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Testimony in Support of SB 16, the Safe Access for All (SAFE) Roads Act of 2023

By Patrick Wojahn, Director of Government Relations, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
Before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
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Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) is the nation's leading organization dedicated to connected trail networks and building healthy places for healthy people. With 4,833 members across the State of Maryland, RTC advocates for development of trail and active transportation networks around the State including the Baltimore Greenway Trails Network and the Capital Trails Coalition Network.

RTC submits this testimony *in support of SB 16*, which would require the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) to recommend and implement certain design elements for pedestrian and bicycle safety when developing certain projects, require the State Highway Administration to submit reports including pedestrian and bicycle safety data, analyses, and plans to the General Assembly, and other requirements.

While the State of Maryland has adopted the concept of Vision Zero, the state continues to fail to take critical steps toward achieving the goal of zero fatalities and injuries, particularly relating to vulnerable road users including pedestrians, bicyclists and people with disabilities. Better reporting and increased access to data relating to crashes and resulting injuries and fatalities will help enable all interested stakeholders to better understand the steps that need to be taken to reach this goal.

Incorporating and investing in best practices for design elements to increase the safety for pedestrians and bicyclists will help ensure that the number of transportation-related casualties for vulnerable users will decrease. As the nation's leading advocate for separated pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure such as trails, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy recognizes that the best way to ensure bicyclists, pedestrians and people with disabilities reach their destination is to provide dedicated infrastructure away from automobiles such as trails. We encourage the General Assembly and MDOT, and the State Highway Administration in particular, to include investment in trail networks as a strategy toward ensuring safety for all vulnerable users.

Trails and active transportation networks can be a tool to provide greater access for all Marylanders to job or educational opportunities in a way that is safe and more affordable. The Non-motorized Transportation Pilot Program, which invested over \$100 million from the federal

budget to develop networks of non-motorized transportation infrastructure in four communities (Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, Marin County, California, Columbia, Missouri, and Minneapolis, Minnesota) demonstrated the potential impacts.¹ As a result of this investment, even with significant increases in the number of people walking and biking, bicycle and pedestrian crashes held steady or decreased in all the communities involved in the pilot.² The 2017 National Household Travel Survey found that 53% of all trips taken are within 3 miles or less, and 28% of all trips taken are within 1 mile or less.³ Many more people will take these trips by walking and biking if they have safe and accessible ways to do so.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. If you have questions, please contact Patrick Wojahn, Director of Government Relations, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, at 240-988-7763

¹ https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/ntpp/

² Id.

³ U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, 2017 National Household Travel Survey Tables, March 2018, <https://nhts.ornl.gov/download.shtm>