



HB 963 – Montgomery County - Highways - Maximum Speed Limits MC 1-25  
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Washington Area Bicyclist Association – FAVORABLE

March 25, 2025

Chair Smith and Committee Members,

WABA supports bill HB 963, which would allow speed-limit reduction to 15 MPH in Montgomery County without an engineering and traffic investigation.

Need

Speed kills. According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "Studies clearly show that higher speeds result in greater impact at the time of a crash, which leads to more severe injuries and fatalities." For instance, a 2011 technical report published by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, "Impact Speed and a Pedestrian's Risk of Severe Injury or Death," found that the average risk of severe injury to a pedestrian increased with vehicle speed from 10% at 16 MPH, 25% at 23 MPH, 50% at 31 MPH, and by an even larger percentage at higher speeds.

Justification

Planning documents adopted by the Montgomery County Council including the county's Complete Streets Design Guide, Pedestrian Master Plan, and Master Plan of Highways and Transitways provide analysis, design, and engineering guidance that is equivalent to the engineering and traffic investigation currently required by Maryland Transportation Code. The Cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg have independent planning authority, however the county's design guide would be applicable to city owned streets and would fill gaps in city planning artifacts.

HB 963 would enable these jurisdictions to respond to local conditions on locally owned roads faster and at lower cost, by eliminating a redundant requirement, enabling them to make local streets safer.

Precedent

There is a precedent for HB 963. Transportation Article § 21-803 (5) states "Baltimore City may, without performing an engineering and traffic investigation, decrease the maximum speed limit on a highway under its jurisdiction." The reason for this exemption is that Baltimore City adopted a Complete Streets program in 2018. HB 963 would extend Baltimore's exemption to Montgomery County jurisdictions based on their equivalent programs.

Montgomery County Policy

The county's Complete Streets Design Guide was developed by Montgomery Planning and enacted by the Montgomery County Council. It is county policy. It designates a Target Speed of 20 MPH for Downtown Streets, Neighborhood Connectors, Neighborhood Streets, Neighborhood Yield Streets, and certain Country Roads, in particular for stretches where they "operate as neighborhood streets for short segments."

Recommendation P-9 of Montgomery County's Pedestrian Master Plan, adopted in October by the County Council, is "Comprehensively lower speed limits countywide." The text explains, *"Higher traffic speeds are directly linked to crash severity. In pursuit of Vision Zero, the county should continue efforts to lower speed limits in neighborhoods and along major roadways, with a goal of having the roadway's posted speed limit match the target speed outlined in the CSDG [Complete Streets Design Guide]."*

Montgomery County has been inhibited from reducing speed limits in accordance with county policy by the current engineering and traffic investigation requirement.

That's why we have Recommendation P-9a, to "Support state legislation to allow jurisdiction-wide speed limit reduction." The detail text reads, *"Montgomery County's ability to lower the posted and statutory speed limit along residential streets is limited by state law... The county should support all legislation that offers local agencies more flexibility in setting speed limits in line with county goals."*

HB 963 responds directly to a recommendation adopted by the Montgomery Planning Board and Council.

#### Summary

Reduction benefits are incontrovertible. Yet we have this lingering requirement for an investigation on a road-by-road basis, which is expensive and onerous. Please update code to eliminate a redundant requirement by advancing HB 963. WABA urges a favorable committee reading.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.

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