



## **AAA Mid-Atlantic News Release**

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### HOUSE PASSES BILL TO REQUIRE AGENCY TO FACILITATE MOTORIST INPUT IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

#### ***House Bill 922 Would Expand Public Comment Period & Ensure More Democratic Process for Maryland Toll Increases***

**TOWSON, MD (March 25, 2009)** – The Maryland House of Delegates today voted to require the agency that operates Maryland’s toll facilities to infuse more democracy in its rate setting procedures. In passing House Bill (HB) 922, Delegates voted to require the Maryland Transportation Authority (MdTA) to hold a 60-day public comment period before the Authority can vote to implement a proposal to fix or revise a toll, fee, or other charge on any part of any transportation facilities project in the State of Maryland.

The bill, as amended, also requires the MdTA to hold public hearings at, or near the transportation facilities projects affected by the proposal to revise tolls or fees, and at least one of the hearings must be held during the evening. Currently, the Authority only permits oral comments by the public during the Authority’s standing monthly meetings, which are held primarily in only one area of Maryland – Baltimore, which is not convenient for all citizens across the state.

“This is great news for motorists who use Maryland’s toll facilities, who for too long have been largely shut out of the decision making,” stated Ragina C. Averella, Public and Government Affairs Manager for AAA Mid-Atlantic. “The bill’s requirement to hold public hearings in areas that will be most heavily impacted by the fees, as well as to hold one evening hearing, will make it more accessible and convenient for citizens to voice their concerns on proposed toll and fee increases.”

“Unfortunately, the recent cost-recovery initiative and the expedited manner in which the MdTA Board approved the proposal demonstrate why such legislation is needed.” The toll increases for large trucks, as well as E-ZPass maintenance fees, were announced in early January and were approved on January 29.

While the Authority permitted public input on their increases at their regular monthly meeting on January 29 and accepted public comment via e-mail and standard mail leading up to that date, the meeting was not highly publicized and there was only one date and location for citizens from other regions of Maryland to offer oral comments.

“Maryland motorists have the right to be engaged in decisions that impact them and the current process does not permit that,” added Averella. AAA Mid-Atlantic received numerous phone calls and emails expressing concerns about the cost-recovery proposal once the public became aware of the initiative. In fact, more than 5,000 emails have been generated through the auto club’s website requesting that Governor O’Malley reverse the monthly E-ZPass fees, which are scheduled to go into effect on July 1.

AAA Mid-Atlantic was a key proponent of HB 922 and commends the bill’s lead sponsor, Delegate David D. Rudolph (D, District 34 B) for his efforts in not only sponsoring the bill, but for working with the MdTA and AAA Mid-Atlantic to reach an acceptable compromise through the amendments.

“The original amendments proposed by the MdTA essentially stripped the bill of its intent to add some real democracy to its decision making process. Through Delegate Rudolph’s diligence, the revamped legislation again addresses the public’s needs and even goes a step further by requiring that an estimated economic impact statement be provided to the Senate Budget and Taxation and Finance Committees, as well as the House Appropriations and Ways and Means Committees at least 60 days before the Authority votes to implement a proposal to fix or revise tolls, fees, or other charges,” stated Averella.

The bill will likely be heard before the Senate early next week. Those who wish to contact their legislators in the Senate to vote in favor of this legislation are urged to visit AAA Mid-Atlantic’s website at [www.aaamidatlantic.com/PGA/LegislativeActionCenter](http://www.aaamidatlantic.com/PGA/LegislativeActionCenter) in the coming days to express support of HB 922.

*AAA Mid-Atlantic is based in Wilmington, Del., and serves nearly four million members in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania and New Jersey with personal insurance, financial, automotive and travel services through 53 retail branches, regional operations centers and the Internet, at [www.aaa.com/community](http://www.aaa.com/community).*

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