October 4, 2019

One of the most significant projects that may be undertaken to grow economic activity in the Greater Baltimore region often flies under the radar - reconstructing the Howard Street Tunnel to accommodate double stacked rail cars that are loaded at the Port of Baltimore. The project would benefit the State of Maryland and Greater Baltimore region with improved competitiveness of the Port, increased economic activity, and job creation.

Earlier this summer, Maryland was awarded $125 million in federal funding through the Infrastructure For Rebuilding America Grant Program to expand the Howard Street Tunnel. The grant’s approval is a clear signal that the federal government recognizes the importance of the Howard Street Tunnel’s expansion and the pivotal role it plays in the Greater Baltimore region and beyond.

While the construction project requires significant costs and labor, it simply calls for an increase in clearance to be added to allow double-stacked trains. These additional inches would eliminate the largest bottleneck on the East Coast of the United States for cargo trains. Double-stacked trains not only create efficiencies for carrying cargo and reduce trucks on our roads, but they would allow the Port to continue its ascension as one of the great East Coast ports.

Despite the federal grant’s approval, the project is not a certainty. The federal grant is not enough to pay for the entirety of the Howard Street Tunnel’s expansion. Local and State government officials and leaders, along with CSX Corporation, owner of the Howard Street Tunnel, must band together and move forward their public-private partnership. By all accounts, that is...
happening as we speak.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Donald C. Fry
President and CEO

Leadership Changes in the Maryland House of Delegates

Speaker Adrienne A. Jones recently announced her new leadership team for the Maryland House of Delegates. Delegate Jones was elected Speaker in May following the death of the House’s longtime leader, Delegate Michael E. Busch.

The changes in leadership implemented by Speaker Jones represent more of a realignment rather than a shake-up, but they are historic. Most significantly, Maryland has its first African American woman as Speaker, and an African American woman in the number two position of Speaker Pro Tem, a job held by Delegate Jones during the previous 16 years.

Elsewhere, all six major committee chairs retain their positions. There is little change in the vice-chair positions with the exception of Delegate Kathleen Dumais taking over as vice-chair of the House Economic Matters Committee following the resignation of Eric M. Bromwell, who left the legislature to join Baltimore County Executive John Olszewski, Jr.’s administration.

There are, however, significant changes in subcommittee leadership. One of the more important changes involves the Capital Budget Subcommittee chair vacancy created by Speaker Jones’ ascension. Delegate Tawanna Gaines, the Vice-Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, will fill that vacancy and handle both roles.

There were a number of other leadership changes or additions:

- Speaker Pro Tem: Delegate Sheree Sample-Hughes
- Majority Leader: Delegate Eric Luedtke
- Vice Chair of Economic Matters: Delegate Kathleen Dumais
- Assistant Speaker Pro Tem: Delegate Bonnie Cullison
- Democratic Caucus Chair: Delegate Jazz Lewis
- Democratic Caucus Vice Chair: Delegate Courtney Watson
- Parliamentarian: Delegate Alonzo Washington
- Chief Deputy Majority Whips: Delegate Ben Brooks and Delegate Ben Barnes
- Chair of Joint Legislative Ethics Committee: Delegate Kathleen Dumais
- Chair of Joint Committee on Unemployment Insurance and ECM Unemployment Insurance Subcommittee: Delegate Ned Carey
- Chair, Joint Committee on Fair Practices: Delegate Erek Barron
- Chair of Joint Behavioral Health: Delegate Kirill Reznik
- Appropriations Capital Subcommittee: Delegate Tawanna Gaines, Chair/
Delegate Mark Chang, Vice Chair
- Appropriations Transportation & Environment Subcommittee: Delegate Marc Korman, Chair/ Delegate Carol Krimm, Vice Chair
- Appropriations Personnel Subcommittee: Delegate Pat Young, Chair
- Appropriations Education & Economic Development Subcommittee: Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair/ Delegate Shelly Hettleman, Vice Chair
- Appropriations Public Safety Subcommittee: Delegate Michael Jackson, Vice Chair
- Environment and Transportation Environment Subcommittee Chair: Delegate Dana Stein
- Environment and Transportation Natural Resources Subcommittee Chair: Delegate Jim Gilchrist
- Environment and Transportation Land Use & Ethics Subcommittee Chair: Delegate Brooke Lierman

