

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2020 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 13

(Senator Hershey, *et al.*)

Finance

Environment and Transportation

Chesapeake Bay Bridge – Reconstruction Advisory Group

This emergency bill establishes the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Reconstruction Advisory Group within the Maryland Department of Transportation and staffed by the Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA). The advisory group must (1) provide MDTA with an independent, citizen-informed perspective on MDTA's operations at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge; (2) work collaboratively with MDTA and provide pertinent input related to traffic and customer service issues; and (3) assist MDTA in assessing potential concerns about activity relating to the bridge and educating the general public about activity relating to the bridge.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Nonbudgeted expenditures increase by \$8,000 in FY 2020 and by between \$32,000 and \$96,000 annually beginning in FY 2021. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The advisory group must adopt bylaws and report its activities and recommendations to MDTA quarterly. By July 1, 2021, and by each July 1 thereafter, the advisory group must report its activities and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly.

Advisory group members may not receive compensation, but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the standard State travel regulations, as provided in the State budget.

Any entity that conducts a study pertaining to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, U.S. Route 50 between the Severn River Bridge and the Kent Narrows Bridge, or U.S. Route 50 between Interstate 97 and Maryland Route 404 must report its findings and recommendations to the advisory group.

Current Law/Background:

Existing Bay Bridge Reconstruction Advisory Group

The existing advisory group was established by MDTA in 2005 and meets quarterly to discuss and advise MDTA on issues related to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. In 2019, its topics of discussion included the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) currently in progress for a third span across the bay, the westbound deck rehabilitation project, and MDTA's summer travel campaign to encourage use of the bridge during off-peak hours. A summary of the existing advisory group's recent activities can be found on its [website](#).

Chesapeake Bay Bridge

The Chesapeake Bay Bridge is the only toll bridge in Maryland that currently crosses the Chesapeake Bay. The bridge connects Maryland's Eastern Shore recreational regions with the metropolitan areas of Annapolis, Baltimore, and the District of Columbia. The original two-lane bridge was constructed in 1952, and the second three-lane bridge was constructed in 1973. MDTA estimates that about 25.6 million vehicles crossed the bridge in fiscal 2014. Traffic congestion on the bridge can be severe.

The 2015 [Bay Bridge Life Cycle Cost Analysis](#) estimates that, by 2040, average traffic on the bridge will increase by at least 31.3% (to 92,800 vehicles per day). Furthermore, on summer Fridays (one of the heaviest traffic days for the bridge), traffic volume is estimated to increase by at least 36.6% by 2040 (to 94,300 vehicles).

The analysis also researched and developed alternatives designed to improve the Bay Bridge and its approaching roadways. The analysis includes a cost estimate of \$3.25 billion to simply repair and maintain the bridge in its existing form through 2065, as well as a range of alternatives that involve building a third bridge across the bay, demolishing one or both existing bridges to rebuild with additional travel lanes, and widening the U.S. 50/301 main line by one lane. Costs for the alternatives are estimated through 2060 and range from \$7.80 billion (which simply widens and rehabilitates the existing eastbound bridge to three lanes) to \$25.34 billion (which demolishes both existing structures to rebuild a new, single, eight-lane bridge).

Third Crossing of the Chesapeake Bay – National Environmental Policy Act Process

MDTA is currently undertaking a Tier 1 NEPA study for a third crossing of the Chesapeake Bay. One of the issues being explored is the best location for such a bridge. A draft of the study is scheduled to be complete during the summer of 2020, while the full study is scheduled to be complete during the summer of 2021. Updates on the progress and findings of the study can be found on [MDTA's website](#).

State Expenditures: The existing advisory group is staffed using existing resources by MDTA staff; it only meets quarterly and its responsibilities are limited. The bill establishes the advisory group in statute and expands its responsibilities. Therefore, nonbudgeted expenditures increase by approximately \$8,000 per meeting held by the advisory group for additional consultant staffing support and meeting materials. If the advisory group continues to meet quarterly under the bill, nonbudgeted expenditures increase by \$32,000 annually. If the advisory group meets monthly, nonbudgeted expenditures increase by \$96,000 annually.

Pursuant to the bill's emergency status, the bill will take effect in fiscal 2020. For purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that one advisory group meeting is held in fiscal 2020 and, therefore, nonbudgeted expenditures increase by \$8,000 in fiscal 2020. Any expense reimbursements for advisory group members are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing resources.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: HB 56 (Delegate Arentz, *et al.*) - Environment and Transportation.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Transportation; University System of Maryland; Department of Legislative Services

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