

Department of Legislative Services  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2018 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
 First Reader

Senate Bill 55 (Senator Benson)  
 Judicial Proceedings

Vehicle Laws - Speed Restrictions - Expressways and Interstate Highways

This bill requires that all expressways and interstate highways that connect with Interstate 495 in Maryland have the same maximum speed limit as Interstate 495 at the point of connection for at least five miles from the point of entrance to or exit from Interstate 495. The State Highway Administration (SHA) must post notice of the maximum speed limit on an expressway at least every five miles.

Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** Transportation Trust Fund expenditures increase by *at least* \$10,000 in FY 2019 only to modify signage in the affected locations. General fund revenues increase, likely minimally, as the bill’s requirement results in a lower speed limit on the portion of I-95 that connects with I-495, which may result in more citations for speeding.

| (in dollars)   | FY 2019    | FY 2020 | FY 2021 | FY 2022 | FY 2023 |
|----------------|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| GF Revenue     | -          | -       | -       | -       | -       |
| SF Expenditure | \$10,000   | \$0     | \$0     | \$0     | \$0     |
| Net Effect     | (\$10,000) | \$0     | \$0     | \$0     | \$0     |

*Note: ( ) = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease*

**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. A maximum speed limit of more than 70 miles per hour may not be established on any highway in the State.

An “expressway” is a major highway of two or more traffic lanes in each direction that is designed to eliminate principal traffic hazards and has the following characteristics:

- a median divider separating opposing traffic lanes to eliminate head-on collisions and sideswiping;
- grade separation structures to eliminate the conflict of cross streams of traffic at each intersection;
- points of entrance and exit limited to predetermined locations;
- vertical curves long enough to provide long sight distances; and
- shoulders wide enough to permit vehicles to stop or park out of traffic lanes.

## **Background:**

### *Speed Management*

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.

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 2016, speeding was cited as a contributing factor in 27% of all fatal crashes, and there were 10,111 fatalities in speeding-related crashes. In Maryland, speeding was a contributing factor in 25% of fatal crashes. Of these crashes in Maryland, about 54% occurred on roads characterized by the U.S. Department of Transportation as an interstate, freeway, expressway, or other principal 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 (43%).

### *Roadways Affected by the Bill*

SHA advises that the bill affects a limited number of roadways that connect with I-495, including:

- I-270;
- I-95;
- I-295; and
- U.S. Route 50.

The speed limit for I-495 in Maryland is generally 55 miles per hour. Thus, the bill effectively sets the speed limit for interstates and expressways that connect to I-495 at 55 miles per hour (for at least five miles). Because I-270, I-295, and Route 50 all have speed limits that are already set at 55 miles per hour at the point of connection with I-495, the bill only has a limited effect on those roadways. (However, SHA may need to ensure that matching speed limits are in place for at least five miles, pursuant to the bill's requirement.)

At the point of connection with I-495, however, the speed limit for I-95 is 65 miles per hour. Under the bill, that speed limit must be lowered to 55 miles per hour in order to match the maximum speed limit of I-495.

**State Fiscal Effect:** SHA advises that some signage changes are necessary in order to implement the lower speed limit along I-95 at the I-495 junction. The total cost of these changes is estimated at \$10,000 in fiscal 2019 only. It is unclear to what extent the bill's requirement for signage every five miles along expressways affects expenditures. To the extent that expressways in the State do not already have signage within the five-mile intervals specified by the bill, expenditures for SHA may increase more significantly. However, SHA is unable to provide an estimate at this time regarding how much additional signage may be required as a result of the bill.

Because the bill effectively lowers the speed limit for I-95 at the point of connection with I-495 from 65 miles per hour to 55 miles per hour, the bill likely results in an increase in general fund revenues (at least in the short term) as additional drivers are issued citations for speeding. Given the limited area affected by the bill, however, any increase in general fund revenues is expected to be minimal.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Montgomery and Prince George's counties; Maryland Department of Transportation; U.S. Department of Transportation; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - January 17, 2018  
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