

# BALTIMORE'S TRANSIT FUTURE

2024 STRATEGY UPDATE



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# A STRATEGY TO ADVANCE BALTIMORE'S TRANSIT FUTURE

In 2022, we released a *Strategy to Advance Baltimore's Transit Future*, which outlined six priorities to build a world-class public transit system to create shared economic prosperity and inclusive growth. Since then, Maryland has relaunched the Baltimore Red Line project, established the Baltimore Region Transit Commission, and accelerated a system-wide effort to create thriving TOD hubs at existing rail stations.

These efforts are encouraging, but our work is just getting started. All sectors of the business community remain committed to working alongside regional leaders to accelerate solutions and collaborate on their implementation. Together we can deliver the transportation system the Baltimore region needs. The momentum that we have seen for public transit in the last two years is exciting and positions our region well for economic growth. However, now is the critical time to lean into this progress and ensure that we unlock the full promise of regional transit.

## **BTF's Six Priorities: Progress and Next Steps**

Our original six priorities continue to serve as the foundation for this coalition's work to build the public transit system that our region needs. As Maryland manages transportation revenue headwinds, the Moore-Miller administration and the Maryland General Assembly have still made commendable progress on several projects -- but more work is necessary to ensure that we can make smart investments in public transit that deliver transformative results. Two years into our work, we are tracking progress against our six priorities and taking stock of next steps:

### **1. Address MTA Repair Backlog and Operator Shortage**

**Progress:** In 2023, MDOT MTA identified a 9% vacancy rate across the agency, a significant portion of which is transit operators. The Moore-Miller administration responded by recruiting more operators, raising operator pay, and creating additional operator positions to meet service delivery needs. As of March 2024, the operator role vacancy rate is under 1%.

**Next Moves:** Key state of good repair projects remain a top priority, including overhauling the existing central light rail system and transforming its Howard Street corridor downtown. Maintaining adequate staffing and state of good repair is particularly crucial to system safety and the perception of safety which impacts ridership.

### **2. Establish Frequent, Reliable Bus Service to all Regional Job Centers**

**Progress:** In 2024, MDOT MTA launched the BMORE Bus plan, which creates a five-to-ten-year expansion and improvement plan for Baltimore Region core bus service. The MTA also launched its Customer Experience Dashboard and Office of Customer Experience, both focused on improving how riders experience transit services.

**Next Moves:** With additional funding and capacity, including a new, fifth bus division, the BMORE Bus plan can transform access to frequent, reliable bus service to all regional job centers. In addition to supporting the BMORE Bus Plan, other key efforts include continuing to prioritize light rail service on Howard Street and buses on key corridors.

### 3. Support Regional Coordination, Decision Making, and Funding

**Progress:** In the 2023 legislative session, the Maryland General Assembly acted to create the Baltimore Regional Transit Commission (BRTC), which will analyze and provide recommendations to MTA. The BRTC began meeting in 2024 and, for the first time, gives the region a unified voice and role in oversight and advocacy for its transit system.

**Next Moves:** While the BRTC provides a much-needed regional voice in Baltimore's transit system, BTF is committed to advancing a toolbox of solutions for our current and future transit needs. These range from reforms to MDOT's capital planning process or MTA's operating scope, as well as more efforts to better integrate all available transit services into a more seamless rider experience. The BRTC has launched a study exploring regional transit authorities which will provide needed context to legislators.

### 4. Implement a 10-Year Rapid Transit Expansion Program

**Progress:** To advance the Baltimore Red Line, the administration is pursuing an aggressive schedule that builds on previous planning work to secure federal funding within the Governor's first term. The Baltimore Red Line will provide a massive boost to the region's economy and make a crucial east-west connection for the system, a need first identified over 50 years ago.

**Next Moves:** The Red Line represents a generational opportunity to expand transit, and we must ensure that state and federal funding is secured to make this long-overdue project a reality. However, beyond the Red Line, we will continue executing against the priorities identified in the [Central Maryland Regional Transit Plan](#).

### 5. Prioritize Regional Rail Investment

**Progress:** The Moore-Miller administration is partnering with FRA and Amtrak to advance the critical Frederick Douglass Tunnel program, which will create more than 20,000 jobs and catalyze growth in the regional economy while making possible greatly enhanced passenger rail capacity. Other efforts supporting regional rail are underway, including the redevelopment of Baltimore's Penn Station and the cross-honor program for MARC and VRE tickets, a step towards true run-through service.

**Next Moves:** The MARC Growth and Transformation Plan, which will move to the capital planning stage in Summer 2024, orients MARC towards comprehensive regional rail service. This can and should include connections to Virginia and Delaware.

### 6. Catalyze Equitable Development at Transit and Rail Stations

**Progress:** In 2023, MDOT launched a system-wide effort to catalyze transit-oriented development (TOD). This effort is currently underway at Reisterstown Plaza, West Baltimore MARC, and other key TOD locations, and MDOT has secured competitive grant funding to accelerate its work. This work has the potential to develop many new thriving community hubs around existing rail, create jobs, expand the tax base, and increase access to economic opportunity.

**Next Moves:** MDOT's aggressive new strategy to catalyze TOD is just getting started; it will take consistent leadership and partnership among stakeholders to make these projects a reality. We will work to support intergovernmental and cross-sector partnerships to continue progress on TOD initiatives.



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