



Maryland DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

HEARING DATE: March 4th

BILL NO: SB 635

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

POSITION: Support

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT: Andrew Wilson (443) 721-6789

TITLE: Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings

BILL ANALYSIS:

SB 635 establishes the Maryland Connectivity Coalition and a Wildlife Connectivity Fund to foster government and stakeholder collaboration and to fund wildlife crossing projects that protect wildlife and motorists from collisions and increase wildlife access to habitat. The bill also requires local governments to “consider wildlife movement and habitat connectivity when enacting, adopting, amending, or executing” their local comprehensive plans, specifically, within the sensitive areas element of these plans, and directs the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) to “coordinate with the Department of Natural Resources and the State Highway Administration to provide each local jurisdiction with updated information on habitat connectivity concerns and current and planned wildlife crossings.”

POSITION AND RATIONALE:

MDP supports SB 635 given its strong alignment with Section 1-201 of the Land Use Article. This section requires the planning commissions of local governments to implement statewide planning visions through their respective comprehensive plans, including visions related to quality of life and sustainability, transportation, environmental protection, resource conservation, and stewardship. SB 635 also strongly aligns with the planning principles in MDP’s departmental bill, HB 286, which updates the visions, specifically the proposed transportation, resilience, and ecology principles.

Land Use Article, Section 1-101, defines “sensitive areas” as a stream or wetland, and its buffers; a 100-year flood plain; a habitat of a threatened or endangered species; a steep slope; agricultural or forest land intended for resource protection or conservation; and any other area in need of special protection, as determined in a plan. The sensitive areas element of local comprehensive plans discusses sensitive areas within each local jurisdiction and includes strategies and recommendations for ensuring the protection of sensitive areas.

By encouraging local governments to “consider wildlife movement and habitat connectivity when enacting, adopting, amending, or executing” their local comprehensive plans, specifically, within the sensitive areas element of these plans, and by providing each local jurisdiction with updated information on habitat connectivity concerns and current and planned wildlife crossings, the bill will encourage local governments to identify areas and projects, in collaboration with state government and other stakeholders, that will support successful wildlife crossing road projects. Doing so will decrease traffic accidents with wildlife, increase habitat connectivity for wildlife, and support Maryland’s statewide planning principles for communities and our environment.