

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 814 (Delegate Fraser-Hidalgo, *et al.*)
Environment and Transportation

Vehicle Laws - Intercounty Connector - Maximum Speed Limit

This bill establishes a 65-miles-per-hour speed limit on the Intercounty Connector (ICC).

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) nonbudgeted expenditures increase significantly beginning in FY 2016 for a traffic engineering study, roadway reconstruction, additional roadway safety enhancements, and additional signage. General fund revenues decrease minimally due to fewer citations being issued for exceeding the speed limit.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Generally, a maximum speed limit of more than 55 miles per hour may not be established or continued on any highway in the State that (1) is not an interstate highway or an expressway or (2) would subject the State to federal funding sanctions under 23 USC 154. A maximum speed limit of more than 65 miles per hour may not be established on any highway in the State.

Background:

Highway Speed Limits

According to the Federal Highway Administration, the management of speed through appropriate speed limits is an essential element of highway safety. In terms of traffic law, speed limits should reflect the maximum reasonable and safe speed for normal conditions. If altered speed limits are desired, engineering modifications and other measures should be implemented to accommodate speeds at the new speed limit.

According to the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), the eighty-fifth percentile speed is the speed at or below which 85% of motorists drive on a given road when unaffected by slower traffic or poor weather. MDOT considers the use of the eighty-fifth percentile speed a good guideline for setting the appropriate speed limit for a road. MDOT has advised that research indicates that the posted speed limit has little effect on the speeds at which most motorists drive. Thus, raising the speed limit, *if done in accordance with traffic and engineering studies and in consideration of the eighty-fifth percentile guidelines*, is unlikely to increase the number of crashes on a road.

Nevertheless, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation, *speeding* (beyond the posted limit or a safe speed for the conditions) is one of the most prevalent factors cited as contributing to traffic crashes. In 2012, speeding was cited as a contributing factor in 30.4% of all fatal crashes, and there were 10,219 fatalities in “speeding-related” crashes. In Maryland, speeding was a contributing factor in 39.4% of fatal crashes. Of these crashes in Maryland, about 44.2% occurred on roads characterized by the U.S. Department of Transportation as an interstate, freeway, expressway, or other arterial road; this is a greater percentage of fatal speed-related crashes occurring on these types of highways than for the United States as a whole (35.3%).

Intercounty Connector

The ICC is an 18.8-mile tolled highway extending from the I-270/I-370 corridor in Montgomery County to the I-95/US 1 corridor in Prince George’s County. The first 5.65-mile tolled segment of the ICC, from I-370 at Shady Grove to MD 97/Georgia Avenue in Rockville/Olney, opened in February 2011. A second segment of the ICC, from Georgia Avenue to I-95 (Exit 31) at Laurel, opened in November 2011. The final segment of the ICC, from I-95 eastbound to US 1, opened in November 2014. MDTA owns, operates, and maintains the ICC, while construction was managed by the State Highway Administration.

According to the draft 2014 *Maryland State Highway Mobility Report*, the ICC has reduced congestion on four parallel or nearby routes by up to 11%, and it provides a savings in

travel time of between 55% and 60% (between 21 and 25 minutes) over these parallel routes. The effect on the Capital Beltway was not measured in the report because, according to MDTA, the ICC is not specifically intended to reduce east-west congestion on the Capital Beltway.

The ICC was designed for a maximum speed of 60 miles per hour due to safety and environmental concerns. An engineering study of the ICC concluded that it would be safe to increase the highway's speed limit from 55 to 60 miles per hour if supported by an analysis of crash data. In March 2013, the speed limit was increased to 60 miles per hour. MDTA advises that, in accordance with standard practice, it conducted a study on the effect, including safety impacts, of increasing the ICC speed limit to 60 miles per hour, as well as the potential for further increasing the speed limit. The study found that increasing the speed limit resulted in an increase in speed-related crashes, total crashes per month, and crashes per vehicle mile traveled. The engineering firm that conducted the study recommended that MDTA continue to monitor the crash trends on the ICC for two to three more years to obtain more robust data. The study noted that the median speed measured at most locations increased by one mile per hour or less (generally from 63 miles per hour to 64 miles per hour).

State Expenditures: MDTA nonbudgeted expenditures increase in fiscal 2016 by \$125,000 for a traffic engineering study and \$8,000 to procure new signs for the ICC. In addition, capital expenditures increase by an indeterminate but significantly greater amount beginning in fiscal 2016 to undertake any necessary roadway reconstruction and for the installation of any new or additional guardrails or other safety enhancements. For example, MDTA advises that the cost just to install new guardrails is about \$25,000 for each additional segment. This analysis assumes that most such reconstruction and enhancements could be completed within four years.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 1111 of 2014 received an unfavorable report from the House Environmental Matters Committee. Its cross file, SB 429, received a hearing in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, but no further action was taken.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Montgomery County, Department of State Police, Maryland Department of Transportation, U.S. Department of Transportation, Department of Legislative Services

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md/ljm

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