



HB 530: Great Maryland Trails Act
House Environment and Transportation Committee
Washington Area Bicyclist Association – FAVORABLE

February 29, 2024

Chair Korman and Committee Members,

Maryland has the potential to be a top-tier state in the nation with multi-use trails that support activities that contribute to our economy, environment, and quality of life. **HB 530, the Great Maryland Trails Act, will help ensure Maryland can fully leverage our progress, resources, and opportunity.**

A Maryland State Office of Trails will help achieve the State's vision, secure funding, ensure coordination, and maximize the beneficial impacts of trails to our economy, public health, transportation equity, and quality of life. **The Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA), an advocacy organization with 1,200 Maryland members, supports the bill.**

Maryland needs coordination, strategic oversight, and increased investments in trails. Although Maryland has many exceptional and diverse trails, communities and advocates have identified a large backlog of maintenance projects and new trail projects that need attention. Current levels of local, state, federal, and private funding are insufficient to make Maryland a nationally recognized destination for trails. A trails office will facilitate increased funding, including through federal grants such as federal active transportation opportunities. Other states, including neighboring Virginia, plus Florida, Massachusetts, and Connecticut have established state trails.

The new trails and connected networks supported through the Great Maryland Trails Act will advance active transportation and recreation, leverage economic impacts, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and meet increasing demand from residents.

Investing in Maryland's multi-use trail networks and bicycling infrastructure makes economic sense. Maryland's outdoor recreation already generates \$14 billion in consumer spending and supports 109,000 jobs, more trails and support and expand these outcomes. Even when governments must make funding cuts, support for bicycling is not just another expenditure; it is a wise investment. According to a study from the University of Massachusetts, an average 11.4 jobs per million dollars spent are created with bicycle projects, compared to 7.8 jobs for road-only projects. More trail projects, increased access for trail users, and more options for outdoor recreation and active transportation will increase participation and returns for our state.

Amendment: We recognize that this is a challenging fiscal year and recommend amending the bill so that it aligns with the resource capacity of participating agencies, especially in MDOT, DNR and MDP. We do not envision any transfer of positions but prefer collaboration among the agencies named in the bill.

The Washington Area Bicyclist Association urges a Favorable HB 530 committee report and House floor vote with amendments.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.

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