Speaker Jones also altered committee assignments for several members:
- Delegate Veronica Turner to Economic Matters
- Delegate Mary Ann Lisanti to Ways & Means
- Delegate Shaneka Henson to Appropriations
- Delegate Carl Anderton to Environment & Transportation
- Delegate Ric Metzgar to Appropriations
- Delegate Andrew Cassilly to Ways & Means
- Delegate Jen Terrasa to Environment & Transportation
- Delegate Teresa Reilly to Health & Government Operations
- Delegate Brooke Lierman to Environment & Transportation

MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

GBC’S 2019 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

GBC’s 2019 Legislative Agenda

GBC’S LEGISLATIVE TRACKER

To read testimony and get more information about bills the GBC tracked this year, visit our legislative tracking website.

MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

General Assembly Website

Committee Schedule

Two Selected to Replace Departing Baltimore County Delegates

Prior to Speaker Adrienne A. Jones' announcement of changes to leadership and committee assignments, two Baltimore County legislators departed the Maryland General Assembly. District 8 Delegate Eric Bromwell and District 42A Delegate Steve W. Lafferty, both Democrats, have resigned to work for Baltimore County Executive John Olszewski, Jr. The County Executive named Delegate Bromwell opioid strategy coordinator and Delegate Lafferty chief sustainability officer.

Their replacements, selected by the Baltimore County Democratic Central Committee and submitted to Governor Larry Hogan for approval of the appointments, have been named. They are Carl Jackson to replace Delegate Bromwell and Catherine Forbes to replace Delegate Lafferty. Upon their appointment by the Governor, the new Delegates will fill out the remainder of the term of office.
State Budget and Revenue Steady

Recent reports on Maryland’s fiscal situation have been steady, but cautious. While indicators of a possible recession continue, the Maryland budget and revenue situation remains stable. Recently, the Maryland Board of Revenue Estimates (BRE) increased its projection for the current fiscal year by $130 million. However, the BRE continues to caution that a downturn may occur in the near future and budget leaders should proceed prudently.

For the upcoming 2020 legislative session, which begins January 8, 2020, the most important budgetary issue facing policymakers is the implementation and costs associated with education reform. The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, better known as the Kirwan Commission after its chair, former University System of Maryland Chancellor William E. “Brit” Kirwan, has recommended education reform that is estimated to cost $3.8 billion a year in new spending if fully implemented. There is an ongoing debate regarding what education reforms to implement and how to find additional revenue to fund them.

In other budgetary news, Maryland continues to maintain a Triple-A bond rating, which was recently reaffirmed by the three major ratings agencies, Fitch, Moody’s Investor Services, and Standard & Poor’s. Triple-A is the highest rating a state can achieve. The benefit is the higher the bond rating, the lower a state’s borrowing costs for capital projects. Maryland is one of 13 states to hold a Triple-A bond rating.

The GBC will address these issues and more at its upcoming annual 2019 Economic Outlook Conference. The speakers will include Tom Barkin, President and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond; Andrew Schaufele, Director of the Bureau of Revenue Estimates, Comptroller of Maryland; and Bernard Yaros, Assistant Director and Economist for Moody’s Analytics. They will discuss the state of the economy for the Mid-Atlantic region and Maryland, the present economic growth outlook, and what is on the horizon for 2020. The event will take place November 5, 7:30-9:30 a.m. at the Hyatt Regency Baltimore. For more information or to register, click here.

Commentaries by GBC President and CEO Donald C. Fry

Click here to listen to Don Fry’s commentary about regional transportation on WYPR 88.1 FM, posted on September 5, 2019.

Click here to listen to Don Fry’s comments about what kind of Mayor Baltimore needs on WBAL NewsRadio 1090, posted on September 30, 2019.

Upcoming Dates of Interest

On October 18, the GBC is hosting a Newsmaker Breakfast with U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen. This event will begin at 7:30 a.m. at the GBC Office, 111 South Calvert Street, Suite 1700, Baltimore, MD 21202.

On October 21, the GBC is holding the Bridging the Gap Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Summit 2019. This summit will begin at 11:30 a.m. at the University of Maryland Baltimore, SMC Campus Center, 621 West Lombard Street, Baltimore, MD 21202.
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