

March 4, 2025

The Honorable Brian Feldman
Chair, Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter of Support with Amendment – Senate Bill 635 – Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports Senate Bill 635 and offers the following information and amendments for the Committee’s consideration.

Senate Bill 635 establishes a new Maryland Connectivity Coalition to foster collaboration among state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders for the purpose of protecting endangered wildlife from habitat fragmentation. It also requires the State Highway Administration to have final authority regarding decisions on placement, funding, or design of wildlife crossings; requires the Department of Natural Resources to develop a website for accepting donations to the fund; and mandates other requirements related to wildlife crossings in Maryland.

The MDOT and the State Highway Administration (SHA) would like to thank the bill sponsors for bringing this legislation to the General Assembly. The Wildlife Crossing Program, which was established as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA), determined there are more than 1,000,000 wildlife vehicle collisions annually in the United States. This poses a significant danger to safety and wildlife survival at a cost of more than \$8 billion and results in tens of thousands of serious injuries and hundreds of fatalities on U.S. roadways.

In response to this issue, SHA applied for and was awarded nearly \$388,000 through the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program. Maryland is one of just 16 states chosen for this pilot program for years 2024 to 2025.

The State Highway Administration plans to use this funding to:

- Identify areas and locations along state highways with high volumes of wildlife - vehicular collisions;
- Create design guidance to reduce wildlife-vehicular collisions on state routes; and

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- Support public engagement and awareness of wildlife-vehicular collisions and habitat connectivity.

Please be advised that, as of the date of this letter, this and certain other grant programs administered through United States Department of Transportation have been frozen in response to certain recently issued federal Executive Orders. SHA is poised to move forward with this grant if the federal funding freeze is lifted.

Currently, SHA is working with the sponsor on several amendments, including one to name SHA as the Chair of the Maryland Connectivity Coalition. Designating SHA to lead the Coalition is appropriate, given the significant role it plays in the operation of the Coalition and its activities

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee consider this information during its deliberation of Senate Bill 635 and issue a favorable report with the suggested amendments.

Sincerely,

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