Beat: Politics

Maryland Lawmakers at a Bottleneck over Transportation Funding

Is an increase in taxes overreaching?

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USPA NEWS - Transportation funding is at the top of the list of priorities with gun-control, and repeal of Maryland´s death penalty law. Yet, nearly halfway through the 90 day Session of the Maryland General Assembly, Senate Bill 830 is the only bill authored that addresses transportation funding.

An additional $700 million to $800 million in transportation funds are reportedly needed to fund projects such as the Washington area´s Purple Line and Baltimore´s Red Line while continuing to properly maintain current roadways.

Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller, who authored, and is the lead sponsor of SB 830, acknowledges it is not a panacea, and contends that the passage of any transportation funding initiative depends on Governor Martin O´Malley.

"We´ve given him a menu. My bill was a menu,"⁇ Miller said Tuesday. "I can only hope that someone bites and says, Let´s move forward."⁇

To many legislators, including Miller, it remains an unknown whether O´Malley has enough political capital left in his pocket to champion a transportation-funding plan that would include raising taxes of some kind.

In the absence of a plan from the Governors Office, Miller´s SB 830 is the only bill currently on the table for Discussion. The Senate Budget and Taxation Committee will hold a public hearing on this bill Wednesday, February 27.

Viewpoint of House Republicans

Members of the House Republican Caucus have made it clear that Maryland does not need a gas tax hike, but instead, a responsible plan that addresses the actual needs of its citizens.

"As a caucus, we are appalled that Democratic leaders would again ask taxpayers to pay more when they have done nothing to curb spending and responsibly steward existing transportation revenue, said House Minority Leader Tony O´Donnell (R-29C).

"If Democrats want more money for transportation, they need to stop raiding the Transportation Trust Fund, " said Delegate Susan Krebs (R-9).

"The problem is not a lack of money, said Delegate Herb McMillan (R-30). "Transportation Trust Fund spending is out of alignment with Marylanders´ transportation needs. The vast majority of the trust fund revenue comes from motorists, but the operating budget spends twice as much on mass transit than roads, which is only used by just under 9% of commuters. We don´t need more revenue. What we need is to ensure that revenues from motorists are spent on highways, and not on mass transit projects that most of them will never use."⁇

Miller scoffs at House Republicans

Following the House Republican Caucus´ press conference, Senate President Thomas V. "Mike"⁇ Miller called the House Republicans "total obstructionists"⁇ and "Neanderthals in terms of their thinking."⁇

Republican Delegate Don Dwyer (R-31) said he was not surprised by the Senate President´s comments. "This is what liberals do when they have no formidable ideas, they engage in character assassination"⁇

While, the future of a new transportation-funding source is unclear, one thing that is clear is that this is a highly emotional issue on both sides of the isle.

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