

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB 254  
State Highway Administration - Pedestrian and Bicyclist Fatalities - Infrastructure  
Review (Vision Zero Implementation Act of 2022)**

This legislation would require the State Highway Administration (SHA) to evaluate safety deficiencies on state roadways in the wake of a pedestrian or bicyclist fatality and to publicly make recommendations on how to make that road safer.

**Overview of Vision Zero**

In 2019, Maryland became the fourth state to adopt Vision Zero—a goal of no deaths or serious injuries on roadways for pedestrians, bicyclists, or motorists by the year 2030.

Rather than continue to accept the status quo that traffic deaths are inevitable, Vision Zero challenges traffic engineers, planners, law enforcement, and others to view traffic deaths as preventable and to plan roads that account for failures in human behavior.

**Roadway Fatalities Are on the Rise**

In 2021, 547 people died on Maryland roads, including 127 pedestrians and 5 bicyclists.<sup>1</sup> These statistics put Maryland among the worst states in the nation in terms of fatalities of vulnerable road users.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, traffic fatalities are increasing in Maryland and nationally. The U.S. saw the largest six-month increase in traffic fatalities in recorded history during the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> Calling the surge in fatalities a “crisis,” U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg has called on all levels of government to take action.<sup>4</sup>

Maryland has seen an increase in pedestrian fatalities in recent years. According to the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), “The apparent risk to pedestrians involved in Maryland crashes calls for improved pedestrian safety as a major focus for traffic safety

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland Dept. of Transportation, <https://zerodeathsmd.gov/resources/crashdata/>

<sup>2</sup> MDOT presentation on the Department’s Pedestrian Safety Action Plan, Spring 2021

<sup>3</sup> <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813199>

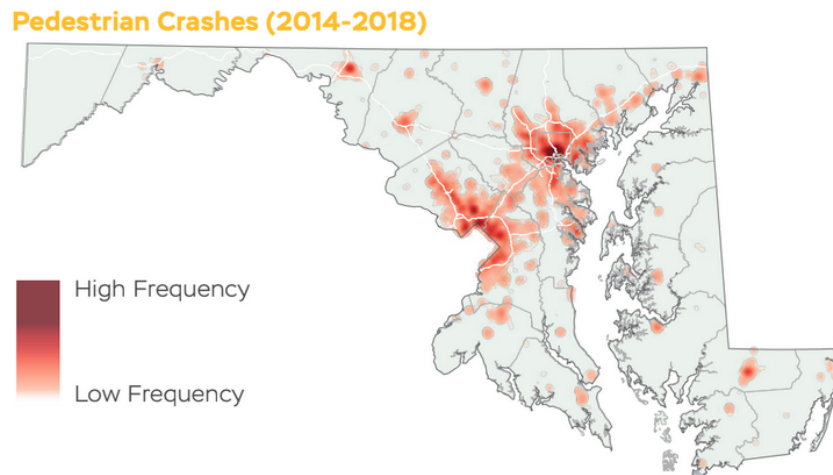
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nhtsa.gov/press-releases/usdot-releases-new-data-showing-road-fatalities-spiked-first-half-2021>

professionals across the state.”<sup>5</sup> This trend is anticipated to continue, as the Governors Highway Safety Association projects that Maryland will have the third largest increase in pedestrian fatalities in future years.<sup>6</sup>

### **Pedestrian & Bicyclist Fatalities More Likely on State Roads**

SHA’s own analysis reveals that pedestrian crashes are five to ten times more likely to be fatal on state roadways as compared to local roads.<sup>7</sup> To prevent future needless deaths, we need to fix safety issues on state roadways.

Importantly, these crashes are not randomly or evenly distributed across the state. Pedestrian crashes tend to occur over a relatively small area, as seen in the figure below.<sup>8</sup> This means that prevention of future crashes can be tackled through safety enhancements in targeted areas.



