



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

The Honorable Senator Feldman, Chair
The Honorable Senator Kagan, Vice Chair
Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
Maryland Senate
Annapolis, MD

March 4th, 2025

Testimony in Support of SB0635: Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and esteemed members of this committee,

SB0635 addresses the high rate of animal-vehicle collisions (AVC) and will increase safety for people and wildlife alike. Specifically, this bill would:

1. Compel the State Department of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources to unite and identify optimal locations for the integration of wildlife passage components into new and maintenance transportation projects.
2. Require the State Highway Administration to coordinate with the Department of Natural Resources and apply for relevant federal funding opportunities for highway crossings.
3. Create an optional Wildlife Highway Crossing Fund to support wildlife crossing projects and the research necessary to identify the most strategic locations for crossings.

Wildlife crossings encompass a variety of structures that are designed or retrofitted to provide safe passage for wildlife above, below, or along a highway. Although wildlife crossing structures do not have standardized designs, they can be categorized as three major types: overpasses, underpasses, and fencing. Overpasses are traffic-spanning bridges that link habitats by allowing for the movement of a wide range of wildlife, from large mammals to reptiles. A wildlife underpass is essentially a wildlife passage below a roadway in the form of either a bridge or a culvert. Existing bridges and culverts can be replaced or retrofitted to enhance passage by terrestrial or semiaquatic species.

Why do we need wildlife crossings? Animal-vehicle collisions, or AVC, are enormously expensive. The Maryland Insurance Administration released a report on December 2nd, 2024 studying effects of wild animal collisions on premium increases for private passenger automobile insurance (“PPA”) in the State. In Maryland, there were 31,702 AVC in 2023¹. The average insurance cost for each claim is \$6,183, for a collective annual cost of \$196,033,423.49². Additionally, there are costs directly to the state, such as accident attendance by emergency

¹ Maryland Insurance Administration Report on Effects of Wild Animal Collisions on Premiums

² Maryland Insurance Administration Report on Effects of Wild Animal Collisions on Premiums

personnel, investigation, and carcass removal and disposal — about \$260³ per AVC, or \$8,580,000 annually. Not to mention the long-lasting emotional and physical costs of being involved in an AVC, or the 200⁴ preventable deaths AVC causes annually.

AVC are also extremely detrimental to wildlife species. Highways fragment the total amount of contiguous habitat available negatively impacting biodiversity. The ability for animals to migrate is fundamental to ecosystem resilience, helping to ensure not only one species' survival but the broader balance of a healthy habitat.

Wildlife crossings are exceptionally effective at preventing these issues. When properly utilized, wildlife crossings reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions by up to 90 percent⁴. Crossing structures in Canada's Banff National Park reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions involving all large mammals by more than 80 percent, and for those involving ungulates, by more than 94 percent, when comparing a two-year pre-construction period to a two-year post-construction period⁵. This AVC mitigation resulted in saving about \$22,940 per mile per year⁶.

Local states are already acting. In 2020, Virginia passed legislation to create a Wildlife Corridor Action Plan. In 2021, they passed additional legislation creating a comprehensive program to identify wildlife corridors, protect motorists from collisions with animals, and address barriers to wildlife movement. The bill passed with strong bipartisan support.

We know this can work in Maryland. A wildlife passage project for Maryland's Inter-county Connector (connecting Montgomery and Prince George's Counties) includes "bottomless arches" that span streams and natural passages⁷. Post-construction monitoring of the bottomless arches indicates that efforts to support fish populations and passage have been successful. Heavy use by deer, raccoons, opossums, squirrels, turtles, and foxes has been documented.

We must address this issue now. Maryland has the third highest deer population in the country. A study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that Frederick and Howard Counties ranked sixth and tenth nationwide in animal-related collisions between 2006 and 2018. And the cost of AVC is growing. The average cost of a claim for an animal-vehicle collision was \$3,972 in 2018⁸, increasing to \$6,183 in 2023⁹ — about a 55 percent increase in just five years. As reported by the Maryland Auto Insurance Administration, "These increases will inevitably

³ Huijser, M.P.; Duffield, J. W.; Clevenger, A.P.; Ament, R.J.; McGowen, P.T. 2009. "Cost-benefit analyses of mitigation measures aimed at reducing collisions with large ungulates in North America: a decision support tool." *Ecology and Society*. 14(2): 15. www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art15/ES-2009-3000.pdf. Price adjusted for inflation.

⁴ Ament, R.; Jacobson, S; Callahan, R.; Brocki, M., eds. 2021. "Highway crossing structures for wildlife: opportunities for improving driver and animal safety." Gen. Tech. Rep. PSW-GTR-271. Albany, CA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station. 51 p.

https://www.fs.usda.gov/psw/publications/documents/psw_gtr271/psw_gtr271_007.pdf

⁵ "Joint Statement Regarding Climate-Informed Wildlife Crossings." *ARC Partnership*, 2023,

<https://arc-solutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Climate-and-Crossings-Consensus-Statement-232023-1.pdf>.

⁶ Ament et al. 2021

⁷ Ament et al. 2021

⁸ Karen Russell, "Wildlife Corridors in Frederick County: Conserving Nature in Maryland's Appalachian Heart." *Climate Change Working Group of Frederick County*, 2023. <https://catocinlandtrust.org/wildlife-corridors-in-frederick-county/>

⁹ Hubbard 2023

¹⁰ Maryland Insurance Administration Report on Effects of Wild Animal Collisions on Premiums

lead to some form of increases in [private passenger automobile insurance] premiums... The base rates for all drivers may be increased if loss costs are increasing.”

Wildlife highway crossings are a proven solution that not only reduce wildlife mortality, but also improves driver safety, avoids costly accidents, and keeps traffic flowing. More broadly, wildlife crossings can reduce habitat fragmentation and improve landscape connectivity to support animal movements and the ecological processes and services that humans rely upon, including pollination, free-flowing water, and recreational opportunities like hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching. To save lives and money, I urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Lewis Young". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Karen Lewis Young