



Legislation Text

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The official copy considered by the City Council is the first reader copy.

Introductory*

City of Baltimore Council Bill R (Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Pinkett

A Resolution Entitled

A Council Resolution concerning

Informational Hearing - Proposed Replacement of the Baltimore & Potomac Tunnel

For the purpose of requesting that representatives from the Federal Railroad Administration, Amtrak, and the Maryland and City Departments of Transportation appear before the City Council to discuss the proposed B&P tunnel replacement project and what its costs and benefits will be for both Baltimore as a whole and the neighborhoods that are being asked to host the project.

Recitals

The 144-year-old Baltimore and Potomac (B&P) Tunnel in West Baltimore, located between the West Baltimore MARC Station and Penn Station along Amtrak's busy Northeast Corridor is used by Amtrak and MARC passenger trains, as well as some Norfolk Southern Railway freight trains. According to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), this nearly century and half old tunnel requires substantial maintenance and repairs, does not meet current design standards, and is approaching the end of its useful life with regard to its physical condition. The FRA has also determined that the tunnel is functionally obsolete, unable to meet current and future rail demands due to its vertical and horizontal track alignment while serving as a bottleneck at a critical point in the Northeast Corridor, impairing operations of the most heavily-traveled rail line in the United States

After years of studies on the issue, the FRA recently announced its preferred option for replacing the tunnel with 3.67 miles of new track including a new 2 mile tunnel through West Baltimore. The FRA proposal, projected to cost \$4.5 billion, would double both the number of trains that could pass along the track in a day and the speeds they could sustain.

However, the project would require Amtrak to acquire 12 acres of land, displacing at least 17 residents and 6 businesses. Concerns have also been raised about the siting of a ventilation facility on North Avenue and the impact of construction and travel vibrations on the affected neighborhoods.

Also, although billed as a passenger rail project, the current tunnel does handle some freight traffic. It is not presently clear whether the increased capacity on the proposed rail line would result in an increase in freight traffic as well, or if the nature of that traffic might change in a way that could raise health and safety concerns for Baltimore residents.

Further discussion about the benefits and drawbacks of the project for Baltimore is needed before funding is allocated or construction begins. Most importantly, the questions about vent locations, required displacements, and freight train usage of the new tracks deserve more attention.

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the City Council of Baltimore, That the Council requests that representatives from the Federal Railroad Administration, Amtrak, and the Maryland and City Departments of Transportation appear before it to discuss the proposed B&P tunnel replacement project and what its costs and benefits will be for both Baltimore as a whole and the neighborhoods that are being asked to host the project.

And be it further resolved, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Executive Director of the Federal Railroad Administration, the President and CEO of Amtrak, the Maryland Secretary of Transportation, the Director of Transportation, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison.