
January 27, 2021

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

***Re: Letter of Information – Senate Bill 297 – Vehicle Laws – Speed Restrictions –
Expressways and Interstate Highways***

Dear Chairman Smith and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on Senate Bill 297 but offers the following information for consideration by the Committee during its deliberations.

Safety is MDOT's top priority. Speed limits on Maryland's roadway are set through careful application of traffic engineering practices. One key to reducing speed-related crashes is to minimize "speed differential," the difference in speed between vehicles on the roadway, which often contributes to crashes. Therefore, transportation professionals set speeds that effectively balance the design of a roadway with driver expectation.

Speed studies establish, validate, or revise speed limits on portions of roadways in part by finding the 85th percentile speed – the speed that most motorists on that section of roadway consider safe and reasonable under typical conditions. In addition, speed studies examine roadway characteristics, crash history, and unusual conditions along the road, such as roadway construction.

Setting speed limits involves a strong consideration of roadway design and driver expectations. Mandating speed limits on certain interstates and expressways removes the speed study and judgement required for speed limits to be reasonably determined as roadway conditions change. If speed limits are arbitrarily set, a change could increase speed differentials of motorists as some obey the posted speed limit, while others will fail to comply out of habit or believing that the limit is unreasonably low for the roadway geometry.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee consider this information when deliberating Senate Bill 297.

Respectfully Submitted,

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