



HB 612 – Montgomery County – Highways – Maximum Speed Limits MC 10-24

FAVORABLE

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

March 27, 2024

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Committee Members,

The Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) is an advocacy organization with 1,200 Maryland members that is active in Montgomery County. We support local bill HB 612 as passed by the House of Delegates and ask for a Favorable committee vote.

Speed kills. According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "Studies clearly show that higher speeds result in greater impact at the time of a crash, which leads to more severe injuries and fatalities." For instance, a 2011 technical report published by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, "Impact Speed and a Pedestrian's Risk of Severe Injury or Death," found that the average risk of severe injury to a pedestrian increased with vehicle speed from 10% at 16 MPH, 25% at 23 MPH, 50% at 31 MPH, and higher at higher speeds.

In response, **HB 612 would strike eight no-longer-needed words from Maryland's Transportation Article, the stipulation that Montgomery County and county municipalities may lower speed limits "only after performing an engineering and traffic investigation."** HB 612 would also allow for speed-monitoring for enforcement, not sooner than a year after a limit is lowered.

An engineering and traffic investigation is no longer for Montgomery County speed-limit reductions needed given the county's 2021 adoption of a Complete Streets Design Guide as well as the development of functional master plans, notably Montgomery County's Pedestrian Master Plan. These plans provide analysis, design, and engineering guidance that is equivalent to the investigation required by current state code.

There is a precedent for your advancing HB 612 on this basis. Transportation Article § 21-803 (5) states "Baltimore City may, without performing an engineering and traffic investigation, decrease the maximum speed limit on a highway under its jurisdiction." The reason for this exemption is that Baltimore City adopted a Complete Streets program, in 2018. HB 612 would extend Baltimore's exemption to Montgomery County and county municipalities.

Gaithersburg and Rockville, which have their own planning authority, and other county municipalities may apply the county's Complete Streets Design Guide to city-owned streets.

The county's Complete Streets Design Guide was developed by Montgomery Planning and enacted by the Montgomery County Council. It is county policy. It designates a Target Speed of 20 MPH for Downtown Streets, Neighborhood Connectors, Neighborhood Streets, Neighborhood Yield Streets,

and certain Country Roads, in particular for stretches where they “operate as neighborhood streets for short segments.”

Recommendation P-9 of Montgomery County’s Pedestrian Master Plan, adopted in October 2023 by the County Council, is “Comprehensively lower speed limits countywide.” The text explains, “*Higher traffic speeds are directly linked to crash severity. In pursuit of Vision Zero, the county should continue efforts to lower speed limits in neighborhoods and along major roadways, with a goal of having the roadway’s posted speed limit match the target speed outlined in the CSDG [Complete Streets Design Guide].*”

Montgomery County has been inhibited from reducing speed limits in accordance with county policy by the current engineering and traffic investigation requirement.

That’s why we have Recommendation P-9a, to “Support state legislation to allow jurisdiction-wide speed limit reduction.” The detail text reads, “*Montgomery County’s ability to lower the posted and statutory speed limit along residential streets is limited by state law... The county should support all legislation that offers local agencies more flexibility in setting speed limits in line with county goals.*”

HB 612 responds directly to a recommendation adopted by the Montgomery County Council. The bill and the proposed amendment to allow speed camera placement are supported by the Montgomery County Delegation.

Speed-reduction benefits are incontrovertible. Yet we have this lingering requirement for an investigation on a road-by-road basis, which is expensive and onerous and no longer needed given Montgomery County’s planning and engineering efforts. You can modernize code and boost Montgomery County road safety by advancing HB 612.

WABA therefore urges HB 612 amendment and a Favorable committee report and General Assembly enactment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.

Seth Grimes, WABA Maryland organizer
seth.grimes@waba.org