



Testimony to the House Environment and Transportation Committee
HB 70 -- Safe Access for All (SAFE) Roads Act of 2023 --
Position: Favorable

The Honorable Kumar Barve
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Environment and Transportation Committee

Feb. 2, 2023

Honorable Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

I'm a consumer advocate and Executive Director of Consumer Auto, a non-profit group that works to foster safety, transparency, and fair treatment for Maryland drivers and car buyers.

We support **HB 70** because it will improve safety for all Maryland road users – and especially of the highly vulnerable pedestrians and cyclists who account for more than 20% of the fatalities on Maryland's roads.

The measures the bill mandates will help address the dramatic spike in road deaths we've seen on U.S. roads in recent years. In 2020, overall U.S. road deaths increased 7.2% to more than 38,000 – and 6,721 pedestrians were among those killed (up 4.8% from the previous year).¹ For 2021, the news was even worse – with traffic fatalities rising another 10.5% and almost 43,000 Americans dying on U.S. roads. NHTSA estimates that 7,342 pedestrians were among those killed in 2021, up 5% from the year before to a 40-year high.²

Sadly, those figures only intensify trends that have been clear for many years. While roads in other wealthy nations have gotten much safer in recent decades (traffic fatalities in the E.U. fell a remarkable 36% between 2010 and 2018, for instance³), fatalities have been trending upward on U.S. roads for several decades. For pedestrians, total fatalities rose about 45% between 2010 (4,302 deaths) and 2019 (6,237 deaths).⁴ From 2010 to 2021, the number of cyclists dying each year soared 58%, with an estimated 8,353 cyclists losing their lives over that period.⁵

Road deaths in Maryland haven't shown quite so dramatic a spike. But between 125 and 138 pedestrians died in our state each year 2019-2021.⁶ Preliminary data for 2022 show that 544 people died on Maryland roads last year, with 128 pedestrians and 11 cyclists among those killed.⁷

1 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-27/usdot-s-buttigieg-announces-new-traffic-safety-strategy>

3. <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/news/traffic-pedestrian-deaths-soar-2021/623913/>

4. <https://cleantechnica.com/2021/12/11/eu-road-deaths-dropped-by-36-while-us-road-deaths-increased-by-10/>

4 <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>

6. <https://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/us-cycling-fatalities-hit-multi-decade-high-but-there-may-be-hope-in-safety-in-numbers-effect>

6 <https://zerodeathsmd.gov/resources/crashdata/#>

7. <https://zerodeathsmd.gov/resources/crashdata/>



We know a great deal about who is likely to be killed in these crashes and where they happen. Across the county, people walking in lower-income neighborhoods are more likely to be killed, with those in the lowest-income neighborhoods almost twice as likely to die as those in middle-income Census tracts.⁸ Death rates are also unusually high among older Americans, African-Americans, and Native Americans.⁹

Data from the Governor’s Highway Safety Association (GHSA) show that 73% of pedestrian deaths happen on principal, minor or interstate arterials – that is, high-speed, high-capacity roads in urbanized areas where crosswalks are often a long distance apart.¹⁰ More than two-thirds of pedestrian deaths happen on roads without protected space for people on foot or in wheelchairs.¹¹

While many factors help make our roads dangerous, safety advocates know that such data carries an important lesson: that the core of the problem is that we have too many dangerous, high-speed roads in urban and suburban spaces that offer too little protection for pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. To improve safety, we need to act with urgency to redesign our streetscapes (esp. in town centers and high-density areas) in ways we know can provide greater protection.

HB 70 takes several important steps to make that happen. It mandates, among other measures, that MDOT and the State Highway Administration implement context-appropriate design changes as they undertake construction and maintenance projects; it requires SHA to act this year to examine the safety of state highways in town centers and offer a plan to install safe pedestrian crossings; it also requires SHA to report promptly on the impact of its open positions on safety efforts and on the number of new signalized crossings approved.

These and other measures the bill mandates promise to make a real difference in the safety of some of our most vulnerable residents and road users. And while some drivers may complain about those changes, re-engineering dangerous intersections and corridors with an eye to protecting their most vulnerable users will in the end tend to lower speeds and alter road designs in ways that will make drivers significantly safer as well.

We support HB 70 and ask you to give it a FAVORABLE report.

Sincerely,

Franz Schneiderman
Consumer Auto

8 <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>

9 Ibid.

10.. <https://ggwash.org/view/85217/why-pedestrian-deaths-in-the-us-hit-a-record-high-in-2021>

11. Ibid.