



Planning with people for a
vital, sustainable Future.

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Delegate Marvin E. Holmes, JR.
House Office Building, Room 207
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Proposed Legislation - State Rail Station Overlay Districts

**HB 948 support
testimony 3/3/11**

Dear Delegate Holmes:

I am writing to support the proposed State Rail Station Overlay Districts (SRSOD) legislation to be considered by the Maryland General Assembly. This is a simple piece of legislation that can truly make a difference in the health, safety, welfare, and economic successes of a state and its major metropolitan regions that encompasses a great world capital.

In a capsule, I am a native of the Baltimore/Washington/Richmond metropolitan region, which I have seen transform itself into a world-class region in a generation. One of the determining factors driving this change has been the leadership exhibited to plan and build-out a major transit system and activate any number of commuter rail systems. For the last two decades I have also had the privilege to work across the county in a variety of metropolitan areas with and without regional transit systems. Most recently, I served as the executive director of the Chicago regional planning agency for nearly a decade. One conclusion is clear and compelling. If we are to progress and excel in the changing world market place, the functioning, quality and livability of our urban centers is key. Maryland has invested in the costly infrastructure to support world-class urban centers. Now it must invest in the political, social and economic will to realize the development benefits this infrastructure investment can and must support. SRSOD will provide a major assistance in that direction.

Prior to my Chicago position, I worked in Seattle WA as it was implementing its statewide growth management planning act. Too few states have shown the vision and leadership exhibited here, in Oregon, and in Maryland to provide the incentives and support for realizing the strategic opportunities of economic development the interdependent job centers that function in the market place across municipal boundaries. While Washington State has shown great will to foster a coordinated growth strategy, it only recently began to build the transit infrastructure to support that vision. The conclusion? Local leadership needs the help to make transformational change that transcends the "As of right" business as usual mold. SRSOD is one of these tools.

Without the state's leadership to support development that breaks the mold, there is little reason for local leaders to take the risk to support change – especially for what will be headlined as increased density.

Our colleague and nationally syndicated columnist covering planning and development, Neal Pierce, has frequently observed that there are two things the American public doesn't like. The first is uncontrolled sprawl; the other is the idea of density. But I would add that the thing that has proved itself profitable and successful is urban density that is well planned, creatively designed, and developed for quality results. In the Baltimore/Washington metropolitan region along there



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are any number of successful examples where transit oriented development as successful created new urban centers such as the Bethesda downtown, the Ballston corridor in Arlington and downtown DC itself. All catalyzed by Metro, but all realized through new and intensified development patterns,

SRSOD provides the support and leadership action that will be a win/win for all involved – public officials, business and development investors, and the public who will find jobs, entertainment and livability in the resulting repurposed urban centers that embody a healthier lifestyle for both people and our supporting environment.

For all of the above reasons, I encourage adoption of the SRSOD legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ron Thomas', is written over a light blue grid background.

Ron Thomas, AICP
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