### **Causes of Increased Pedestrian Fatalities**

Pedestrian deaths are on the rise while vehicle occupant deaths are falling.<sup>9</sup> The increase in pedestrian deaths, however, has not been linked to any significant change in pedestrian activity. Walking (as a share of all trips) has increased by less than 1% since 2009, while vehicle miles traveled has increased by 8%. Moreover, the number of pedestrians cited for traffic violations has decreased in recent years.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> MDOT MVA Highway Safety Office, FY 2021 Maryland Highway Safety Plan

<sup>6</sup> “Pedestrian Traffic Fatalities by State, 2020 Preliminary Data Addendum,” May 2021, Governors Highway Association

<sup>7</sup> MDOT Pedestrian Safety presentation on Oct 21, 2021. <https://youtu.be/KMGN6ZvYCak?t=1636>

<sup>8</sup> “Context Driven: Access and Mobility For All Users,” 2020, MDOT

<sup>9</sup> Smart Growth America and National Complete Streets Coalition “Dangerous by Design” report, 2019

<sup>10</sup> MDOT MVA Highway Safety Office: FFY 2021 Maryland Highway Safety Plan

Rather, pedestrian deaths are linked to changes in driver behavior, such as speeding and distracted driving. Incidents of speeding remain higher than during pre-pandemic times in both urban and rural environments.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, drivers are increasingly using their phones while driving.<sup>12,13,14</sup> Taken together, these studies document an increase in speeding and distracted driving compared to the pre-COVID status quo—making pedestrian safety more urgent than ever.

### **Safety Improvements Needed**

This legislation would require SHA to identify safety deficiencies on state roadways where a pedestrian or bicyclist is killed. This bill is modeled on legislation enacted in Illinois in 2021.

This legislation is needed to achieve the state’s goal of Vision Zero and to implement MDOT’s Strategic Highway Safety Plan. Specifically, Transportation §8-1005 calls for “investing more resources into construction needs for high-accident intersections and roadway sections.”

This bill also complements a new federally-required retrospective analysis of vulnerable road user safety. This federal analysis will be a five year lookback, whereas this bill will address future crashes and safety deficiencies.

The list of corrective actions included in the bill are consistent with the Safe System Approach, which was developed by a group of leading highway engineers, scientists, public health professionals, and safety experts. The recommendations of the Safe System approach promote equity in transportation and traffic enforcement and encourage the use of pedestrian beacons, roundabouts, bike lanes, median barriers, rumble strips, and other measures to reduce crash severity. These design features are common to other initiatives, including Maryland’s Complete Streets policy<sup>15</sup> and SHA’s Context Driven guide.

The Safe System approach has been linked to substantial traffic fatality reductions. Countries that adopted the approach show large drops in deaths—with a 47% reduction in Australia, 48% reduction in New Zealand, 80% percent reduction in Spain, and 67% reduction in Sweden.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “Continuation of Research on Traffic Safety During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.” NHTSA, October 2021

<sup>12</sup> “Measuring and Pricing Phone Distraction Risk: A Telematics-based Analysis of U.S. Driver Behavior and its Impact on the Insurance Industry.” May 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Zendrive Collision Report. December 2020. <https://live.zendrive.com/collision-report>

<sup>14</sup> “The Impact of COVID-19 on Road Safety in Canada and the United States.” Vanlaar, et al.

<sup>15</sup> Transportation §2-112.

<sup>16</sup> “Recommendations of the Safe System Consortium.” May 2021.

<https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-injury-research-and-policy/our-impact/documents/recommendations-of-the-safe-system-consortium.pdf>

## **What This Bill Does**

Requires SHA to conduct an infrastructure review at the location of each pedestrian or bicyclist fatality on a state roadway, identify potential infrastructure solutions, and make the results publicly available.

- An investigation is required only if there is a fatality involving a pedestrian or bicyclist, not for crashes involving only injuries or property damage.
- Does not put any requirements on local governments; the bill only applies to state roadways and intersections with state roadways.
- An investigation must identify needed engineering and traffic control deficiencies and recommend appropriate corrective actions.
- An investigation must be completed within 6 months of the crash and results must be made publicly available.