

Re: FAVORABLE position on HB 389: State Highways - Sidewalks and Bicycle Pathways - Maintenance and Repair

Melissa Schweisguth
Hyattsville, MD 20782 (District 22)

February 26, 2024

Dear Chair Barnes and Committee Members,

Thank you for your service to our state.

I am writing to ask that you provide a favorable report for HB 389, which would repeal the requirement that a political subdivision maintain and repair sidewalks and bicycle pathways constructed along Maryland state highways, and ensure that Maryland.

I regularly bike for commuting and errands, live on a state road connecting urban residential areas and a trail system heavily used by bike commuters, and regularly drive on state roads that bisect residential, school, commercial, and transit-center areas such as MD 450 and MD 202. I am keenly aware of the lack of bike and pedestrian facilities on such state roads, which are very desirable for bike and pedestrian transit, but highly deadly without bike and pedestrian facilities.

HB 389 strikes two provisions from the State Code's Transportation Article that require local jurisdictions to maintain and repair sidewalks and bike paths along state roads if the local jurisdiction requested the sidewalk or bike path, or SHA required a developer to build it. HB 389 would enable local jurisdictions and SHA to assign responsibility on a case-by-case basis, based on what is most efficient and feasible for all parties involved. It will not impose a new tax or fee on residents and businesses, disrupt SHA's existing agreements with local governments, or affect SHA's ability to negotiate similar agreements going forward.

Under current law SHA will not construct the sidewalk or bike path if the local jurisdiction does not agree to repair and maintain it. As such, current law effectively disregards pedestrian and bike safety as the basis for determining where sidewalks and bike paths should be installed. Consequently, the Transportation Article's local maintenance by default provisions are contrary to state policy for bike and pedestrian safety on our roadways, chiefly Maryland's Vision Zero commitment (zero traffic fatalities and severe injuries by 2030) and the State Highway Administration's Complete Streets policy (which calls for the inclusion of bike paths and sidewalks). Current provisions also create inefficiencies and gaps by carving up maintenance and repair requirements across multiple entities where roads cross jurisdictions, and make it difficult for road users to know whom to contact to address issues.

In my own county, the local maintenance requirement has been an impediment to bike paths and sidewalks on three state roads with substantial safety issues for cyclists and pedestrians: the Greenbelt East Trail on MD 193, the Washington, Baltimore & Annapolis Trail extension on

MD 703, and the Rhode Island Avenue Trolley Trail extension along US 1 from Hyattsville to the Washington DC border.

These trails and other bike and pedestrian infrastructure are urgently needed along state roads as Prince George's County has the highest rate of traffic fatalities in the state. It had 129 road deaths in 2023, including 39 pedestrians and three bicyclists. The need statewide is great as road deaths have increased over the past few years-trending farther away from the Vision Zero goal. The General Assembly passed Maryland's Vision Zero law in 2019. In 2020, Maryland had 574 road deaths the next year, in 2020, including 129 pedestrians and 15 bicyclists. In 2023, there were 601 road fatalities, including 155 pedestrians and 15 bicyclists. HB 389 would ensure that Maryland can reverse these trends, save irreplaceable lives, and meet Vision Zero goals.

HB 389 is a critical tool in helping Maryland reverse the trend of increasing road deaths and reaching its Vision Zero commitment – eliminating all traffic fatalities and severe injuries on Maryland roadways by 2030.

Please provide a Favorable HB 389 committee report and support passage in the House.

Thank you for considering my comments

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa A. Schweisguth". The signature is written in a cursive style. To the right of the signature, there are three small, vertically aligned dots.

Melissa Schweisguth