



P.O. Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB70 – “Safe Access for All (SAFE) Roads Act of 2023”
Position: Support
Hearing Date: February 2, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB70, which would require the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) to recommend and implement context-driven design elements to increase pedestrian and bicycle safety when developing any construction or improvement project. When a new construction or improvement project would take more than 12 months to complete, all possible near-term safety improvements must be made.

The State Highway Administration (SHA) would also be required to submit to the General Assembly before October 1, 2023, a report with information about employees who work on pedestrian and bicycle safety that includes turnover rates and the number of open staff positions. The report also should provide the number of signalized crosswalks that have been approved for construction and the timeline for completion. The bill also would require SHA to submit to the General Assembly on or before December 1, 2023, a full analysis of state highways that pass through suburban activity centers or traditional town centers, and a timeline for installing safe pedestrian signalized crossings on all state highways where there is significant transit dependency and a population density along the highway exceeding 10,000 people per mile.

We live in a car-centric culture where transportation planning, road design and vehicle laws are focused on getting cars and trucks to their destinations as swiftly as possible. With more and heavier SUVs on the road than ever before, this has resulted in high rates of injury and death for pedestrians and bicyclists. The correlation between speed, road design and crash severity is well documented. Combining excessive speed with poor roadway and intersection designs can yield horrifying results. According to the MDOT Motor Vehicle Administration’s Highway Safety Office, there were 544 traffic fatalities in our state in 2022, including 139 pedestrian and bicycle deaths.

Not everyone is able to drive, for reasons including age, health, and finances. Roadway design must be updated to prioritize safety for pedestrians and bicyclists as well as drivers. The state transportation system needs to ensure that everyone has a safe way to get to their job, education, and housing. One important measure to take is installation of more crosswalks on state highways in high population areas.

Transportation is now the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in our state. Tailpipe emissions are also a major source of health-damaging air pollution. There is a growing need to get individuals out of their cars, to take transit, ride bikes and scooters, and walk more. These modes significantly reduce air pollution and can increase physical health.

In summary, the high number of pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities that continue to occur on our roadways is unacceptable and indicates new measures must be undertaken to dramatically lessen and ideally eliminate all traffic deaths. HB70 would help make that happen. We urge a favorable report on this bill.

Brian Ditzler
Chapter Transportation Chair
Brian.Ditzler@MDSierra.org

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.