



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL

NANCY FLOREEN
COUNCILMEMBER AT-LARGE

Statement before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee – March 19, 2004

Senate Bill 898 – Transportation Trust Fund Transportation Financing – Increased Revenues

Chairman Currie, Vice Chair Hogan, and members of the Budget and Tax Committee

For the record, I am Nancy Floreen, a Montgomery County Councilmember and Chair of the Council's Transportation and Environment Committee.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on SB 898. I have come to Annapolis once again to testify on a transportation bill because I feel so strongly that traffic congestion, with all its negative ramifications, stands as the single most important problem facing not only Montgomery County, but most jurisdictions in Maryland. This is why legislation that would guarantee an additional revenue stream into the Transportation Trust Fund is so critical to the future of our State.

If you live or work in Montgomery County or most any area in the State of Maryland, the time it will take you to get from point A to point B is part of every scheduling decision. And this goes for families, commuters, bus drivers, shoppers, tourists, and businesses.

As I have stated here before, traffic congestion poses the greatest threat to the economic viability of our region.

The fact that the Greater Washington Board of Trade, a group not known for advocating increases for the costs of doing business, is fighting for higher gasoline taxes is an indication of magnitude of the problem. As businessmen and women, they recognize that the gridlock every day on the roads in this State threatens the economic health of their firms, even their business reputations, -- deliveries and service calls are consistently late and even forced to cancel.

The Maryland Department of Transportation has estimated that to fund its transportation obligations they need a minimum of \$17.1 billion between now and 2010. But its current resources may not even cover 40% of that need. To get Maryland to where it must go - funding the projects that everyone agrees are necessary to relieve congestion - more revenue must be found.

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Although this bill won't get us there, it does signal a sea change by earmarking additional funds for the TTF. There has been no significant increase in dedicated funding for the Transportation Trust Fund in more than a decade. If the fiscal summary estimates are correct, SB 898 has the potential to pour an additional \$201 million into the cause of congestion relief, and \$54.5 million of this is to be shared with local governments through the Gasoline and Motor Vehicle Revenue Account. This must be applauded, and, as a local official, I urge you to support this initiative.

There is unbelievable need out there. I have testified and written about the woefully underfunded transportation budget before. And the Governor acknowledged the problem by appointing the Hellman Commission to explore and recommend options. On November 24th of last year, I came before that Commission emphasizing to what extent congestion is the result of not moving forward with badly needed transportation solutions. Although the Commission's final plan didn't meet all our expectations, it did pose the challenge to try to reach at least 2/3 of programmed transportation needs. But in order to get there, every innovative idea that can generate additional funding must be considered.

I believe this bill takes an important first step toward finding some of that income necessary to achieve a more responsible transportation vision. I only hope this Bill is just the beginning of many creative initiatives that find permanent resources for the Transportation Trust Fund. And then your next task is to ensure that the Fund will only be used for transportation needs.

Thank you.