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March 3, 2011

Delegate Marvin E. Holmes, Jr.  
The Maryland House of Delegates  
House Office Building, Room 313  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

[marvin.holmes@house.state.md.us](mailto:marvin.holmes@house.state.md.us)

Re: proposed legislation — **HB 948 Land Use — State Rail Station Overlay Districts**

Dear Delegate Holmes:

I am writing this letter in strong support of the proposed legislation to empower local governments to establish State Rail Station Overlay Districts (SRSOD) in the State of Maryland. The SRSOD will benefit the eastern transportation corridor by leveraging on public transportation investments that have already been made, by increasing the economic viability of public rail transit, by creating a market-based solution to a modern environmental hazard, and by serving as an example of how public policy adopted at the local and state levels can alleviate national problems without the cry for increased but ineffective funding at the federal level.

Although I am not a citizen of Maryland, nor a frequent traveler of Maryland public transportation, nor a shareholder in any Maryland-based development, corporate, or political concern, I do know and respect Dr. Jay Hellman. When I learned of his work to solve this profound problem regarding our broken land-use regulatory system as it relates to land within walking distance of rail stations, I felt the need to write to you as I am a well-educated United States citizen under the age of 30 who has a stake in the long-term public policies adopted in America, particularly, those policies that affect our fragile economy and environment.

The transit system running along the east coast is the most efficient and advanced public transit system in the country. Many billions of dollars have been invested in the development of its infrastructure. However, like all public rail transit systems in the United States it suffers from a variety of financial problems, most of which can be solved with increased ridership.

The SRSOD will eliminate the regulatory hurdles which limit development near train stations. SRSOD will make it possible for more people to live and work in well-designed mixed-use 'cities' within walking distance of train stations. By increasing development in these Districts, the SRSOD will increase the market-base from which the rail system draws its riders. Therefore, with little public investment, Maryland can increase the economic viability of public transit, while increasing ancillary public revenues and at the same time, reducing the costs of sprawl.

Second, the SRSOD will create a market-based solution to the environmental and public health hazards associated with vehicle commuting. Automobiles, particularly in congested areas, are a huge contributor to environmental degradation. At present, most citizens have two choices in

getting to work, or shopping, or their friends' home: they can drive to their destination, or drive to the train station. In either case they have to deal with the stress associated with traffic and parking, and contribute to environmental pollution. If attractive mixed-use cities were developed within walking distance of every train station, more people would choose to live there and be able to walk instead of drive. Simply put, SRSOD will reduce automobile congestion, reduce injury, property damage and deaths from auto accidents, and improve public health by walking, thereby reducing our unsustainable medical care costs.

Third, as noted in President Obama's 2011 State of the Union Address, rail transit is a public policy priority. The President intends to increase investment in rail transit by billions of dollars, and in doing so, expose his administration to political risk at the hands of critics who decry such use of federal spending, and if the critics are to be believed, expose the nation to increased financial risk. The SRSOD will ensure that public investment in transit is sustainable by matching ridership with capacity.

Fourth, the State of Maryland has an opportunity with the SRSOD to serve as an example for America of how regulatory reform at the state level can help meet the national goals of economic, and environmental sustainability. One of the benefits of federalism is that it conceives of the States as public policy laboratories. Individual states should experiment with different forms of policy to tackle problems often common among many states. When a particular policy works, it will be copied by other states, or by the Federal Government.

Finally, in a Jeffersonian sense, local communities and states should have an active role in helping to solve problems of national concern. For Jefferson, the action of local communities toward national aims was a democratic necessity, *see Thomas Jefferson's letter to Samuel Kercheval, 12 July, 1816*. The more problems that are solved locally, by exercising the political will of those communities in a democratic groundswell, the fewer problems will need to be solved nationally, by the federal government pushing down and quelling local action, and state sovereignty. The SRSOD is a fine example of how a State government can help solve national problems by advancing the interests of the citizens of the State.

As a political scientist I have an interest in State initiatives like the SRSOD because it allows for market-based and environmentally sustainable growth and development, and it promotes rail as a viable alternative form of transportation, and it does so without requiring irresponsible federal financial support. In this way, SRSOD is a model of policy that should be adopted by states and local governments throughout the country. It is not only good for the People of Maryland, but for all the People of the United States.

Please contact me if you have any questions. Thank you for your sponsorship of such an important legislative advance.

Sincerely,



Todd Spanier, JD