

April 2, 2024

The Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
251 House Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

RE: Letter of Information – Senate Bill 1067 – Baltimore County – Speed Monitoring Systems - Interstate 695

Dear Chair Korman and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) offers the following information on Senate Bill 1067 for the Committee’s consideration.

As amended, Senate Bill 1067 authorizes the State Highway Administration (SHA) to place and use speed monitoring systems on I-695 in Baltimore County and provides for the operation and enforcement of speed violations through these systems. The fines collected from violations are to be remitted to SHA to be used solely to assist in covering the cost of roadway and safety improvements on I-695 in Baltimore County.

The amended bill language is modeled after the authorizing language¹ that underlies SHA’s SafeZones program, which establishes a framework for work zone speed monitoring throughout the State. SHA appreciates the sponsors for their efforts to improve highway safety in Baltimore County and that the funds generated by these citations will be used to implement roadway and safety improvements along the I-695 corridor. However, it is SHA’s view that the best results will be achieved by modeling this initiative after other successful county-operated speed monitoring programs authorized under Article – Transportation § 21-809 of the Annotated Code of Maryland, including those that are applicable to State highways such as MD 175, MD 210, and MD 333.

Unlike other local speed monitoring programs on State highways, where SHA permits the installation of speed monitoring cameras on SHA’s right-of-way but is not involved in the regular operation of the cameras, or the Safe Zones program, where the State uses automated enforcement measures to monitor speeds in work zones, SB 1067 requires a different level of involvement from SHA and would, in effect, create two different standards of speed monitoring programs within the Administration. SHA anticipates needing additional personnel and financial resources to stand up the I-695 camera program while continuing to operate the work zone program and permit for the local speed monitoring programs. While SHA may be able to recover program costs from the I-695 cameras over time, there will be initial costs for SHA to stand up the program.

¹ See Article - Transportation § 21-810 of the Annotated Code of Maryland.

Further, tying the operation of the proposed I-695 camera program to SHA's current SafeZones program, as opposed to the current locally operated speed monitoring programs, presents a series of practical problems. The current law applicable to work zone speed control systems requires SHA to operate manned cameras – this language was included in the proposed language for SB 1067. This will further increase the cost of operating cameras along I-695, as the bill requires operators to be trained on the set up, testing, and operation of these systems, as well as for operators to complete daily set-up activities that are not required with unmanned cameras. Additionally, SHA would have to pay for the operator costs. By contrast, the locally operated programs can utilize unmanned cameras for speed monitoring, increasing the effective window for speed monitoring and reducing program costs. If the intent is that these cameras be for fixed locations, manned operation is unnecessary.

Additionally, while real-time monitoring of speed can be a useful tool to notify drivers that they are exceeding the speed limit and provide them with an opportunity to correct their behavior and slow down before receiving a citation, the amended bill requires speed feedback signs that are proximate to each sign that indicates a speed monitoring system is in use. However, separately, the bill requires that all speed limit signs approaching and within the segment where the speed monitoring system is located include MdMUTCD²-compliant signs that indicate speed monitoring is in use. As such, SHA anticipates a need to significantly increase the number of speed feedback signs in operation or, conversely, to reduce the number of signs it might otherwise use to notify drives of automated speed enforcements, relative to the SafeZones program, in an effort to control costs and ensure effective speed monitoring in the corridor.

Finally, the bill provides for a maximum of 16 cameras, but only allows 4 cameras to be in operation at any time. While a cap on the maximum number of cameras would be consistent with other locally operated speed monitoring programs, the number of cameras in operation should be determined by the program administrator, based on traffic data and operational conditions. Additionally, if SHA procures more than the maximum number of cameras it will be able to operate, there will be a carrying cost associated with maintaining the non-operational cameras – as such, fine revenue will have to cover increased contract costs rather than safety improvements.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests that the Committee consider this information during its deliberations of Senate Bill 1067.

Sincerely,

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² “MdMUTCD” means the Maryland Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.