports the operations associated with maintaining approximately 900 miles of road, and under any reasonable metric, the County's share is less than other recipients. The County applauds efforts and recommendations of the Maryland Commission on Transportation Revenue and Infrastructure Needs (the TRAIN Commission) to pursue sustainable transportation revenue sources that more accurately reflect the users' impact; however, whatever revenue strategies are implemented must be shared in an equitable manner relative to the collection method and each owners' highway maintenance costs.

Aviation Program: The Hagerstown Regional Airport (HGR) is grateful for the continued generous and reliable financial support from the state Office of Regional Aviation Assistance (RAA). In order to maintain safety and service, HGR is looking to undertake the following by 2029: runway and airfield rehabilitation and lighting and marking upgrades; passenger boarding bridge upgrades, terminal parking lot and entrance roadway improvements, adjacent property acquisition, fuel farm facility relocation, construction of a new salt/materials storage building, security fence and camera upgrades, ARFF vehicle F3 foam transition, Wildlife Hazard Plan update, snow removal equipment building expansion, replacement of aging T-Hangar structures and airport vehicles, and completion of a 4,800-square feet addition to the landside terminal. HGR hopes to complete an Airport Master Planning process (including Terminal Study) in 2029 after our BIL programs are concluded. We note that proposed cuts have limited the RAA's funding to as little as \$1.3 million to cover the needs of some 16 non-MAA-owned airports. HGR respectfully requests the restoration of RAA past funding levels, providing that office with the necessary resources for state-matching funds to cover "soft costs" such as design, bidding, and construction phase services. Ideally, increasing to an annual \$5 million would better serve our state's airport system needs and maximize access to federal grants awarded to Maryland's non-MAA administered airports. ATCT Update: With assistance from Maryland's Congressional Delegation, HGR is in communication with the FAA to inquire as to HGR's status within the FAA Air Traffic Organization (ATO)'s internal list of scheduled ATCT replacements. Finally, HGR recommends development of a Routine Airport Maintenance Program (RAMP) grant program similar to what is administered by the State of Texas (https://ftp.dot.state.tx.us/pub/txdot-info/avn/ramp_grants.pdf).

Transit Program: With new business development in the County driving increased public demand, Washington County Transit (WCT) ridership has continued to recover, surpassing pre-Covid numbers. Creative recruitment practices have helped WCT to fulfill the transit system's needs during the recent national driver shortage. Each year, WCT logs over 500,000 service miles in and around Hagerstown, Maryland. Formula-based FTA and State operational funds are critical to expanding public transit throughout Washington County in accordance with the most recent Transportation Development Plan. Federal operating fund allocations continue to remain flat for WCT, and increased program costs over the last several years have outpaced State revenues (grant funding matches and SSTAP) thus impacting local authority contributions of both federal match dollars and over-match dollars to cover

expenses. In FY25, local County over-match dollars will again increase by approximately \$300,000. WCT is requesting an increase in Federal and State formula-based funds to bridge this gap in funding and allow for the needed expansion of demand response, paratransit service for individuals with disabilities, staffing at the Transit Transfer Center in downtown Hagerstown and expansion of transit services to connect communities in rural areas of the County. In FY25, the Hagerstown/Eastern Panhandle Metropolitan Planning Organization (HEPMPO) will be undertaking a study regarding a Facilities Expansion Plan for Washington County Transit, which moved into a former car dealership in 1972. The current facility is inadequate for the administrative, maintenance and bus storage space needed for ongoing transit service and operations. Regarding Intercity Transit Connections, the County is concerned about the uncertain funding status of the MTA Commuter Bus program and the general lack of alternative affordable intercity connections with Washington County. The County supports right sizing intercity delivery models and operations so that Washington County residents and businesses can continue to connect to the larger metropolitan communities and thrive. Recent population and economic growth trends show western migration, changing travel patterns, and mode preference should be considered when developing a statewide transit plan, rather than doubling down on existing systems that may prove to be a long-term financial drain on the state transportation system.

Pedestrian Safety: The County appreciates your continued support of Transportation Alternatives Programs (TAP) that enhance infrastructure and pedestrian safety in the County as well as the City of Hagerstown. We are pleased that the Dual Highway Sidewalk project (Eastern Boulevard to All Star Court) is moving forward this year. In FY25, HEPMPO will be undertaking a corridor safety study of US11/Virginia Avenue, which is identified in MDOT's Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment and Pedestrian Safety Action Plan.

Railroad Crossings/Study: There are three operating rail systems in Washington County (CSX Transportation, Norfolk Southern Corporation, Winchester & Western Railroad Company) including 37 at-grade crossings with County roads. The County has been working with the MDOT SHA Rail Coordinator on developing a plan for safety improvements at a CSX railroad crossing and several Norfolk Southern railroad crossings. For the CSX crossing at Wright Road, construction of new gates and lights will commence this summer. For the Norfolk Southern crossings, safety improvement design is anticipated to begin later this year with construction to follow in 2025. Also, the MARC Brunswick Line Expansion Study Technical Report was published in 2023 and explores up to four railroad alignment options to extend the Brunswick Line service into Western Maryland. The MDOT Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) had a public involvement process in 2023, and the County awaits updated reports.

State Bridges in County Municipalities: MDOT completed a Planning & Environment Linkages (PEL) preliminary study for the Town of Williamsport regarding the Route 11 bridge in Williamsport and plans on completing a final study by early 2024. The final study is anticipated to include potential concepts that could be investigated further, recommendations about the next steps in the project development process, and strategies to develop and implement improvements, such as interim improvements. Thank you for the work completed thus far, but please provide an update on the progress of this study as the

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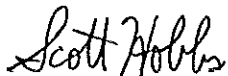
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Town still awaits the final study. Similarly, the County requests a planning and environmental study of the US 522 bridges in the Town of Hancock, which were built in the 1930s and nearing the end of their useful service life. MDOT resurfaced the US 522 bridge over the Potomac River in 2015.

Appalachian Regional Commission and County-State Coordinated Projects: The County has enjoyed collaborating with your staff on projects that involve State/Federal funding, including the recently completed Professional Boulevard Bridge/Phase 2; Halfway Boulevard Extended and the Eastern Boulevard at Maryland 64 intersection improvements, both with anticipated construction this year; and the Wright Road project, currently in design.

Washington County urges you to take further action on I-81 as outlined above and thanks you for the continued support on the other projects mentioned herein to improve local transportation and pedestrian safety. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at (240) 313-2407 or shobbs@washco-md.net.

Sincerely,



Scott Hobbs
Director of Engineering

cc: Board of County Commissioners
Michelle Gordon, County Administrator
Washington County Delegation Members
Senator Benjamin Cardin
Senator Christopher Van Hollen
Congressman David Trone
Linda Puffenbarger, SHA District Engineer
Jim Bender, City Engineer
Matthew Mullenax, HEPMPO Executive Director
Andrew Eshleman, Public Works Director
Neil Doran, Airport Director
Kevin Cerrone, Transit Director