
February 8, 2024

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

RE: Letter of Support – House Bill 278 – Urban State Highways - Speed Limits - Exceptions

Dear Chair Korman and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports House Bill 278 as it provides another context-driven tool that can be used to improve safety and reduce road incidents on urban highways.

House Bill 278 enables the State Highway Administration (SHA) to reduce the speed limit on an urban highway by five miles per hour without performing a traffic or engineering study. An urban highway is defined as a roadway within a municipality (not including expressways) which features curb, gutter, and closed drainage, and is located within a U.S. Census defined urban area where significant pedestrian traffic is observed.

Increasingly, the State is responding to a number of requests for speed limit reduction on State highways where posted speed limits no longer correspond to roadway context. In 2019, Maryland adopted Vision Zero and SHA published the *Context Driven: Access and Mobility for All Users Guide* to establish a framework for understanding the relationship between access and mobility and to address serious injuries and deaths on our roadways. Since then, speed limit reductions on State roads have been one of the top three most requested engineering safety countermeasures implemented by SHA, with more than 40 corridors studied and evaluated at the request of local jurisdictions or following a serious injury or fatality. House Bill 278 provides SHA with a way to respond in a more agile manner to areas where speed is a contributor to roadway incidents. This ability, in conjunction with tools such as the Pedestrian Safety Action Plan and the Context Guide for engineering, allows SHA to plan, design, and engineer roadways that are responsive to the environment around them.

This legislation is a critical tool that can be used to accelerate efforts towards achieving zero traffic deaths and serious injuries in Maryland, specifically where known issues exist. Data shows that in Maryland and nationwide, more frequent crashes occur on State and locally owned roads in urban areas where density is higher, and more severe crashes occur on State-owned roads where speeds are generally higher. Recent National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) findings have shown Maryland is on track with the nationwide average where speeding, exceeding the posted speed limits, or traveling too fast for conditions was a contributing factor in almost 29 percent of all traffic fatalities.

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House Bill 278 also aligns with recommendations in the Federal Highway Administration's *Safe System Approach for Speed Management* report which found that small changes result in improved outcomes for roadway users. Other states like Washington and Florida have adopted similar strategies for speed management where incremental speed limit reductions by five miles per hour are implemented to achieve target speeds and increase compliance over time. These results are increased exponentially when complimentary tools in engineering, education, and enforcement are used to achieve target operational speeds. The Context Driven toolkit is an integral part of designing safe streets in Maryland and House Bill 278 adds a proven speed management technique that supports Maryland's commitment to Vision Zero.

For these reasons, the Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee grant House Bill 278 a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

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