Making Transportation Work for Baltimore

Baltimore should be a city that works for its residents, students and employees, including offering a great transportation system. However, the state of our current public transportation system is woefully inadequate, plagued by long commute times, limited routing and a lack of integration. Our city is disconnected and inequitable in providing mobility to our citizens.

In a city with poor public transit, where one-third of residents don’t have access to a car, this becomes a barrier to gaining employment, grocery shopping or even getting your child to school on time. A 2015 study found commuting time to be the strongest factor determining the odds of escaping poverty.¹ Mobility from poverty is central to making Baltimore safe for everyone. We simply can’t afford a weak transportation system that doesn’t serve the most vulnerable populations.

A robust public transportation system is essential to green and thriving cities, improving air quality by reducing congestion and pollution. Our reliance on automobiles contributes to health disparities in Baltimore, particularly in asthma prevalence.² Today, 23% of workers in Baltimore spend 45 minutes or more commuting one-way – wasting time, burning fuel and adding to poor air quality.³

At its core, Baltimore needs an efficient, reliable, and affordable multimodal system, a key component of transportation justice.⁴ Beyond a strong bus and rail system, walking, biking and other modes of transit like e-scooters should be encouraged with a focus on safety and equity. To date, little has been done to offer solutions to Baltimore’s transportation inadequacies, or a Plan B when programs fall through. Mary will take accountability to advocate for solutions and take steps to get things done to create an equitable, public transit-oriented Baltimore.

As Mayor, Mary will improve transportation and mobility for everyone in Baltimore by:

1) Taking Greater Local Control,
2) Improving Bus Service Equitably,
3) Making the City Safer for Pedestrians and Bicyclists, and
4) Expanding Students’ Access to Transit.

Equity issues in Baltimore are interconnected. Mary’s time in the Obama Administration gave her the experience to tackle complex problems. Since launching in January, Mary has released a plan to Make Baltimore Safe for Everyone, Create Inclusive Growth, and Strengthen our Education System, all tying into her plan to Make Transportation Work for Baltimore.
1. Taking Greater Local Control of Public Transit

Baltimore is unusual among large cities in having the State run its public transportation system, with little local control over key decisions, like abandoning plans to build the Red Line. At the same time, many of our transportation challenges don’t stop at the city’s borders. The city’s Department of Transportation needs to take a stronger role in all aspects of multimodal transportation in Baltimore.

As Mayor, Mary will support moving to a Regional Transportation Authority to serve Baltimore and surrounding counties. This move will allow Baltimore to better control the destiny of our transportation infrastructure. This should become a key consideration in the Central Maryland Regional Transit Plan now being developed.

2. Improving Bus Service Equitably

A 2017 report found that the average Baltimorean using public transit can only get to 9% of jobs in the region in under an hour.\(^5\)

The Mayor and City can pull levers and advocate to improve transportation, including creating a robust Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. Delivering fast and efficient service with BaltimoreLink was a start, but these services don’t go far enough to make public transit the best option for all residents. As Mayor, Mary will direct the Department of Transportation to implement BRT criteria in Baltimore.

- Specifically, Mary knows that mobility in the East-West corridor needs to be faster. Mary is committed to increasing the number of bus lanes in the city, and where possible, converting streets into busways. Baltimore should examine the successes that other cities have had, such as New York, which recently converted 14\(^{th}\) Street into an east-west busway.

- BRT depends on fast boarding, unobstructed lanes, and buses that come every 5 to 10 minutes, not every half hour. Mary will prioritize methods to improve headways and boarding times, such as level boarding. Additionally, Mary will increase bus lane camera enforcement and traffic signal enhancements to prioritize buses.

- Access to an improved BRT system needs to be fair and equitable. Mary will ensure that upgrades to our public transportation system benefit all residents, not just those who live downtown.

- In recent years the service quality of the Charm City Circulator has worsened. In some cases, it is duplicative of MTA bus routes. As Mayor, Mary would commission a restructure of the Circulator and expand it to serve Baltimore more equitably.
3. Make the City Safer for Pedestrians and Bicyclists

Mary believes the city should be designed for all Baltimoreans, not just drivers. Many of our neighborhoods are not walkable, and intersections are often unsafe. In 2018, there were 68 pedestrian fatalities in the Baltimore region, with many more injuries. Ease of walkability and mobility is linked to improved health outcomes and economic growth. To incentivize biking, e-scooters, and walking as low-carbon methods of transit, the City needs to ensure that people can enjoy the roads safely.

- Biking and walking infrastructure are most useful when it is connected and when users feel safe. The Greenway Trails Network is a great example of how we can create more public space while making pedestrian and bike travel safer. In addition to making the central business district more bike-friendly, Mary supports installing more bike infrastructure equitably throughout Baltimore by fully funding the Separated Bike Lane Network Plan.

- Mary supports the Complete Streets initiative to redesign city streets to reduce congestion and increase safety for residents who walk, bike, and take transit. As Mayor, Mary will implement the Complete Streets report’s final recommendations.

4. Expanding and Improving Students’ Access to Transit

Public transportation should work for all students and families, without restrictions on time and distance. Parents in Baltimore have the ability to send their middle and high school children to any school they prefer, but that choice is meaningless if children have to spend hours on the bus and risk missing numerous connections. Additionally, there are distance criteria to be eligible for a free student transit pass and time restrictions on its use.

As Mayor, Mary will expand free ridership to all Baltimore City students, regardless of the distance they live from their school. She will also eliminate the weekend and time restrictions to expand daily access to public transportation.
References

3 “2017 Transportation Card.”
5 “2017 Transportation Card.”