

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2009 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1375 (Delegates Smigiel and Sossi)
Environmental Matters

Commission to Study the Impact of Large Truck Traffic on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge

This bill establishes a Commission to Study the Impact of Large Truck Traffic on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) must provide staff support for the commission. The commission must submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by January 1, 2010.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2009, and terminates June 30, 2010.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Given the State's fiscal difficulties, agency budgets have been constrained. Thus, the requirement to staff the commission is not absorbable within the existing budgeted resources of MDOT. Instead, Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) expenditures increase in FY 2010, primarily for contractual staff to support the commission. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The commission's report must include the following information:

- the current impact of large truck traffic on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and safety for drivers of two-axle vehicles;
- the impact of projected future growth in large truck traffic on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and safety for drivers of two-axle vehicles;
- the impact of banning large truck traffic on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge at all times or during certain times of the day;
- the viability and likely effect of instituting a variable toll pricing policy to incentivize large truck users to travel the Chesapeake Bay Bridge during times of the day when traffic flow is likely to be less dense;
- the impact of the commission's recommendations on projected traffic flow on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and on surrounding highways and the efficacy of current safety measures; and
- the cost of the commission's recommendations to the trucking industry and drivers of two-axle vehicles.

Members of the commission may not receive compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the standard State travel regulations.

Background: The Chesapeake Bay Bridge connects Maryland's Eastern Shore with the metropolitan areas of Baltimore, Annapolis, and the District of Columbia. The original two-lane bridge was constructed in 1952, and the second three-lane bridge was constructed in 1973. The existing bridge is the only roadway crossing of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland; approximately 27 million vehicles crossed the bridge in 2007. Traffic congestion on the bridge can be particularly severe, due in part to factors such as a lack of shoulder room to perform maintenance.

The 2004 *Bay Bridge Transportation Needs Report* estimates that, by 2025, traffic will increase on the bridge by at least 41% over 2001 levels on both weekdays (61,000 vehicles in 2001, increasing to 86,000 in 2025) and summer Saturdays (95,000 on an August Saturday in 2001, set to increase to 135,000 in 2025). In fiscal 2008, total truck traffic crossing the bridge was just over 1 million vehicles.

On August 10, 2008, a three-vehicle crash occurred on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge resulting in a tractor-trailer going through a concrete jersey wall and into the water below, killing the truck driver. The accident closed down the older, two-lane eastbound span of the bridge and prompted questions about the bridge's safety. An investigation after the accident revealed corrosion in some of the bolts that anchor the concrete jersey walls. Portions of the bridge were closed for weeks while inspectors assessed the problem and repairs were made.

In September 2008, Governor Martin O'Malley announced the establishment of a peer review group, composed of nationally recognized experts, to examine the Maryland Transportation Authority's (MDTA) bridge and tunnel inspection program and identify and evaluate best practices used throughout the United States. The peer review group is expected to submit a report containing findings and recommendations in April 2009.

The 2009 inspection of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge is currently underway and nearly complete. In fall 2008, MDTA hired a new consultant to complete the annual bridge inspection.

Additional Comments: MDOT advises that more than six months is likely necessary to complete the bill's reporting requirement.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: SB 866 (Senator Pipkin) - Finance.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Transportation, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 9, 2009
ncs/ljm

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